

**Transnational networking and cooperation
among neo-reformist left parties in Southern
Europe during the Eurozone crisis:
*SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos***

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Abstract

European parties to the left of social democracy have always lagged behind the main political families in terms of transnational cooperation at the level of the EU. However, the markedly transnational character of the Eurozone crisis and of the management of that crisis has arguably provided a uniquely propitious context for these parties to reduce that gap. This research project aims to establish whether they achieved that by focusing on three parties that were particularly prone to seeking an increase in their transnational cooperation: *SYRIZA* from Greece, *Bloco de Esquerda* from Portugal and *Podemos* from Spain. For these parties not only come from the member states most affected by the crisis, both economically and politically, but they also share several programmatic and strategic features favouring such an increase.

By using a mix of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observation, the thesis discusses both the informal and formal transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties. This discussion reveals four key findings, with potentially useful insights for wider transnational party cooperation that are to be pursued in future research.

Firstly, the transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos did increase at some point during the crisis, particularly around SYRIZA's electoral victory in January 2015. Secondly, since the U-turn of that government in July 2015, SYRIZA's relationship with both Bloco and Podemos has declined significantly, as reflected in their diverging views of the EU. Thirdly, both the increase and decline have been largely determined by rather pragmatic considerations linked to the dynamics of domestic politics, showing that the primacy of national politics also applies to nominally the most internationalist party family. Fourthly, formal cooperation is perceived as more significant than informal cooperation, with the political group in the EP as the most important framework for cooperation, in contrast to the limited significance attributed to social movements or political foundations.

In answering the main research question, the thesis also contributes to the current literature by providing the first comparative study of three of the most successful left parties in the EU today and by mapping the transnational networking and cooperation of left parties, whose informal dimensions in particular have been largely unexplored so far.

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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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Abbreviations

25MI	–	25M Institute for Democracy
AKEL	–	Progressive Party of Working People (Cyprus)
ANEL	–	Independent Greeks
ATTAC	–	Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens
CAG	–	Communist and Allies Group
CP	–	communist party
CUL:TRA	–	Cultural Cooperative of Labour and Socialism
ECB	–	European Central Bank
ENA	–	Institute for Alternative Policies (Greece)
EP	–	European Parliament
ESF	–	European Social Forum
EU	–	European Union
GJM	–	Global Justice Movement
GUE/NGL	–	Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
IMF	–	International Monetary Fund
IU	–	United Left (Spain)
KKE	–	Communist Party of Greece
LFI	–	<i>La France Insoumise</i> [Unbowed France]
LPs	–	left parties
MEPs	–	members of the European Parliament
MoU	–	Memorandum of Understanding
NLPs	–	neo-reformist left parties
NPI	–	Nicos Poulantzas Institute
NPM	–	‘Now, the People!’ movement
PASOK	–	Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Greece)
PCE	–	Communist Party of Spain
PCF	–	French Communist Party
PCI	–	Italian Communist Party
PCP	–	Portuguese Communist Party

PEL	–	Party of the European Left
PRC	–	Communist Refoundation Party
PP	–	People’s Party (Spain)
PS	–	Socialist Party (Portugal)
PSOE	–	Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party
RLS	–	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
SGP	–	Stability and Growth Programme
SYN	–	<i>Synaspismos</i> [Coalition of the Left and Progress]
UCM	–	Complutense University of Madrid
USFI	–	United Secretariat of the Fourth International
WSF	–	World Social Forum
YoB	–	Youth of Bloco
YoS	–	Youth of SYRIZA

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Dissemination

Conference papers

- ‘Transnational cooperation of neo-reformist left parties during the Eurozone crisis’, at the UACES Annual Conference in Bath (2018).
- ‘A new type of left-wing Euroscepticism: Bloco’s ‘Disobedient’ position’, at the ECPR General Conference in Hamburg (2018).
- ‘Plan B for Europe: A new type of left-wing Euroscepticism?’, at the UACES Graduate Forum in Leuven (2018).
- ‘What kind of left is the ‘new left’ in Southern Europe: Labelling *SYRIZA*, *Bloco de Esquerda* and *Podemos*’, at the 14th Annual Conference of the History of European Integration Research Society (HEIRS) in Rome (2018).
- ‘United we stand? Transnational cooperation of new left parties in Southern Europe since 2009’, at the Seminar Series of Europa Research Group at the University of Edinburgh (2017).
- ‘Arriving late at the party: The tardy cooperation of radical left parties at EU level’, at the 13th Annual Conference of the History of European Integration Research Society (HEIRS) in Luxembourg-Ville (2017).
- ‘New left parties in Southern Europe: Bloco, Syriza and Podemos’, at the Postgraduate Research Seminar Series at the University of Portsmouth (2016).
- ‘The new European left: A transnational front against austerity’, at the 12th HEIRS Annual Conference in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium (2016).
- ‘A spectre haunting Europe? The transnational cooperation of the new European left’, at the UACES Student Forum Research Conference at the University of Kent in Brussels (2016).
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Other publications

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- Book review of *The Unfinished History of European Integration*, by W. Meurs, R. Bruin, L. Grift, C. Hoetink, K. Leeuwen and C. Reijnen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 57, No 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12853>.
- Book review of *Anti-Austerity Left Parties in the European Union: Competition, coordination and integration*, by E. Calossi (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2016), *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, Vol 14, No 1, 2018.

Papers under review

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Introduction

No political success in a single European country can be sustainable if it is not followed, within a short time, by similar successes in other countries. A progressive island in a reactionary archipelago is a thing of the past.

Haris Golemis (2012), member of the SYRIZA Central Committee and former Director of the Nicos Poulantzas Institute

The Eurozone crisis that started in 2009, with its multiple social and political implications, presented left-of-social-democracy parties (LPs), particularly in Southern Europe, with both opportunities for and challenges to their transnational cooperation. The present thesis is a critical analysis of the post-2009 transnational cooperation among the three most successful LPs in Southern Europe in recent years: *SYRIZA* [Coalition of the Radical Left] from Greece, *Podemos* [We Can] from Spain and *Bloco de Esquerda* [Left Bloc] (Bloco) from Portugal. Drawing mainly on document research and analysis and qualitative interviews, this thesis maps out the informal and formal transnational networking and cooperation among these three parties and discusses its evolution since the start of the Eurozone crisis. The main purpose is to establish whether that process enhanced in an arguably propitious context for the transnational unity of the left, particularly in Southern Europe.

Theme

The development of the European integration over the last three decades has led to what has been called the ‘Europeanisation’ of party politics (Hix *et al.*, 2007; Ladrech, 2002; Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998), the continuous primacy of national politics notwithstanding (Poguntke *et al.*, 2007). This process has entailed, among other things, an increase in transnational party cooperation (Hanley, 2008; Lightfoot, 2006), as reflected by the emergence of new political groups in the European Parliament (EP), European political parties, and European political foundations.

In comparison to other political families within the European Union (EU), the transnational cooperation of what is commonly called the ‘radical left’ – broadly understood, for now, as being to the left of social democracy (March, 2011) – always tended to be rather weakly developed, despite its constitutive internationalism (Dunphy & March, 2013; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2012; Dunphy, 2004). Thus, the first radical left group in the European Parliament (EP), the Communist and Allies Group (CAG), was formed only in 1973, two decades after those of the other main political families. Moreover, CAG was marred by internal divisions that eventually led to the group’s split in 1989, between the ‘Eurocommunist’ parties and the ‘orthodox’ ones still loyal to the Soviet model of socialism (Jacobs & Corbett, 1990). A new political group of the radical left in the EP was established in 1995, as the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). But GUE/NGL too has since proved less cohesive compared to other political groups in the EP, remaining a rather loose and eclectic confederation of parties (Calossi, 2016; Dunphy, 2004; Raunio, 2001).

Furthermore, the Party of the European Left (PEL) was established only in 2004, more than a decade after the Maastricht Treaty had provided the framework for the creation of European political parties. Despite continuous growth, the PEL has been rather limited in its political effectiveness, mainly due to its failure to overcome long-standing divisions on the non-social democratic left, particularly over the question of Europe (Dunphy & March, 2013). Hence, unlike in the case of social democrats, the parliamentary group and the Europarty of the ‘radical left’ are far from overlapping, thus hindering the political impact of both (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016; Dunphy & March, 2013). In short, the LPs’ transnational cooperation at EU level has historically been rather limited compared to other political families but also considering the ideological importance of internationalism for the left in general and, indeed, the incentives and opportunities provided by European integration to translate that ideological internationalism into actual transnational party cooperation (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2012; Dunphy, 2004).

As it will be explored later on, the limited transnational cooperation of LPs in the EU after 1989, even by comparison to the social movements of a left-wing character (March & Mudde, 2005), is related to a number of factors ranging from the aforementioned division on the question of the EU to the legacy of ‘the false internationalism of Soviet domination’ (Dunphy, 2004, p. 28). But they all came in the context of a wider ideological and political marginalisation of the non-social democratic left following the collapse of Soviet-style socialism (March, 2011; Hudson, 2000). In other words, transnational cooperation of these parties was weak after 1989 also because the parties themselves were weak after 1989. Their

decline in the EU was reflected throughout the 1990s in both national and European elections, where they gained an overall average vote of 6.6% and 5.8% respectively, compared to 10.5% and 9.4% respectively in the previous decade.¹

However, the Eurozone crisis that started in late 2009 arguably provided a favourable context for the revival of the non-social democratic left in the EU (Chiocchetti, 2014; Visser, Lubbers, Kraaykamp, & Jaspers, 2014; Dunphy & March, 2013; March, 2011). The so-called ‘austerity consensus’ that came as an answer to the crisis (Becker, 2014; Busch, Hermann, Hinrichs, & Schulten, 2013; Farnsworth & Irving, 2012; McNally, 2011), where austerity is broadly understood as a set of policies aimed at reducing public deficit and debt by cutting public spending (Blyth, 2013), arguably created a fertile ground for LPs with an anti-austerity agenda (Calossi, 2016; March, 2011).

To a certain extent, such parties did benefit electorally since the start of the crisis, albeit perhaps not as significantly as it might have expected (Keith & March, 2016). Their overall average vote in the member states of the Eurozone increased from 8.5% in the decade preceding the crisis to 11.3% in the post-2009 period, while GUE/NGL increased its number of members in the EP (MEPs) from 35 in 2009 to 52 following the 2014 European elections. As pointed out by Keith (2016) and illustrated by *Table 1* below, the electoral breakthrough of LPs proved most prominent in member states such as Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland. Here, the crisis and the austerity measures have had a particularly strong negative impact, both socially (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2016; Matsaganis & Leventi, 2014; Matthijs, 2014; McKee et al., 2012) and economically (Schui, 2014; Semmler, 2013). Indeed, they led to a political crisis that has undermined the support for mainstream, centre-left and centre-right, parties while creating favourable opportunities for more radical, anti-establishment parties on both the left and the right (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; March & Rommerskirchen, 2015).

It is in these aforementioned countries where, in direct relation to the decline of social democratic parties that have largely endorsed austerity measures and even implemented them when in government (Heilig, 2016; Lavelle, 2014; Moschonas, 2013), anti-austerity LPs have made the most significant electoral gains since the start of the crisis. Thus, in 2015 and 2016, Podemos in Spain, Bloco in Portugal and *Sinn Féin* [We Ourselves] in Ireland became the third largest parties in their countries, with both Bloco and Podemos currently giving parliamentary support to the incumbent minority social democratic governments. Moreover, in the Greek elections from January 2015, SYRIZA became the first left-of-social-democracy party to form

¹ Based on calculations from www.parties-and-elections.eu and www.parlgov.org.

the government in an EU member state (besides the exceptional case of AKEL in Cyprus). SYRIZA won the elections based on an anti-austerity programme that promised to gradually reverse the austerity measures taken by previous governments and to renegotiate the write-off of most of Greece's public debt (SYRIZA, 2014).

Table 1. Overall average vote for main LPs in the Eurozone before and after the start of the Eurozone crisis (excluding Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which adopted the euro after the start of the crisis)

Country	Average vote in the 2000s	Average vote since 2009
Austria	0.8%	0.8%
Belgium	0.5%	2.6%
Cyprus	32.9%	29.2%
Finland	9.4%	7.6%
France	7.7%	11.2%
Germany	7.8%	8.4%
Greece	10.8%	36.3%
Ireland	7.2%	14.9%
Italy	5.4%	2.7%
Luxembourg	2.8%	4.9%
Malta	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	9.6%	9.5%
Portugal	14.6%	16.9%
Slovakia	5.1%	0.6%
Slovenia	n/a	5.9%
Spain	4.7%	17.6%
<i>Overall</i>	8.5%	11.3%

Key: In bold, the member states most affected by the crisis and austerity policies.

Source: Author's calculations from www.parties-and-elections.eu and www.parlgov.org.

At the same time, given the transnational character of austerity, it was reasonable to expect that such left, anti-austerity parties would enhance their transnational cooperation in order to oppose austerity more effectively (Calossi, 2016, p. 194; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 333; Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 10;). Indeed, there have been repeated and various calls from many on the European radical left to create a transnational front of the left as the only way to defeat austerity and the neoliberal EU establishment (Laurent, 2016; Transform, 2016; Besancenot *et al.*, 2015; Gohlke & Wissler, 2015; Iglesias, 2015a; Tsipras, 2015a; Golemis, 2012). More generally, arguably all transnational party cooperation should have increased as the EU-wide

management of the crisis meant, especially in Southern European member states, an intensification of the broader process of Europeanisation (Saurugger, 2014; Meardi, 2011), which has been said in past to increase transnational party cooperation (see Ladrech, 2002).

Research questions

The likeliest LPs to seek an increase in their transnational networking and cooperation would be those from member states in the ‘Southern periphery’ (Tondl, 1998) that have experienced substantial austerity measures too (see Douzinas, 2017, pp. 191-192), the so-called PIGS (i.e. Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain); in particular, LPs with similar features but also with realistic chances to participate in government. Those LPs would have arguably been SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, which have themselves been calling for increased transnational cooperation on the left as part of the struggle against austerity (see Iglesias, 2015a, p. 170; Tsipras, 2015a; Bloco, 2013; Golemis, 2012).

Therefore, the main research question of the thesis is whether and, if so, how and why the transnational networking and cooperation among Bloco, SYRIZA and Podemos has increased since the start of the Eurozone crisis in late 2009. Of course, given that Podemos was formed only in 2014, for the period 2009-2014 the analysis will only discuss the transnational networking and cooperation between Bloco and SYRIZA, founded in 1999 and 2004 respectively.

The main question entails three more specific sub-questions. Firstly, the thesis seeks to establish whether the parties’ informal networking and cooperation has increased since 2009, which is broadly understood here as the networking and cooperation taking place outside the official party channels and the EU’s institutional framework. The focus is on three types of channels: social movements, given the parties’ strong links, at least in their early years, with social movements both nationally and transnationally; academic networks, given the significant prevalence of academics in prominent roles within all three parties; and the parties’ political foundations as well as the pan-European network that all are affiliated to – Transform Europe. In answering this secondary question, the thesis also maps dimensions of left party transnational networking and cooperation that have been virtually unexplored in the current literature.

Secondly, the thesis aims to determine whether the parties' formal networking and cooperation has increased since 2009. For that purpose, the thesis discusses four channels: bilateral or, if relevant, trilateral relations between the parties, including individual connections, which arguably sit at the crossroads between informal and formal interaction; GUE/NGL, the EP group and the only international structure that all the three parties belong to; the PEL, the Euro-party that SYRIZA and Bloco belong to as founding members; and the Plan B for Europe and its offshoot, the "Now, the People!" movement, the staunchly Eurosceptic transnational initiatives that Bloco and Podemos are prominently involved in.

Thirdly, the thesis seeks to identify, rate and critically discuss the main incentives of and obstacles to the post-2009 transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. This represents the most analytical part of the thesis, which also feeds into the challenges to broader transnational party cooperation in Europe today. In correlation to this, the thesis also aims to reveal what the parties believe should be done, where relevant, for their transnational networking and cooperation to improve.

While these questions have been barely touched upon in the current literature, why is it nevertheless worth answering them? On the one hand, the crisis opened up a significant window of opportunity for these three parties in particular, and the European left in general, to increase their (rather limited) transnational networking and cooperation; hence, it is interesting to see whether these parties have managed to seize this opportunity. Indeed, these questions relate to the wider question of the tension between the Europeanisation of politics and the persistent primacy of national politics, and the impact that has on transnational party cooperation.

On the other hand, if it proves that these parties have not fully capitalised on the favourable context provided by the crisis for their transnational networking and cooperation to enhance, then this might provide some insight into why the austerity consensus has not been significantly challenged up to the present day and perhaps also into some of the reasons for the electoral resurgence of the populist and far right across Europe.

Literature review

There are three key literatures relevant to the main research question of this thesis: the literature on transnational party networking and cooperation in the EU, the literature on

contemporary European parties to the left of social democracy, and the literature on transnational networking and cooperation of this party family. In this section, these three are outlined in turn, including the gaps that the present research is aiming to address.

Transnational party networking and cooperation in the EU

It has been widely acknowledged that the development of the EU has brought about the so-called ‘Europeanisation’ of party politics (Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2007; Kaiser & Starie, 2005; Ladrech, 2002; Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998), where Europeanisation is understood as the ‘process in which Europe, and especially the European Union, becomes an increasingly more relevant and important part of political reference for the actors at the level of the member states’ (Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998, p. 1). In other words, the gradual transfer of power from national to EU level entailed by the process European integration (Kaiser, Leucht & Gehler, 2010), which has intensified sharply over the last three decades, determined political parties to increasingly transcend their national horizons and pay more attention to EU politics.

Europeanisation has affected political parties both programmatically, by them having to develop policies towards the numerous and evolving aspects of European integration (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2012), and organisationally, by them having to adapt their internal structures in order to engage with EU institutions and compete in the European political arena (Ladrech, 2002). In turn, this has increased parties’ need for transnational coordination and diffusion of ideas and policies (Macklin, 2013), which led to a gradual intensification of transnational networking and cooperation of political parties in the EU (Hanley, 2008; Lightfoot, 2006; Ladrech, 2002).

It is important here to briefly draw a distinction between ‘networking’ and ‘cooperation’, which is not often made in the literature – see, for example, Pridham (2008), who uses the two terms interchangeably. As used in this thesis, networking entails the participation in pan-European, transnational party networks, understood along the lines proposed by Speht (2005, p. 185), as sets of political parties from several European states that ‘collectively form an umbrella organisation along ideological party family lines’. As Macklin (2013, p. 177) points out, for all political parties networking functions, most importantly, as ‘a crucible for the exchange of ideas and information on policy and praxis’ and as ‘the basis for the convergence and harmonisation of ideological aims and strategic practice as a precursor to the formation of political alliances’. Thus, transnational party networking, as structured and

regular process of interaction between parties from different countries, is a precondition for transnational party cooperation.

Transnational party cooperation in the EU has been defined by Pridham (1982, p. 318) as a process ‘whereby political parties of the same ideological tendency from different member countries seek to harmonise and present their European-policy positions’. However, Pridham understands transnational party cooperation only in its formal dimension, i.e. within the institutional framework of the EU. The present thesis discusses both formal and informal dimensions of the transnational networking and cooperation of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, where these dimensions are understood according to the definition provided by Salm (2016, p. 11):

‘Formal dimensions of transnational party cooperation are characterised by structures, decision-making processes and functions that are codified in the statutes of partly or fully institutionalised transnational political networks of parties. Informal cooperation is not codified but, rather, is shaped by habits among and links between individuals.’

The EU-wide transnational networking and cooperation of parties started, at a formal level, with the creation in the early 1950s of political groups in what was then the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, which from 1962 onwards became the EP. As pointed out by early observers such as Boisson (1959) and Kapteyn (1960), it was bound for the representatives of national parliaments to group together along ideological lines, given the different ideological stances on European affairs and the pre-existing transnational structures of party cooperation (some dating as early as the late nineteenth century). While not particularly influential over EU’s policy-making in the earlier stages of European integration, these political groups played important roles of channelling and communication (Murray, 2004, p. 114) that helped put the basis for transnational party cooperation at the EU level.

As the EP increased in size and gained new prerogatives over the last three decades, the political groups became bigger, better organised and more dynamic (Calossi, 2016, pp. 28-31). Indeed, the allocation of material resources and of positions on parliamentary committees to political groups provided new incentives for national party delegations and individual MEPs alike to join a group (Attinà, 1990). Today, political groups in the EP are seen as remarkably cohesive (Hix et al., 2007) and continue to represent ‘by far the most important institutional form that party politics takes at the EU level’ (Calossi, 2016, p. 25), although it is not very clear to which extent they influence the parties’ behaviour in their national arenas, as this represents a rather unexplored research area.

Also at the formal level of transnational cooperation, the three main political families in post-war Europe – the Christian democrats, the social democrats and the liberals – established party federations in the mid-1970s, mainly in anticipation of the first direct European elections. According to Murray (2004), these transnational organisations allowed parties to coordinate their policies, devise common political programmes and carry out unified electoral campaigns. However, their role should not be overrated. Calossi (2016, p. 45) points out that their joint manifestos for EP elections were ‘mild documents, which addressed few similarities, and were largely ignored by national parties during their electoral campaigns’. Nevertheless, by building up transnational links, these federations prepared the ground for the creation of European political parties in the 1990s.

Largely to the pressure of national parliaments, but also to address the accusations of democratic deficit aimed at the EU, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty emphasised the need for European political parties, or Euro-parties, in creating the conditions for a political union (Heard-Lauréote, 2013). Indeed, Euro-parties would receive funding from the EP, depending on the number of MEPs affiliated to them, which was supposed to enhance their autonomy from national parties. As Hanley (2008) points out, funding obviously represented a strong incentive for the development of Euro-parties, in correlation with the more structural need for coordination and information exchange (Lightfoot, 2005). Last but not least, Europarties are important in terms of legitimacy, arguably enhancing national parties’ visibility and credibility in front of their own members and voters (Kaiser & Starie, 2005), particularly in the former Soviet-style socialist states from Eastern Europe (Pridham, 2005).

The literature is somewhat divided over the significance of Europarties (cf. Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 521): the ‘pessimists’ see them as merely loose and weak networks of national parties that are ultimately tributary to the interests of the latter (see Delwit et al., 2004; Seiler, 2011); for the ‘optimists’, they are increasingly relevant actors in EU politics, with the potential of becoming genuine transnational political parties (see Van Hecke, 2010; Hanley, 2008; Lightfoot, 2005; Hix & Lord, 1997); finally, those adopting a middle ground acknowledge the limited impact of Europarties while emphasising the potential for that impact to increase in the light of institutional and financial incentives (see Dunphy & March, 2013).

Despite these differences, it is broadly accepted that Europarties are fundamentally inhibited by the persistent primacy of national party politics (Bardi, Bressanelli, Calossi, Gagatsek, Mair, & Pizzimenti, 2014, 2010; Bressanelli, 2014; Ladrech, 2007, 2003; Poguntke *et al.*, 2007). As Ladrech (2003, pp. 124-125) argues, that primacy is due to the fact that parties still derive much of their resources, power and legitimacy from the national arena but also

because, given the institutional design of the EU, they arguably have very little influence over its policy-making.

Hence, Euro-parties also bear little influence over their constituent national parties, which control their internal organisation and decision-making process (Calossi, 2016; Ladrech, 2007). According to Ladrech (2007, p. 41), ‘the relationship between party members and Euro-parties is extremely weak’. The relationship with their voters and the wider public is arguably even weaker. Moreover, Calossi (2016, p. 62) points out that Europarties are secondary in terms of both resources and influence to the EP political groups. In sum, as Bardi et al. (2014, p. 44) put it, Euro-parties ‘are still in a very early stage of organizational development and a truly European transnational party system is far from being institutionalized’. However, it might be the case that transnational party cooperation and the prospects for Euro-parties have improved in the context of the Eurozone crisis – another research avenue that has not been significantly explored so far.

To support the development of Euro-parties, the EU also enabled and encouraged the establishment of European political foundations, which receive separate funding from the EP and whose role is to underpin and complete the activities of Europarties. More specifically, they are meant to help bridge the gap between Euro-parties, on the one hand, and the members and voters of constituent national parties as well as the wider civil society, on the other (Bardi et al., 2014; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2011; Ladrech, 2007). Indeed, these transnational foundations may be sources of information, ideas and policies for Europarties, which – given their aforementioned weakness – tend to lack the resources to follow thoroughly the developments of the EU policy- and decision-making processes (Bardi et al., 2014; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2011).

On the other hand, the informal dimensions of transnational party networking and cooperation in the EU have been largely overlooked in the literature, with very few exceptions (see Salm, 2016; Kaiser, 2013; Kaiser, Leucht & Gehler, 2010). This is a significant gap in the literature, not only because of the inherent informality of party cooperation in general, but also because, given the widely acknowledged substantial role played by informality in the wider process of European integration (Stacey, 2010; Héritier, 2007; Mak, & Van Tatenhove, 2006; Heisenberg, 2005; Christiansen & Piattoni, 2003), parties would presumably have an incentive to make use of and expand informal channels of transnational cooperation in order to influence that process.

The prevalence of informal transnational party cooperation has been indeed confirmed by Kaiser (2013, p. 16), according to whom throughout the process of European integration,

‘informal party cooperation was very intense and effective even in times when its formal organization was still very low’. It would be reasonable, therefore, to expect that SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos have cultivated a significant informal networking and cooperation since the start of the crisis, even more so given that informality has played a significant role in the management of the crisis (Schoeller, Guidi & Karagiannis, 2017; Christiansen & Neuhold, 2013). Thus, if the powers to be in the EU found it necessary to manage the crisis also outside the formal channels provided by the institutional framework of the EU, even more so should be the case for LPs with considerably less influence within that framework to coordinate their opposition to that management of the crisis via informal channels of cooperation.

When it comes to the study of particular party families, almost all of them have received their fair share of attention in the academic literature. Thus, there have been several studies dealing with the transnational party networking and cooperation of Christian democracy (see Kaiser, 2013, 2007, 2004; Johansson, 2002; Papini, 1997), social democracy (see Holmes & Lightfoot, 2012; Lightfoot, 2005; Ladrech, 2003; Newman, 1996), Greens (see Bomberg, 2002; Dietz, 2000; O’Neill, 1997; Bowler & Farrell, 1992), radical right (see Startin & Brack, 2016; Durham & Power, 2010; Startin, 2010; Dočekalová, 2006). The biggest gap in the literature is with regard to the parties to the left of social democracy (Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 521).

Despite the increasing relevance of LPs in the context of the Eurozone crisis, there still are very few studies specifically dealing with their transnational networking and cooperation (see Calossi, 2016; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016; Dunphy & March, 2013; Sozzi, 2011). This gap may be explained by both the ongoing gap regarding these parties in general (Keith & March, 2016) and their rather limited transnational cooperation in the EU, on the background of the marginalisation of this political family after 1989 – all of which are discussed in the following subsection.

Left-of-social-democracy parties in the EU

As mentioned earlier, it is widely held that in the post-1989 context the European radical left became largely irrelevant, particularly in EU member states (March, 2011; Hudson, 2000; Sassoon, 1998). The rather unexpected and quick collapse of the only actually existing alternative to capitalism at the time entailed a massive drawback for anti-capitalist ideas. Indeed, as Sassoon (1998) points out, organisationally speaking, the fall of Soviet-style socialism also deprived many European LPs of both international legitimacy and financial support from Moscow.

That development paved the way for the ideological and political hegemony of the emerging neoliberal consensus (Worth, 2013; Cooper & Hardy, 2012; March, 2011; Harvey, 2010; Hudson, 2000), which is broadly understood here as the classic liberal belief in the superiority of the ‘free market’ over ‘the state’, entailing as core policies reduction of public spending, privatisation of public assets, deregulation of labour and financial markets, trade liberalisation (Gamble, 2009; Herman, 2007; Navarro, 2007).

In the context of social democracy itself increasingly adopting such policies, the opposition to the growing neoliberal consensus was largely assumed by the new social movements and particularly the anti-globalisation movement, also referred to as the Global Justice Movement. It was the latter that, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, provided the main challenge to neoliberalism and also the main framework for transnational left cooperation against it (March, 2011; March & Mudde, 2005; Heartfield, 2003).

The decline of the European radical left was reflected, in the first half of 1990s, not in the decreasing average share of votes for this party family, as pointed out earlier, but also by the relative absence of studies on this party family, despite some exceptions, such as the studies on post-1989 communist parties in Western Europe by Bull and Heywood (1994) and Bell (1993). However, it has been largely acknowledged since that, on the background of social democracy’s shift to the right throughout the 1990s, the turn of the century saw a relative resurgence of the ‘radical left’ in the EU (Dunphy & Bale, 2011; March, 2011; March & Mudde, 2005; Hudson, 2000, 2012).

That resurgence manifested itself in terms of both electoral results and participation in government, generally in coalition with social democratic parties. Indeed, Hudson (2000) points out that at the end of the century social democratic-led governments in France, Italy, Germany and Sweden depended for their parliamentary majorities on parties situated to their left. Furthermore, in the first years of the new century new formations to the left of social democracy emerged in several EU member states, including two of the parties studied here, Bloco and SYRIZA.

All these developments were partially mirrored, in the early and mid-2000s, by a slight increase in the academic interest in this party family. Most studies, however, were focused on a single country, or on the fate of communist parties in either Western Europe (Botella & Ramiro, 2003) or, more often, the former Eastern Bloc (Curry & Urban, 2003; Bozóki & Ishiyama, 2002; Handl, 2002; March, 2002; Ishiyama, 1999; Racz & Bukowski, 1999). Other books dealt only with specific aspects of LPs, such as their relation to European integration, which most of these parties have increasingly endorsed throughout the 1990s and 2000s

(Dunphy, 2004). Thus, with the notable exception of Hudson (2000), the academic literature throughout the 2000s largely lacked in works tackling the European non-social democratic left as a whole.

However, that began to change with the start of the Eurozone crisis in late 2009 and the subsequent austerity policies, which has provided a fertile ground for LPs with an anti-austerity agenda (Visser et al., 2014, p. 541; Dunphy & March, 2013, pp. 520-521; March, 2011, p. 1). Thus, in recent years, there have been more and more relatively broad studies tackling European left-of-social-democracy parties as a political family (Chiocchetti, 2017; Amini, 2016; Calossi, 2016; Heilig, 2016; March & Keith, 2016; Wennerhag, Fröhlich, & Piotrowski, 2016; Ducange, Marlière & Weber, 2013; De Waele & Seiler, 2012; Hudson, 2012; Daiber, Hildebrandt & Striethorst, 2011; March, 2011; Hildebrandt & Daiber, 2009; Backes & Moreau, 2008). As Keith and March (2016, p. 2) put it, ‘whereas a decade or so ago, there were barely any in-depth, up-to-date comparative studies, making RLPs [radical left parties] the poor relation of party politics fields, this is now decreasingly the case.’ Nevertheless, they believe that significant gaps in the literature continue to exist, especially regarding those parties that have performed particularly well since the start of the crisis (Keith & March, 2016, p. 3), such as SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos.

There seems to be a relatively broad consensus among scholars about the use of the term ‘radical left’ to label the parties to the left of social democracy today (Calossi, 2016, p. 86; Keith & March, 2016, p. 5). But what does it mean to be ‘to the left of social democracy’? Fundamentally, whereas social democracy has gradually abandoned the project of replacing capitalism with a socialist society, those parties to its left have maintained faith in that project (Heywood, 2003; Eley, 2002; Adams, 2001). As Keith and March (2016, p. 6) put it, ‘the wish to radically *transform* and not just reform contemporary capitalism remains the key distinction between RLPs and social democratic ... parties’. In other words, anti-capitalism is the specific difference of radical left parties (see also Fagerholm, 2018).

March (2011, pp. 7-12) makes the most compelling and influential (Calossi, 2016, p. 86) case for why the term ‘radical’ would best capture the transformative ambition that essentially distinguishes these parties from social democracy. He correctly argues that, etymologically speaking, ‘radical’ stems from the Latin word for ‘root’, which in political terms would translate as the intention to change society from its roots, something that Marx and Engels (1975) themselves hinted at. Moreover, for March (2011, p. 9), the term ‘radical left’ is preferable to rather pejorative terms such as ‘hard left’ or ‘far left’, which tend to inherently suggest marginality. Indeed, unlike the latter two, the term ‘radical left’ is also employed by

some of the parties themselves (Keith & March, 2016, p. 5), most prominently by SYRIZA, whose name stands in Greek for ‘Coalition of the Radical Left’.

Most scholars in the field have adopted the term ‘radical left’ (Fagerholm, 2018; Chiocchetti, 2017; Ramiro, 2016; Amini, 2015; Ducange, et al., 2013; Lisi, 2013; Moschonas, 2013; Visser et al., 2014; Charalambous, 2011; Daiber et al., 2011; Dunphy & Bale, 2011; Sozzi, 2011), but not all. One of the most recent and notable exceptions to that consensus has been Calossi (2016, pp. 86-89), who rejects the term for three main reasons: firstly, because ‘radical’ may simply designate ‘the high degree of commitment and determination a political actor uses to achieve its goal’ (Calossi, 2016, p. 86); secondly, because certain liberal parties are using this label too (e.g. Radical Party in France); thirdly, because ‘radical’ too often has a pejorative meaning.

However, Calossi’s first two reasons could be quite swiftly refuted by simply adding ‘left’ next to ‘radical’, which those using this label always do, precisely to make it clear enough that they refer to the type of left parties aiming for the transformation of society from its roots, and not to a type of liberal parties. Also, there is a slight contradiction between these first two reasons and the third one: if ‘radical’ has a pejorative meaning and scholars should therefore abandon it, then why would even some liberal parties use it to identify themselves rather than avoid it? Indeed, is the term pejorative or it may simply designate ‘the high degree of commitment and determination’ that parties of all orientations can display?

Nevertheless, while agreeing with how the term ‘radical left’ is defined above, the present thesis argues that the way it is applied is not entirely unproblematic. Many of the parties that are commonly seen as ‘radical left’ today, including the three ones studied here, are not fully radical in the sense circumscribed above. They rather put forward an agenda that is visibly less-than-radical, as already acknowledged in the literature (see Keith & March, 2016; Amini, 2015; Keith, 2010; Taylor, 2009). More specifically, their economic agenda seems to be relying on the older, post-WWII, policies of social democracy that have been gradually abandoned or diluted by social democracy itself, such as high taxation of the rich and a strong welfare state (Moschonas, 2013, p. 7; March 2011, p. 205). Thus, unlike in the case of orthodox communist, Trotskyist or Maoist parties, the explicit call for overthrowing capitalism and building socialism is often absent from the programme of these parties (March, 2011, p. 9). Anti-capitalist or socialist policies such as public ownership, democratic control of the economy and economic planning are virtually missing from their electoral manifestos and day-to-day rhetoric, even more so – where applicable – from their practice in local or national government.

Programmatic de-radicalisation is also reflected on the question of European integration. If up until the 1980s most radical left parties – aside from Eurocommunist parties – opposed European integration on the basis that it was a project of ‘capitalist elites’ (Castellina, 1988, 26-7), over the last thirty years most of them have gradually endorsed that project, coming thus closer to the pro-integration position of social democracy (Dunphy, 2004, pp. 1-2). Today, a majority of ‘radical’ left parties display, to various degrees, what Dunphy (2004, pp. 4-6) calls ‘critical pro-integrationism’: critical of the ‘embedded neoliberalism’ (Van Apeldoorn, 2001) of the EU but aimed at reforming the latter from within rather than abandon it (Charalambous, 2011).

In other words, as Keith and March (2016, p. 6) acknowledge, some of the so-called radical left parties today are explicitly rather anti-neoliberal than utterly anti-capitalist, rather ‘reformist’ than ‘revolutionary’. Indeed, this assessment is shared by much of the literature. Badiou (2014), cited by Douzinas (2017, p. 21), argues that today the differences between these parties and social democratic parties largely amount to ‘nuance and detail, a minimal further redistribution without any foundational changes in the dominant capitalist logic’. Amini (2015, p. 12) also points out that ‘as social democratic parties gradually abandoned their traditional commitment, radical left parties also increasingly moved away from revolutionary anti-capitalism toward reformist Keynesianism’. Arter (2002) has dubbed this development the ‘social-democratisation’ of the radical left and Keith (2016, p. 95) calls it a ‘long-term de-radicalisation’. Chiochetti (2017, p. 11) also argues that the programme of the contemporary ‘radical left’ in Europe is ‘the ideal legacy of much of the social democratic and green-alternative thought of the seventies and early eighties’. Finally, March (2011, p. 205) too recognises that most of what he calls the radical left has practically turned into ‘the custodian of traditional social democratic values and policies’. In other words, most ‘radical’ left parties seem to have become the new old social democracy (see also Moschonas, 2013, pp. 7-8).

As developed later on, all three parties discussed here, Bloco, SYRIZA and Podemos, more or less fit this profile. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the literature still classifies them and other similar parties as ‘radical left’. This is the case even with scholars like Keith and March, who admit that such parties are ‘self-evidently “reformist”’ (Keith & March, 2016, p. 6), as they are ‘falling short of full anti-capitalism’ (Keith & March, 2016, p. 7). However, that means that these parties are falling short of the very defining characteristic that, according to them, makes radical left parties be radical, fundamentally distinct from social democratic parties.

Hence, in contrast to most of the literature, this thesis argues the three parties discussed here need to be given an alternative label that sums up the political ground they are currently occupying, which is the ground of post-WWII social democracy that in the meantime has been vacated by the shift to the right of social democratic parties themselves (albeit at various degrees and with some relapses in recent years). While this is not the place to develop a full-fledged argument in that direction, for the purposes of this thesis, it will suffice to use as a tentative alternative label for SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos and other broadly similar parties (e.g. Die Linke, La France Insoumise) the term ‘neo-reformist left parties’ (NLPs).

This label has the advantage of capturing these parties’ attempt to revive the reformist agenda of classic social democracy, which they couple with New Left concerns such as gender equality and environmentalism. Thus, the prefix ‘neo-’ designates both the revival of old policies but also the addition of new elements to those policies², as well as the relative chronological newness of these parties. Furthermore, this label has the merit to distinguish these parties, on the one hand, from truly radical left parties who explicitly aim to overthrow capitalism, be they ‘orthodox communist’ parties such as the Communist Party of Greece and Communist Party of Portugal or ‘revolutionary left’ parties such as the Socialist Party in Ireland and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France (see Keith & March, 2016, pp. 8-12; Escalona & Vieira, 2013, pp. 11-14). On the other hand, it also distinguishes them from the social democratic parties who have seemingly given up on any aspiration to structurally reform capitalism (Heilig, 2016; Lavelle, 2014; Moschonas, 2013). Hence, for the sake of simplicity, the thesis refers to NLPs and radical left parties together as simply ‘left parties’ (LPs), contending therefore that contemporary social democracy has qualitatively shifted to the right.

All this matters not only for the sake of theoretical rigour, but because using the ‘radical’ label for something that is not truly radical is itself a political act that reinforces the idea that what is to the left of the neoliberal paradigm is ‘radical’. Indirectly, this might contribute to the legitimisation and ‘normalisation’ of that paradigm, in at least two ways. On the one hand, given the pejorative connotations that this term is commonly associated with (Calossi, 2016, p. 88), it might help discrediting the ‘neo-reformist’ alternative, which used to be the prevailing norm in the decades following the Second World War. On the other hand, dubbing what is not radical as radical virtually excludes from the academic and the broader

² This is arguably analogous to *neo*-liberalism being a revival of classic economic liberalism. Indeed, to take this parallel even further, just as the Keynesian agenda of classic, mid-20th century, social democracy came as a reaction to the perceived failure of classic economic liberalism, as arguably epitomised by the 1929 Great Depression, so is the neo-Keynesian agenda of European NLPs a reaction to the perceived failure of neoliberalism, as arguably epitomised by the Eurozone crisis and the austerity policies accompanying it.

public debate the truly radical, anti-capitalist and socialist, alternative; for why bother taking seriously what is even beyond ‘radical’? Political scientists have, therefore, both an academic and political responsibility in the labels they attach to the various political actors they study.

Transnational networking and cooperation of left parties

The broad consensus of this literature is that the transnational networking and cooperation of left parties in the EU has historically been rather belated and limited compared to other party families. However, the establishment of the GUE/NGL and later on the PEL has been widely deemed as a substantial improvement of the left’s networking and cooperation. March (2011, p. 165) claims that ‘the level of truly voluntary international radical left cooperation now achieved is impressive’. Nevertheless, he immediately admits (writing, however, in the early stages of the austerity-centred management of the sovereign debt crisis) that ‘this “international” party family’s transnational activity and organisation still lag behind the other main party families’ (March, 2011, p. 166) – an assessment shared by the rest of the literature (e.g. Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016).

This literature remains very limited though, despite the rise in interest for LPs and that their transnational networking and cooperation was expected to increase in the context of the Eurozone crisis (Calossi, 2016, p. 194; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 333; Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 10). As Calossi (2016, p. 194) puts it, ‘during the “age of austerity” ... expect the further improvement of relations between the different subfamilies of the Anti-Austerity Left parties’. Thus, there still are strikingly few studies focusing on LPs’ transnational networking and cooperation at EU level, the few exceptions including the books by Sozzi (2011) and Calossi (2016), the article by Dunphy and March (2013), and chapters in edited books (see Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, 2012) or in single author books (see March, 2011) about the European left in general.

Moreover, the current literature is limited to the formal transnational cooperation via the institutional framework of the EU, mostly overlooking bilateral party cooperation as well as informal networking and cooperation altogether. Sozzi’s book (which has not been translated in English) and the chapter by Holmes and Lightfoot (2016) only deal with the GUE/NGL and PEL, while the article by Dunphy and March (2013) deals with the PEL alone. Calossi’s book could have been an opportunity to overcome these limits, as it is the largest English-language study tackling the transnational left in the EU. However, it also focuses almost entirely on the cooperation taking place via GUE/NGL and the PEL, leaving aside the bilateral, party-to-party

cooperation, while informal cooperation is very marginally touched upon, when discussing PEL's political foundation, Transform.

Moreover, despite having been published in the second half of 2016, the book's discussion of the transnational networking and cooperation since the start of the crisis is rather limited. The main text specifically dealing with the latter is that of Holmes and Lightfoot (2016). According to them, while the crisis might have created a more favourable context for the enhancement of the transnational cooperation of what they call the 'radical left', that largely did not happen, as the parties failed to present a cohesive alternative to the 'current neoliberal nature of the European Union' (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 333). The main reason for that lies with their divisions over whether the EU can be reformed or not, as 'the crisis has pushed both viewpoints further away from each other' (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 347). This argument is also endorsed by Chiocchetti (2014) and Keith (2016); according to the latter, 'the different approaches taken by RLPs towards European integration meant that they failed to unite to campaign against austerity' (Keith, 2016, p. 94). This cleavage will prove particularly salient throughout this thesis as well.

Finally, with regards to the three parties studied here, there are a few recent comparative studies of SYRIZA and Podemos (Kiouпкиolis & Katsambekis, 2018; Kouki & González, 2018; Porta, Kouki & Fernández, 2017; Segatti & Capuzzi, 2016), one of SYRIZA and Bloco (Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013). However, there is no comparative study of all three parties or of just Bloco and Podemos, which warrants even more the inclusion of Bloco in the present research. Moreover, at the present time there is no study focused on the transnational cooperation between any two of these three parties, not to mention among the three of them, despite their similar features, including strong orientation towards transnational cooperation, broadly similar contexts and the recent favourable conditions, provided by the Eurozone crisis, for such cooperation to increase.

Having said this, this PhD project intends to address mainly three gaps in the existing academic literature: firstly, the lack of any comparative study of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, the three most successful LPs in Southern Europe; secondly, and most specifically, the gap regarding both the formal and the informal transnational cooperation of these LPs, which of all European LPs would have arguably had the greatest incentive to engage in such cooperation given the impact of the Eurozone crisis on their countries; thirdly, the gap regarding the informal dimensions of the broader transnational networking cooperation of LPs, with potentially useful insights for the study of other party families.

Research design and methods

To tackle the puzzle of whether and how SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos have increased their transnational networking and cooperation since the start of the crisis, the thesis employs an inductive approach. Through the collection and analysis of qualitative data, it hopes to contribute to the literature by addressing the gaps identified above. Nevertheless, the thesis is theoretically informed by the key concepts introduced in the previous section, particularly Europeanisation, transnational party networking, transnational party cooperation and radical vs neo-reformist left parties.

The thesis' focus on transnational networking and cooperation is embedded in a comparative discussion of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos in terms of their origins, programme, strategy, organisation, and developments in the post-2009 European and national contexts. These categories have been chosen not only because they tend to be the standard analytical comparators in the literature on political parties but also because of the assumption that the parties' similarities and differences relative to these categories are particularly relevant for the assessment of their cooperation. In identifying these similarities and differences, the thesis undertakes an in-depth analysis of the current academic literature, party documents, mass media materials and other relevant sources.

The discussion of the parties' transnational networking and cooperation since 2009 aims to provide both a descriptive account and critical assessment of the post-2009 evolution of that process. This entails the mapping of both formal and informal channels of those processes, although, for reasons that will become apparent later on, the thesis does not develop a social network analysis based on diagrams, as such visualization would not have added much to the discussion.

The discussion focuses on the processes' significant channels, incentives and obstacles, which required the use of a qualitative approach, as most scholars recommend (see Börzel, 1998, p. 255; Firestone, 1993, p. 12). Moreover, the qualitative approach is justified by the assumption that the best way of exploring the transnational networking and cooperation among three political parties is by investigating the beliefs and perceptions of the actors involved in those processes, particularly with respect to the informal aspects of networking.

Hence, the thesis employs three methods of qualitative research, which are to allow for data triangulation that arguably enhances the consistency and credibility the findings: firstly, document research and analysis; secondly, semi-structured interviews; and thirdly, non-

participatory observation research, with the author attending the three-day conference organised by Transform in October 2018 in Lisbon, “Is Southern Europe the Weak Link of European Integration? Tracing Possible Areas of Cooperation among Movements and Parties”, which had among its speakers several members of SYRIZA and Bloco. The use of the first two methods is detailed below.

The document research and analysis build on a mix of both primary and secondary data. On the one hand, there is qualitative documentary and textual analysis of electoral manifestos, motions, discussions, minutes, declarations and other similar sources from SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, as well as from the relevant transnational organisations and networks, such as the GUE/NGL, the PEL, Transform, Plan B. Given the availability of many of these sources in English but also the author’s sufficient level of reading in Spanish and Portuguese, the only linguistic obstacles were raised by SYRIZA’s manifestos before its 2012 electoral breakthrough, which can only be found in their original Greek versions. In those cases, the thesis turned to existing academic literature and mass media materials on SYRIZA’s programmatic aspects up to 2012.

On the other hand, secondary data provided by the Manifesto Project (Volkens, Lehmann, Matthieß, Merz, Regel & Weßels, 2017) – which measures policy preferences of parties through quantitative content analysis of electoral manifestos from over fifty countries since 1945 onwards – was used to assess the evolution in time of the three parties’ programmatic radicalness. Thus, whether a party’s manifesto radicalised or de-radicalised from one election to the other was established depending on the percentage of the manifesto’s content that indicates left radicalness, as the latter has been defined in the previous section. The indicators of left radicalness, as they appear in the list compiled by the authors of the Manifesto Project, are ‘planned economy’, ‘economic planning’, ‘controlled economy’, ‘Marxist analysis: positive’, ‘publicly-owned industry: positive’, ‘nationalisation’, and ‘socialist property: positive’. In contrast, the indicators from that list that would express neo-reformist left policies or themes – in a way that distinguishes them from radical left policies or themes – are ‘welfare state expansion’, ‘market regulation’, and ‘Keynesian demand management’. Thus, this thesis sees a lower overall percentage of radical indicators and/or a higher overall percentage of neo-reformist indicators in a manifesto compared to previous elections as a sign of programmatic de-radicalisation.

Secondly, twenty semi-structured interviews and three non-structured interviews have been conducted with people who are either directly involved in the post-2009 transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, or have a close knowledge

of those processes (see Annex 2 for the questionnaire). More precisely, sixteen semi-structured interviews have been conducted with people working for the three parties (see Annex 3). Five of them work for SYRIZA, out of which two work for the party's international department, two for the party's delegation to the EP and one for both the party's political institute and Transform. Other five interviewees work for Bloco, out of which two are MEPs assistants, one is the head of the party's international department, one is an MP and one works for both the political foundation close to the party and Transform. The remaining six interviewees work for Podemos, out of which five are MEPs assistants and one is a political advisor for GUE/NGL. Thus, all of them occupy positions allowing them to have a first-hand experience and knowledge of their parties' transnational networking and cooperation. This sample of party interviewees has a visible weakness though: the absence of MEPs, whose busy schedule and scale of priorities prevented the author from managing to interview any of the current nine MEPs that the three parties currently have combined.

Also, four semi-structured and three non-structured interviews have been conducted with people who, despite not being affiliated to any of the three parties, have a good understanding of them and the broader European left. The purpose of including perspectives of such semi-outsiders to the process concerned was to partly counter-balance the inevitably biased perceptions of the party interviewees. Out of the seven semi-outsiders, three are journalists with left-wing sympathies who have been covering closely the activity of these parties in recent years, two are left-wing academics with personal contacts in some of these parties, one is the coordinator of the Transform network and one is a Senior Administrator for GUE/NGL (see Appendix 3).

The overall number of twenty-three interviews were conducted face-to-face during trips to Brussels, Athens, Lisbon and London, but also via Skype. All the interviews were conducted in English, although basic grammar corrections in the quotes used throughout the thesis have been made where necessary. Also, average scores assigned by the interviewees to various channels, incentives and obstacles for their significance to the parties' transnational networking and cooperation were rounded to the nearest tenth (e.g. 1.87 became 1.9).

While the reasons for the choice of the case study and of the timeline have been outlined already, it is worth reiterating more systematically and briefly developing on them. Firstly, SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos have been selected because they have been the most electorally successful anti-austerity LPs in the EU in general elections since the start of the Eurozone crisis (not including AKEL from Cyprus and *La France Insoumise* [Unbowed France] (LFI), which scored a better result than Bloco half-way through the completion of this

PhD). Indeed, these parties broadly share several characteristics in terms of programme, strategy and organisational culture, as well as in terms of socio-economic and political contexts, particularly since the beginning of the crisis. Moreover, all three parties have acknowledged the importance of transnational cooperation in fighting austerity effectively. Also, they entertain bilateral relations through a range of transnational organisations and channels. Thus, under all these conditions, it would be reasonable to expect that, of all left parties in the EU, their transnational cooperation was the most, or at least particularly, likely to increase in the post-2009 context.

At the same time, while these parties' commonalities warrant for a comparative framework of study, there are some notable differences among them, which might have had an impact on their cooperation. For instance, while SYRIZA and Bloco self-identify as 'radical left' and have direct linkages to former radical left groups, Podemos tends to avoid such ideological labels and, partly for that reason, has declined so far to join the PEL, which the other two are founding members of. Most importantly though, while Bloco and Podemos have at best given parliamentary support to minority social democratic governments in this period, SYRIZA has been leading the government since early 2015, which will be shown to have influence the trajectories of the three parties and, indeed, the relations between them.

In terms of the timeframe, the Eurozone crisis, which has been linked to the wider economic crisis or Great Recession, is understood to have started in late 2009 (Laursen, 2013). That is why the focus is on the post-2009 period in trying to assess whether the Eurozone crisis, rather than the wider economic crisis, has led to a growth in the transnational networking and cooperation of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos.

Finally, it is important to point out that there are no major ethical concerns regarding this project. All the participants to the interviews were fully informed about the nature of the interviews and of the research project. They all gave their consent to take part in the interviews and for the data they provided to be used for the present research project or for similar purposes, such as an academic publication. Indeed, this data does not include any personal or sensitive information, but only data regarding the networking and cooperation among contemporary political organisations. When the interviewees asked to not be quoted on a particular thing they said, their wish was respected. Thus, there are no foreseeable reputational issues that may arise from this research, neither for the interviewees themselves, nor for the political organisations they belong to, who by their nature are active and arguably want to be perceived as active in the transnational networking and cooperation of the European left.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided in five chapters, each one divided in sections, which are often themselves divided in sub-sections. Chapter 1 is a comparative discussion of the three parties, with each section focusing on their origins, programme, strategy and organisation (including national and transnational linkages). Each section deals in turn with SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. This sequence, which is maintained throughout the thesis, was justified by the order of their importance at the time of writing this chapter (early 2018), with SYRIZA in government and Bloco conferring parliamentary support to the Portuguese minority government, although in the meantime Podemos plays a similar role in relation to the government in Spain. The chapter finishes with a sum up of the parties' similarities and differences.

Chapter 2 deals with the European and national contexts of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos since the start of the Eurozone crisis and the developments of the three parties in those contexts. The first section provides a brief outline of the Eurozone crisis and its austerity-centred management, including the narrative that these parties broadly share in that respect. The following three sections discuss in turn each national context since the start of the crisis and the evolution of the respective party within that context. The conclusion sums up the key similarities and differences between the parties in terms of their post-2009 national contexts and developments.

Chapter 3, the largest and arguably most innovative of all in relation to the current literature, explores the informal transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. Its three sections explore that process by focusing on social movements, academic networks and political party foundations (including their pan-European network). This sequence reflects the proximity of these frameworks to the parties themselves, from the farthest to the closest, as well as the fact social movements preceded the parties in mobilising against neoliberalism and, since 2009, against the austerity policies. The conclusion sums up the key findings with regards to the three parties' informal networking and cooperation.

Chapter 4 deals with the formal transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos and is divided in four sections. The first one focuses on bilateral party cooperation, including connections between leaders and internal ideological currents. The second section discusses GUE/NGL, the only transnational structure that all three parties are members of and, generally, the most politically important transnational organisation of the

European left today. The third section deals with the PEL, which only SYRIZA and Bloco are members of, while the last section tackles the Plan B initiative (virtually unexplored in the current literature), which only Bloco and Podemos are members of. The chapter's conclusion sums up the key findings with regards to the three parties' formal networking and cooperation.

Chapter 5 is the most analytical part of the thesis and is divided in three sections. The first two provide a critical examination of the main factors that, according to the interviewees, have stimulated and hindered respectively the transnational cooperation among the three parties during the Eurozone crisis, with implications to party transnational cooperation in general. The discussion of these factors is intertwined with sketching the short-to-mid-term prospects for the cooperation among the three LPs and within the European left in general. The third section presents and discusses the recommendations suggested by the interviewees for the improvement of their parties' transnational networking and cooperation. The conclusion of the chapter sums up its key findings, followed by the general conclusion of the thesis, which recapitulates the key findings of all five chapters, while pointing out its own limits and the potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 1

Comparing SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos

This chapter is a comparative discussion of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos that aims to introduce the three parties and establish the key similarities and differences among them in preparation for the core chapters of the thesis that tackle their transnational networking and cooperation. The chapter is divided in five sections that deal with five standard analytical comparators often used in the literature on political parties and which might prove relevant to the parties' links with each other. The first section explores the origins of each party in turn, focusing on the political context of their emergence, their organisational lineage and initial ideological orientation. The second section discusses the evolution of each party's programme and agenda, with an emphasis on founding and electoral manifestos. The third section presents the evolution of the parties' strategy and the fourth section outlines their organisational structure, including their auxiliary organisations and international affiliations. The chapter finishes with a sum up of their similarities and differences.

Origins

As pointed out already, LPs in Europe and particularly in the EU became largely irrelevant after 1989 (March, 2011; Hudson, 2000; Sassoon, 1998). However, as social democratic parties gradually moved to the right and endorsed, to various extents, the neoliberal paradigm and on the background of the negative socio-economic impact of neoliberalism (see Hermann, 2007), a new vacuum on the left was created. Thus, the turn of the century saw the emergence of new formations to the left of social democracy, such as Bloco and SYRIZA, as well as *Die Linke* [Left Party] in Germany, *Parti de Gauche* [Left Party] and *Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste* [New Anticapitalist Party] in France, or *Vinstrihreyfingin – grænt framboð* [Left-Green Movement] in Iceland. Of course, the extent to which these formations were 'new' at the time is rather debatable, as most of them emerged as 'recompositions of older

organisations' (March, 2016, p. 32). This was particularly true of SYRIZA and Bloco, and less so in the case of Podemos, as shown in this section.

SYRIZA

The Greek party's origins go back to the 1968 split from the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which would become known as the KKE-Interior. While the KKE has remained an orthodox, unreformed communist party till the present day, KKE-Interior soon adhered to the new Eurocommunist current, alongside the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) (Spourdalakis, 2013, pp. 101-102). Its core tenet was that each communist party (CP) should follow its own path to socialism, depending on its national context and free of any interference from Moscow (Dunphy, 2004, pp. 24-25). In Western Europe, that entailed a full engagement with liberal democracy at a national level and European integration at an international level. Indeed, the Eurocommunist vision for the EU was to reform it from within and develop it into a vehicle for socialist policies (Dunphy, 2004, p. 26) – a view that still prevails on the European left today, although the policies pleaded for are now rather social democratic.

The KKE-Es struggled throughout the 1970s and early 1980s to become a significant actor in Greek politics, as it competed with both KKE and the highly successful Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) for the left-wing electorate. Hence, in 1986 it changed its name to the Greek Left, as an explicit attempt to build a broader political force, similar to the Spanish *Izquierda Unida* [United Left] (IE) established the same year by the PCE. According to Dunphy (2004, p. 35), this 'marked the decisive move of the party into the post-communist phase'. Two years later, the party joined an electoral coalition with KKE, which had temporarily softened its approach on the background of Gorbachev's 'perestroika' in the Soviet Union (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 3).

The new coalition of former comrades was called *Synaspismos* [Coalition of the Left and Progress] (SYN) and gained over 10% in each of the three consecutive general elections it competed between 1989 and 1990, but in 1991 KKE left the coalition due to a deep internal crisis following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The same year, SYN became a fully-fledged political party (including the non-hardliners who had been purged from KKE), defining itself as a pluralist left that supported a mixed economy and put more emphasis on 'new issues' such as feminism and the environment (Kalyvas & Marantzidis, 2002). Also, it inherited from

Eurocommunism the broad support for European integration and openness towards transnational cooperation (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 11).

The 1990s and early 2000s represented a period of modest electoral results for SYN, with 5.1% in the 2000 general elections as its best achievement, thus failing to benefit from the gradual ‘neoliberalisation’ of PASOK (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 101), which won three consecutive general elections during that period largely by managing to present itself as the driving force of Greece’s modernisation (Spourdalakis & Tassis, 2006). Also, despite its orientation towards the civil society, SYN did not manage to significantly challenge the KKE’s domination over the trade union movement (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, pp. 8-9). Moreover, the party’s pluralist organisation came along with factionalism and protracted internal debates, which led to a decline in membership by the end of the 1990s (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 10).

In that context, the party experienced a slight radicalisation after 2000, by placing more emphasis on class and economic issues (Eleftheriou, 2009). Moreover, the leadership came to the conclusion that, in an age of new social movements, particularly the Global Justice Movement (GJM), a strong orientation towards such movements would be the solution to the crisis of the Greek left. Thus, in 2001 SYN launched the Space for Dialogue and Common Action of the Left with the aim of unifying the Greece left around it and enabling the latter to forge links at home with the social movements and engage in transnational social movements such as the GJM (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 8).

The ‘Space’ proved to be the basis on which SYRIZA was born as an electoral coalition for the 2004 parliamentary elections. SYN was by far its largest and leading component, amounting for roughly 80% of its cadres and activists (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 10). The other components of the very broad coalition were DIKKI (left social-democratic party), New Fighter (group of PASOK dissidents), Active Citizens (movement led by Manolis Glezos, a well-known figure of the Greek Resistance), Movement for the Unity of Action of the Left (splinter group from KKE), the Ecosocialists of Greece, Red (Trotskyist group), Internationalist Workers’ Left (Trotskyist group), Beginning (Trotskyist group, affiliated to the Committee for a Workers’ International), the Communist Organisation of Greece (Maoist group), and the smaller groups Rosa Group, Radicals and Anticapitalist Political Group (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 17).

Following the good result in the general elections of May 2012, when it gained almost 17% of the votes, SYRIZA re-registered as a political party rather than a coalition for the elections one month later. In the elections in June they scored almost 27% and became the main

opposition party on the basis of an anti-austerity programme that focused on the defense of the welfare state. At the first party congress the following year, the decision was made to formally dissolve the constituent parties of SYRIZA into a unitary party. Nevertheless, the various orientations formed platforms along doctrinal lines within the new party, with the more radical elements gathered under the banner of the Left Platform. In the aftermath of SYRIZA's deal with the Troika in July 2015, the majority of the Left Platform, which opposed the deal, split to form the new party Popular Unity. Another tendency was formed in 2014, the so-called Group of 53+, described as 'the left wing of the party's mainstream' (Sheehan, 2016, p. 142).

Bloco

The emergence of Bloco at the end of the century can also be understood by looking several decades back, at the Portuguese political context following the 1974 Carnation Revolution that ended almost fifty years of right-wing dictatorship. The revolutionary events pushed the political landscape so much to the left that even what would become the country's main centre-right party named itself the Social Democratic Party. However, after decades of operating clandestinely, the radical left was neither united and confident enough, nor sufficiently rooted in the population to capitalise on that favourable context and seize power. In particular, it did not seem capable of delivering the more immediate reforms that people were waiting for (Príncipe, 2016, pp. 159-161). That shortcoming only became cemented over time and, as Príncipe aptly notes (2016, p. 161), 'the revolutionary left remained divided, squabbling for the cold comfort of "revolutionary purity"'.

The main beneficiary of that context proved to be the centre-left Socialist Party (PS), which promised the expected reforms, and partly delivered them, together with a 'return to normality' following the decades of dictatorship and then the upheaval of 1974-1975 (Príncipe, 2016, p. 160). Together with the Social Democratic Party, the PS dominated the post-1974 political scene in Portugal (Lisi, 2009, para 7), alternating in government till the present day. However, as the PS gradually moved to the right together with the rest of European social democracy (Freire, 2010), a new gap on the left was created by the end of the 1990s. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), only weakened by the collapse of the Soviet Union, was too ossified to fill in that gap and to address the concrete challenges faced by Portugal after its 1986 accession to the EU (March, 2011, p. 107).

It was in such circumstances that Bloco was established in 1999 through the merger of small radical left organisations that had come to realise that they could not develop their forces

on their own (Lisi, 2009, para 9). The three founding organisations were the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Trotskyist group, affiliated to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, USFI from now on), the People's Democratic Union (Maoist group), and Politics XXI (former Eurocommunist dissidents from the PCP). The following year, the Left Revolutionary Front (another Trotskyist group, affiliated to the International Workers League) also joined. While Bloco had a full party status from the start, its constituent groups retained a certain degree of autonomy as distinct political tendencies.

From the very beginning, Bloco's two-fold goal was to capitalise on PS's move to the right and attract its disillusioned voters, while at the same time challenging PCP's hegemony over the radical left electorate by attracting the new generation of voters (Lisi, 2009, para 10; Príncipe, 2016, p. 164). This approach proved very soon to be relatively successful, as the party gained parliamentary representation the same year it was created. Its vote in general elections steadily increased ever since (with the exception of a slump in 2011 elections, discussed in the last section of this chapter), from 2.4% in 1999 to 6.4% in 2005 to 9.8% in 2009 to 10.2% in 2015.

Together with a strong emphasis on the youth and non-economic issues that the PCP largely neglected, such as reproductive rights and cohabitation laws (Lisi, 2009, para 21), Bloco also displayed, like SYRIZA, a strong orientation towards social movements. In some ways, Bloco's very creation can be seen as a reaction to the emergence of new social movements in the late 1990s and the latter's search for a political expression (Lisi, 2013, p. 35; Príncipe, 2016, p. 162). Indeed, Bloco has been called by some scholars as a 'movement party' (Lisi & Cancela, 2017), which is also confirmed by its own statute (Bloco, 2016a), where Bloco is defined under Article 1 as 'a political movement of citizens that takes the legal form of a political party'.

Podemos

Of all the three parties discussed in this thesis, Podemos is the newest both chronologically and genealogically. It was established in early 2014 as the political by-product of the social unrest that had shaken the Spanish state since the start of the economic crisis (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 4). This crisis had a large impact on Spain, which lost 15% its GDP between 2008 and 2013 (World Bank, 2014). During the same period, unemployment rose from 8.2% to 26.2% (Eurostat, 2015).

Such an economic situation combined with the austerity measures taken by the government to counter the crisis ignited, on 15 May 2011, the biggest protest movement in the country's recent history (Machuca, 2016). What would become known as the *Indignados* [The Outraged], or 15-M, Movement represented not just a reaction to the economic crisis but also a wholesale rejection of the political mainstream (Stobart, 2016; Hughes, 2011). That rejection was mainly targeted at the two big parties that had dominated Spanish politics since Franco's death in 1975 – the social democratic Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the conservative People's Party (PP), whose average combined vote in general elections had been 75% over the previous three decades.

The 15-M Movement was followed by the emergence of other social movements, such as the mass campaigns against cuts and privatisations (the so-called *mareas* [tides]) and the anti-eviction movement PAH (Stobart, 2016, p. 177). However, that did not translate into a boost for the established 'radical left', IU, which was also perceived as part of the mainstream and thus failed to capitalise on the popular disillusionment channelled by the new social movements (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 15). This created a 'window of opportunity' (Gilmartin, 2017) for the development of a left-wing political alternative, which came in the form of Podemos in January 2014, following a manifesto (Podemos, 2014) signed by several intellectuals and activists.

Podemos' explicit aim was to compete in the EP elections that May, in which it remarkably gained over 8% of the votes. The party presented itself as an alternative for all those feeling unrepresented by the existing political parties, an alternative in support of 'popular sovereignty', decent living standards and civil rights for all (Podemos, 2014). Indeed, in 'a moment of deep crisis of legitimacy for the European Union', Podemos opposed what it called the 'financial coup d'état against the peoples of Southern Europe' (Podemos, 2014, p. 1). Thus, the new project had an intrinsic transnational dimension, as it framed its goals and very *raison d'être* partly in relation to the EU and its policies. The reference to Southern Europe itself entailed the awareness that Spain's economic problems extended beyond Spain, and so did, arguably, the solutions to them.

Unlike SYRIZA and Bloco, Podemos was not born from the merger of pre-existing left-wing organisations. The founders of Podemos mainly consisted of a group of former activists from the 15-M Movement and academics from Madrid, including among the latter its two most prominent figures, Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón. Moreover, while the two personally declared to be left-wing, they avoided that label for the party from the very start, as they believed that the 'left vs right' divide was not fully relevant for contemporary Spanish politics

(Iglesias, 2015a, 198-199). The main lineage of Podemos was considered by all to be the 15-M Movement.

However, Podemos' left-wing filiations were rather diluted than truly absent. Among the founders there also was the Anticapitalist Left, a Trotskyist group affiliated to the USFI, who had previously been part of the IU and now represent the main radical current inside Podemos under the name of *Anticapitalistas*. Indeed, Errejón himself used to be a member of this group, while Iglesias activated in the youth wing of the PCE during the 1990s. The Podemos' MEPs affiliation to GUE/NGL and the self-identification of a majority of its voters as left-wing (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 4) only came to confirm that this was a left party, although arguably less so in terms of both ideology and strategy than either SYRIZA or Bloco, as shown in the next two sections.

Programme

This section outlines the evolution of the three parties' programme, with a focus on their founding and electoral manifestos. It illustrates the argument set out in the introduction that, despite how they are widely perceived and in contrast with their origins discussed in the previous section, the agenda of these parties is not radical left (anymore) but rather neo-reformist. In other words, SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos are challenging neoliberalism and aim to defend the welfare state and social rights rather than overthrow capitalism and replace it with a socialist society. This similarity is arguably a favourable premise for the transnational networking and cooperation of these parties.

SYRIZA

As mentioned earlier, SYRIZA emerged as an alternative to both the social democracy of PASOK and the 'orthodox' communism of KKE. One of SYRIZA's founding members, the academic Michalis Spourdalakis (2013, p. 108), notes that such an alternative aimed to 'bridge the gap between reform and revolution and to define the radical transformation of capitalist society as a process of structural reforms directly connected to everyday struggles.' Thus, echoing its Eurocommunist roots, SYRIZA opted for a gradual and democratic path to socialism, while openly rejecting, in stark contrast with the KKE, the legacy of Stalinism and the Soviet Union (Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 8). At a theoretical level, this approach was largely

influenced by the ideas of Greek-French Marxist Nicos Poulantzas (whom the party's political institute is named after), who believed that, while under capitalism the state fundamentally serves the interests of the capitalist class, its complexity and relative autonomy would allow the anti-capitalist left to struggle for hegemony and potentially make significant gains within its framework (see Martin, 2008).

At the same time, SYRIZA aspired to be a plural and modern left that also campaigns for non-economic causes such as gender equality and the protection of the environment. That plurality is expressed by the three flags making up the party emblem, with the red flag symbolising the socialist dimension, the green flag standing for ecologism and the purple one for feminism (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 107).

Thus, in accordance with its origins, SYRIZA's 2004 electoral and founding manifesto had some radical elements. However, based on data from the Manifesto Project (Volkens, Lehmann, Matthieß, Merz, Regel & Weßels, 2017), the aggregate number of statements referring to 'controlled economy', 'nationalisation', 'Marxist analysis', 'publicly-owned industry', 'socialist property' and/or 'economic planning' – i.e. the categories that, as set out in the introduction, would indicate left radicalism – represented merely 6.3% of the manifesto. At the same time, the statements expressing Keynesian or broadly reformist policies and goals amounted to 3.8% of the manifesto, which would arguably still render the latter as a radical left programme overall (Volkens et al., 2017).

Following the party's change of leadership and shift to the left (Payiatsos, 2017, p. 14), the 2007 elections saw an even more radical manifesto from SYRIZA, with more than 16% of the text pointing to economic policies of an anti-capitalist or socialist character, while the reformist elements were limited to 1.8% (Volkens et al., 2017). That remains, to the present day, the most radical SYRIZA manifesto. The 2009 manifesto, however, was visibly less radical than the previous one, with less than 2.4% radical policies compared 8.9% reformist elements (Volkens et al., 2017). That marked the beginning of SYRIZA's programmatic moderation that has only accelerated since the start of the crisis.

Given PASOK's direct participation in the first wave of austerity policies (Moschonas, 2013), SYRIZA became the main opponent of austerity and defender of the welfare state, in the attempt to 'capture the middle ground in Greek politics' (Exadaktylos, 2012). Nevertheless, this was not a sudden but a sinuous process of de-radicalisation, as the manifestos for the elections in May and June 2012 still called for anti-capitalist policies such as the nationalisation of banks, private hospitals and formerly public services or utility companies (SYRIZA, 2012).

After 2012, although the radical aspiration to build socialism in a distant future was still present in the more theoretical party documents (Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 8), SYRIZA's de-radicalisation in its day-to-day discursive practices and electoral manifestos enhanced steadily (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 12). Thus, SYRIZA's manifesto for the elections it won in January 2015, also known as the Thessaloniki Programme, made no reference to capitalism or socialism, to nationalisation or public ownership, to economic planning or democratic control of the economy. Instead, it explicitly pleaded for social democratic and neo-Keynesian aims such as the 'rebuilding of the welfare state' and 'a **European New Deal** of public investment financed by the European Investment Bank' (SYRIZA, 2014). The much more social democratic character of SYRIZA's programme was reinforced in the snap elections held eight months later, when that balance was 5.5% to 2.6% in favour of social democratic economic policies (Volgens et al., 2017). It represented the culmination of a process of social-democratisation that had begun at least since the start of the crisis.

As Moschonas (2013, p. 37) put it as early as 2013, SYRIZA's 'economic policy has changed gradually during the three years of the debt crisis, moving in a similar direction to the path taken during the 1930s by social democrats in Sweden and New Deal Democrats in the United States'. Thus, despite claims to the contrary on behalf of the party leadership (see Tsipras, 2013, p. 41), from an alternative to social democracy SYRIZA became the new social democracy, as hinted at even by some of its own members (see Douzinas, 2017, p. 67). Moreover, as detailed in the following chapter, since being in government and implementing further austerity measures, SYRIZA has arguably departed even from that classic social democratic agenda. Thus, according to Chatzistavrou (2016), SYRIZA has undergone a political mutation from left radicalism to 'post-left managerialism'.

Finally, but particularly relevant to the present discussion, SYRIZA's Eurocommunist legacy has also been reflected in its broad support for European integration and for Greece's membership to both the EU and the eurozone (Chatzistavrou, 2016; Nikolakakis, 2016). At a deeper theoretical level, that ideological choice stemmed from the party's core principle that there are no national roads to socialism and that that long-term goal can only be pursued at a pan-European level and beyond (Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 8). While since the start of the crisis SYRIZA's view of the EU and particularly of the eurozone has become increasingly critical, the party still maintains the belief that the EU can be reformed from within through the transnational cooperation of progressive forces (SYRIZA, 2017). At the same time, as it will be shown throughout the thesis, that continuous allegiance to the EU has had a significant impact on SYRIZA's relations with both Bloco and Podemos.

Bloco

Similarly to SYRIZA, Bloco emerged as an alternative to a ‘neoliberalized’ social democracy and an ossified communist party. In its founding manifesto, Bloco is presented as a party that ‘renews the legacy of socialism and includes the converging contributions of several citizens, forces and movements that over the years committed to the search for alternatives to capitalism’ (Bloco, 1999, p. 18). Once again, the path to socialism would go through the institutions of liberal democracy, which means that socialism ‘cannot be an immediate objective’ (Louçã, 2007, para 6).

Hence, from the beginning, Bloco focused on defending the welfare state by calling for higher taxation of big business and increased state intervention (Lisi, 2009, para 13). In other words, Bloco reclaimed the classic social democratic policies abandoned by social democracy itself. Indeed, between 1999 and 2011, positive references to the welfare state amounted, on average, to more than 22% of Bloco’s electoral manifestos, compared to a bit over 15% in the case of the PS (Volkens et al., 2017).

The classic social democratic agenda was combined from the start with a strong emphasis on new left issues, such as gender equality and the protection of the environment, which had been largely marginal for the other two left-wing parties (Lisi, 2009, para 13). Bloco pursued this left-libertarian agenda with considerable success given their small parliamentary representation, most notably by exerting pressure on the PS government to legalise abortion in 2007 following a referendum that had failed to meet the validation threshold. This programmatic dimension enabled Bloco to attract, from early on, support among white-collar and professional workers more concerned with non-economic issues (Lisi, 2009, para 15).

After the 2002 elections, Bloco gradually moderated its programme even more, in an attempt to ‘acquire a profile which could favour its acceptance in the political arena’ (Lisi, 2009, para 22). That was reflected by an even stronger emphasis on left-libertarian rather than economic issues, over half of the party’s legislative proposals having to do with women’s rights, LGBT rights, environment, bioethics or drug legislation. On the economic side, the party reinforced its commitments to increasing taxation of capital and strengthening public services. Indeed, the de-radicalisation process became stronger following the 2007 party convention, when Bloco tried to lose the ‘radical left’ image by rebranding itself as an ‘eco-socialist’ party. Also, the party’s anti-capitalism became limited to opposition towards neoliberal policies (Lisi, 2009, para 28).

As discussed also in Chapter 2, the Eurozone crisis brought about, initially, further de-radicalisation for Bloco. In a party document from 2010, which specifically deals with the question of the economic crisis, there is no critical reference to capitalism or even neoliberalism, but rather to ‘finance globalisation’ (Bloco, 2010). Indeed, Bloco’s main goal here seems to be the opposition against finance globalisation, as ‘its defeat is instrumental for enforcing labor rights and fighting against the current modes of exploitation’ (Bloco, 2010, para 29). There is no reference to more systemic structures and policies of neoliberal capitalism that arguably made possible the Eurozone crisis and have tended since to govern the management of that crisis. Indeed, the commitment to European integration is reinforced and the possibility of an exit ruled out explicitly.

When it comes to what it stands for, even the defence of the welfare state seems less ambitious than before – for instance, the idea of nationalising key utilities like water and energy is completely abandoned. However, after the electoral disappointment of 2011, when the party lost almost half of its vote share, Bloco slightly re-radicalised its programme and started calling, for the first time, for the complete rejection of austerity measures and the cancellation of most of the country’s debt (Bloco, 2012, para 10). Moreover, it proposed the nationalisation of two private banks that had been recapitalised by the state (Bloco, 2012, para 25).

This re-radicalisation trend was strengthened with the 2015 electoral manifesto (Príncipe, 2016), which made a reference to capitalism’s inability to offer solutions to the question of climate change (Bloco, 2015, p. 49) and called for the nationalisation of the banking system (Bloco, 2015, p. 6) and of the energy sector (Bloco, 2015, p. 53). Indeed, the new party statute approved during the party’s national convention in June 2016 asserts a commitment, albeit rather vague, to the prospect of socialism as ‘an expression of humanity’s emancipatory struggle against exploitation and oppression’ (Bloco, 2016a, p. 3).

However, while these radical elements arguably currently place Bloco to the left of SYRIZA, they fall short of the type of policies that would qualify a party as radical left. During the same national convention, the more radical motion lost by 444 to 58 votes against the more moderate motion. Thus, while the former talks of collective property, planification of the economy and anti-capitalism as the only answer to the crisis (Bloco, 2016b), the latter merely states that ‘the only way to save the Welfare State, re-launch investment and create more jobs is renegotiating the debt and having the public control of the banking system’ (Bloco, 2016c, para 7), with no reference to any anti-capitalist or socialist policies or goals. Thus, the new leadership of the party is committed to saving the welfare state rather than developing a concrete alternative to capitalism. That was reinforced at the last national convention in

November 2018, when the leadership's winning resolution made no reference to capitalism or socialism, thus lacking any systemic vision (Bloco, 2018).

Finally, with regards to the EU, Bloco went from total opposition in its early years to a 'left-Europeanist' position that aimed to reform the EU in the service of what fundamentally is a classic social democratic agenda centred around full employment, social justice and gender equality (March, 2011, p. 109). With the start of the crisis though, Bloco's stance towards the EU has hardened, as it sees the latter responsible for Portugal's socio-economic crisis (Bloco, 2012, para 8). Indeed, Bloco started to call on the rest of the left to put forward 'a courageous political program to break with the IMF [International Monetary Fund], ECB [European Central Bank] and EU policies and with austerity, and to recover our economy against the debt tyranny' (Bloco, 2012, para 28).

The anti-EU discourse only enhanced following SYRIZA's experience in government, as reflected in one of Bloco's main campaign slogans for the 2015 elections: 'No more sacrifices for the euro'. For Príncipe (2016, p. 172), the anti-EU discourse was one of the reasons for the party's best electoral result ever. Indeed, the party coordinator, Catarina Martins, stated that the EU is 'the greatest threat to people in Europe' and that time has come 'to dismantle' it (De Jongh, 2017, para 7). As mentioned earlier and developed later on in the thesis, this shift in policy towards the EU represents one of the main factors in the transnational cooperation between Bloco and SYRIZA.

Podemos

Podemos is the newest of the three parties not merely genealogically, but also ideologically. As pointed out in the previous section, the party leadership avoided from the very start to label the party as left-wing, despite admitting themselves to be, as individuals, on the left. They argued that the 'old left' had been defeated over the last few decades of neoliberal hegemony, so a new left with a new language was needed. According to the party leader, Pablo Iglesias, the task is 'to introduce new concepts and arguments that would help to define the political battlefield to our advantage' (Iglesias, 2015*b*, p. 17). That included abandoning the left-right divide, which they believed had become irrelevant for Spanish politics and needed to be replaced by a new dichotomy – between 'the establishment' (referred to as *la casta* [the caste]) and 'the people' (Iglesias, 2015*b*; Di Pietro, 2014).

The 'elite vs people' dichotomy is central to populism (Mudde, 2007; Canovan, 2002) and therefore reflects the party's populist dimension (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, pp. 4-6). Indeed,

while such a dichotomy is employed by other left- and right-wing parties too, in Podemos' case that has become a defining element (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 6). However, populism is understood here not as an ideology but rather as a strategy (see Moffit & Tormey, 2013; Weyland, 2001) and in particular as a discursive strategy (see Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Taguieff 2003), which is why Podemos' populism is discussed in the next section about the parties' strategies.

Podemos is a left party though. As pointed out in the previous section, some of their lineages, their leaders and their own electorate are on the left. Most importantly, their policies are 'clearly left-wing' (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 4). The programmes put forward in the 2014 European elections and then during their founding congress later that year proposed, among other things, the restructuring of the country's debt, free public healthcare for all, right to housing and an end to all evictions, the introduction of a universal basic income, renationalisation of banks and energy companies and exit from NATO ("Objetivos de Podemos", 2014). That comes along with a preoccupation for New Left issues such as gender equality, protection of environment and citizen participation (Podemos, 2014).

However, Podemos' programme has never been radical but reformist, and Iglesias has always been rather straightforward about that: 'we are not opposing a strategy for a transition to socialism, but we are being more modest and adopting a neo-Keynesian approach, like the European left, calling for higher investment, securing social rights and redistribution' (Iglesias, 2015c, p. 27). Indeed, that has been reflected in the prevalence of social democratic over socialist proposals on economic issues in both manifestos for the 2015 and 2016 general elections – 7.8% vs 1.7% (Volkens et al., 2017).

Indeed, even that 'neo-Keynesian approach' has been softened, with its more radical elements like the introduction of a universal basic income and renationalization of energy companies and banks having been dropped from its manifesto for the 2015 general elections (Stobart, 2016, p. 183). As Stobart (2016, p. 185) puts it, 'This encouraged a process of social democratization and further alienated supporters on the left'. While the party's electoral coalition with the PCE-led IU for the 2016 general elections (which is extant at the moment of writing, more than two years since the elections), *Unidos Podemos* [United We Can], indicates a certain shift to the left, including a broad call for 'democratic control of the financial sector' (Podemos, 2017, p. 33), the party's programme remains neo-Keynesian, thus placing it among the other NLPs that are trying to overtake social democracy by reclaiming its classic values and policies.

Finally, with regards to the EU, Podemos finds the latter as responsible for the austerity measures that have affected Spain and Southern member states in general (Podemos, 2014, p. 1). However, neither the EU nor the eurozone are to be abandoned, but democratised. According to a party declaration from 2016, Podemos stands for ‘a democratic Europe, a space for human rights, liberties, peace, and cooperation’ (Podemos, 2016). Only the radical, Trotskyist tendency Anticapitalistas supports the eventuality of an exit from the eurozone and the EU, as they are involved together with Bloco and other sections of the European left in the Plan B for Europe, discussed in Chapter 4.

Strategy

This section discusses the main characteristics of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos in terms of how they try to pursue the programmatic goals outlined in the previous section. Such a discussion is particularly relevant to this thesis’ research questions. These parties’ strategies concern and impact directly on their positions on the question of transnational cooperation. For the moment, however, this section focuses on the broad characteristics of these parties’ strategies in their national contexts, particularly their strong, albeit inconsistent, orientation towards social movements and the youth. This discussion will lay the groundwork for the later analysis of their attitudes to and practices of transnational cooperation.

SYRIZA

From the very beginning SYRIZA had to cope with a trade union movement that was already mostly under the influence of either PASOK or KKE (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013) and with the wider lack of institutional resources of the left in general (Lisi, 2013, p. 23). Hence, SYRIZA aimed to compensate for these disadvantages by trying to unify the Greek left and link it up with the emerging social movements both nationally and internationally. In doing that, SYRIZA adopted a strategy of protest and social mobilisation (Tsakatika, 2016; Spourdalakis, 2013).

According to Spourdalakis (2013, p. 103), that choice signalled ‘a clear departure from the traditional instrumentalism among parties on the left, completely preoccupied as they were with securing public office’. That represented a significant break with the previous strategy of

LPs in the EU, such as the French Communist Party (PCF) or the Italian Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), who throughout the 1990s and early 2000s sought to strengthen their influence by joining centre-left government coalitions as junior partners (Keith, 2010) but then suffered considerable electoral setbacks as a result of that (March, 2011). Thus, SYRIZA started to participate in all relevant social and protest movements, without trying, however, to take them over, as KKE always tended to do, but rather try and work alongside them (Douzinas, 2017, p. 41; Tsakatika, 2016, p. 8).

Together with this came a sustained effort to attract the youth, which is seen as ‘an autonomous social category that ... can be converted from a “lost generation” to the generation of social transformation’ (Youth of SYRIZA, 2017). That was reflected, among other things, by the election of a 34-year old Tsipras as SYN’s president in 2008 (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 8), as part of a broader process of promoting younger members in key party positions (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 102). Indeed, Tsipras was the representative of the movement-oriented sections of the party that favoured ever stronger focus on building SYRIZA (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 104), whose leader he also became in 2009.

With the start of the crisis, SYRIZA’s orientation towards social movements increased, particularly during the 2010-2012 period of intense social mobilisation in reaction to the first wave of austerity measures (Rüdig & Karyotis, 2014). It was this participation in the various bottom-up anti-austerity movements that contributed decisively to SYRIZA’s electoral breakthrough of 2012. As detailed in the following chapter, SYRIZA managed to intervene in those movements by respecting their own dynamics while giving their demands a platform through the SYRIZA MPs and a programmatic articulation that posed itself as a clear alternative to the government’s policies (Spourdalakis, 2013, pp. 109-110). In other words, SYRIZA gradually became the political alternative proposed by the anti-austerity movement.

The protest strategy was coupled with a populist discursive strategy that portrayed SYRIZA as representing ‘the people’ against the ‘corrupt political elites’ (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). That was arguably best reflected by one of the party’s slogans for the elections in May 2012 – ‘Us or them’ (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 10). That dimension of its discourse has recently led several scholars to dub SYRIZA as a populist party (see Kiouпкиolis & Katsambekis, 2018; Mudde, 2017; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014), thus warranting even more a discussion of its similarities and connections with Podemos.

A crucial moment in SYRIZA’s strategic development was a Central Committee meeting in July 2011, when the leadership adopted a ‘competence strategy’ (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 11) meant to convince all social strata affected by austerity that SYRIZA had the best plan to

take the country out of the crisis and that it was ready to govern in order to put that plan in practice (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 111). According to Tsakatika (2016, p. 11), ‘it is very difficult to understand SYRIZA’s electoral success without the claim to government responsibility articulated in terms of the Government of the Left’. Indeed, one of SYRIZA’s current MPs, Costas Douzinas, sees that ‘as a key moment in the rise of SYRIZA’, which aimed at ‘putting an end to a long period of defeat and marginalisation’ (Douzinas, 2017, p. 42). As part of that strategy, SYRIZA sought to convince the voters that it had the expertise required to reboot the country’s economy, which partly explains the prevalence of economists in high-profile positions in the party, as discussed in Chapter 3.

That new strategic focus led, particularly following the good electoral results in 2012, to a more fundamental reorientation away from protest and social mobilisation towards electoral and parliamentary politics (Kouki & González, 2018; Eleftheriou, 2016; Tsakatika, 2016). In other words, SYRIZA went back to the office-seeking strategy that it had previously distanced itself from and which typically entails, at least in the case of left parties, lesser emphasis on civil society linkages (Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013, p. 8). While that did not entail abandoning the engagement with protest and social movements completely, SYRIZA subordinated it to the office-seeking strategy (Eleftheriou, 2016, p. 297). That trade-off occurred on the background of a decrease in the level of spontaneous social mobilisation (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 9), as ‘by the middle of 2012 the signs of a serious tiredness of the movement were evident’ (Payiatsos, 2017, p. 15).

This was not completely unprecedented though, as SYN (the main organisation that founded SYRIZA) had privileged a ‘office-seeking strategy’ in the late 1980s, when it even participated briefly in a government coalition with the centre-right New Democracy (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 4). This strategic reorientation only enhanced after SYRIZA came into government in early 2015. Indeed, despite the *Oxi* referendum moment, SYRIZA moved further away from its strategy of protest and mass mobilisation in favour of appeasing the domestic political establishment and negotiating with the EU establishment (Douzinas, 2017; Payiatsos, 2017; Kouvelakis, 2016; Sotiris, 2016).

Bloco

Similarly to SYRIZA, Bloco was confronted not only with the lack of institutional resources generally characteristic of the left (Lisi, 2013, p. 23), but also with a trade union movement (the main confederation CGTP in particular) largely dominated by the PCP

(Príncipe, 2016, p. 165). This led Bloco to adopt a strong orientation towards social movements as a key element of its strategy in order to gain legitimacy and electoral support (Lisi, 2013, 36). Thus, Bloco built its profile by campaigning on non-economic issues, such as domestic violence, abortion or LGBT rights (Louçã, 2010; Lisi, 2009). Indeed, by doing that, Bloco secured significant support among the youth and white-collar professionals (Louçã, 2010), with students and teachers amounting to 40% of the membership in 2003 (Lisi, 2009).

That strategy was coupled, though, with a strong focus on electoral campaigning and parliamentary politics. As Príncipe (2016, p. 165) puts it, ‘the party has to function as an instrument of social struggle, a vehicle for coordinating between distinct movements and pursuing their goals at the parliamentary level’. The party’s success with regard to the 2007 legalisation of abortion is a case in point. Thus, Bloco managed to present itself as a left-wing alternative to the political mainstream not by merely putting forward an alternative agenda, but by showing that it is capable of realising at least some parts of that agenda. The electoral fruits of that double-fold strategy came about in 2009, when the party gained its best electoral score up to that point.

Following the 2009 elections and the start of the economic crisis, Bloco started to put more emphasis on parliamentary politics rather than social mobilisation. For instance, while in the parliament Bloco voted against the three packages of austerity measures implemented by the PS government between 2009 and 2011, the party did not mobilise its base against those measures, despite being involved in the anti-austerity measures that took place in that period. Indeed, Bloco’s support for the PS candidate in the 2011 presidential elections might have well undermined its credentials as a left alternative to the PS.

Bloco’s focus on parliamentary work in a period of substantial austerity measures and increasing social upheaval against those measures may well have played a role in the party’s losses in the 2011 snap elections. However, what is certain is that following those elections, Bloco not only radicalised some aspects of its programme and discourse but also returned to the previous strategy of social mobilisation and active engagement with social movements. As Lisi (2013, pp. 33-34) points out, whereas the PCP was reluctant to get involved with such movements, Bloco offered them logistical and material support and, indeed, gave their demands a programmatic articulation and a platform on the political scene.

On the background of an increasingly polarised landscape around the question of austerity (Príncipe, 2016, pp. 170-171), Bloco’s programmatic and strategic radicalisation after 2011 led to its best electoral result ever in the 2015 elections. However, its subsequent agreement with the PCP and the PS to lend parliamentary support to the latter’s minority

government has led to a new departure from ‘the streets’ in favour of institutional activity, not the least because of the low levels of social mobilisation in Portugal after 2015 (Príncipe, 2016, p. 174).

Podemos

Of all three parties, Podemos’ links with social movements have arguably seemed the most prominent, including with regards to its genealogy, which earned it the label of ‘party-movement’ from some scholars (see Agustín & Briziarelli, 2018, p. 10). From early on, Podemos placed an explicit emphasis on mass mobilisation, particularly in the first year of existence, when it encouraged its supporters (members and non-members alike) to get actively involved in the party building process through its local and sectorial branches called ‘circles’ (Stobart, 2016, p. 181). Furthermore, in early 2015, Podemos organised the March of Change, which, despite not raising any specific demands, attracted between 100,000 and 300,000 people, of which the party leader Iglesias said, during the event, that they ‘are the DNA of our party’ (Dawber, 2015).

Such an orientation towards the masses reflected the leadership’s strategy to ‘link the most advanced sectors of civil society into a broader project of political change’ (Iglesias, 2015a, p. 19), so that Podemos can become a governing party. As Stobart puts it (2016, p. 177), Podemos ‘consciously sought to embody the will of the majority and win office – a strategy expressed in coalition names like *Let’s Win* or *Atlantic Tide*’. Thus, similar to SYRIZA, Podemos combined mass mobilisation with a bold commitment to come into government or at least overtake PSOE as the main party on the Spanish left (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 21). That entailed a strong focus on electoral politics, that would not be parallel to but intertwined with mass mobilisation. Indeed, as Iglesias (2015b, p. 19) points out, ‘the March for Change signalled a determination to end the disassociation between mass mobilizations and electoral politics’.

In addition to that, Podemos stood out for its ‘careful and intensive use of media’ (Agustín & Briziarelli, 2018, p. 7), in particular of its leader Iglesias, who became a regular presence on Spanish television after the start of the crisis. Back in 2010 Iglesias and other future founders of Podemos started producing for Tele-K, a neighbourhood TV channel from Madrid, a round-table talk show on political issues called *La Tuerka*, which later became an ‘essential viewing’ (Tremlett, 2015) for the more politically active layers of the *Indignados* movement. That was followed, in early 2013, by a similar show called *Fort Apache*, hosted by HispanTV, the Spanish-language television service run by the Iranian state. The channelling of

the party's political communication via television is explained by Iglesias' (2015b, p. 16) belief that 'in Spain TV talk shows are probably the major producers of arguments explicitly for popular use'. Indeed, the party went as far as putting the candidate's face on the ballot paper for elections (unprecedented in Spanish politics), for 'the TV nation, so to speak, didn't know about a new political party called Podemos, but they knew about the guy with the pony-tail' (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 17).

This multilateral strategy notwithstanding, electoral politics quickly became the main priority (Kouki & González, 2018), as reflected by the political document passed with over 86% at the party's first congress in the autumn of 2014. Issued by the grouping gathered at the time around Iglesias and Errejón, *Claro que Podemos* [Of course We Can], the document announced that the phase of social mobilisation would make way for a new, institutional phase (Stobart, 2016, p. 183). Indeed, the aforementioned March for Change from January 2015 was actually the only protest that the party intensely mobilised for in the run up to the general elections that took place that December (Stobart, 2016, p. 175).

This shift in the party's strategy not only echoes those of SYRIZA and Bloco but is particularly characteristic of the left-populist approach adopted by the leadership, which arguably assigns social mobilisation with merely a 'supporting role' (Stobart, 2016, p. 179). Indeed, Podemos' leadership admits having been inspired by the Latin American left-populist regimes of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 14), for whom both Iglesias and Errejón worked as consultants throughout the 2000s. At a more theoretical level, Podemos' populist strategy has been shaped by the theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 14). For them, the fragmented nature of contemporary capitalism means that a class-based socialist project has become implausible and that a new left would have to be built around charismatic leaders capable of embodying the common causes of 'the people' against 'the elites' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Iglesias (2015b, p. 22) tried to justify the shift away from social mobilisation by arguing that 'institutional empowerment will offer us safeguards and give us vital experience'. Indeed, Errejón, seen as the main architect of the party's institutional approach, stated that Podemos' main task is to 'build a political majority to win elections and conquer the institutions' (López de Miguel, 2014). At the same time, Iglesias acknowledged the risk entailed by that: 'it could also mean we lose our "outsider" advantage' (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 22).

However, following the two general elections in December 2015 and June 2016, when Podemos became the third biggest party but still failed to overtake PSOE, Iglesias signalled a relative and gradual return to social mobilisation in the party's strategy (Stobart, 2016, pp. 187-

188). At the second party congress in February 2017, Iglesias clashed with Errejón on what the future strategy of the party should be focusing on. While the latter favoured a continuous emphasis on parliamentary activity and, indeed, an alliance with PSOE rather than IU, Iglesias argued that Podemos needed to return to its original position and reclaim the streets (*Izquierda Revolucionaria*, 2017), and that the party's MPs should see themselves as activists rather than mere politicians (*The Economist*, 2017). Iglesias won the leadership elections by a long margin, but the party's re-orientation towards popular mobilisation has been mostly rhetorical so far, with no major mass demonstrations led by Podemos ever since.

Organisation and linkages

It has been noted that it is important to study party organisation because, among other things, it helps us to better understand how parties establish links with social groups and other organisations (Katz & Mair, 1995; Panebianco, 1988). It is therefore relevant to the aims of this thesis to discuss the party organisation of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. This section presents their structure and organisational model, their auxiliary organisations of the three parties. As pointed out earlier, such linkages are particularly important for left parties who try to compensate for their lack of institutional resources and relative political marginality by building strong ties with sections of the civil society (Lisi, 2013). Finally, the section introduces the parties' formal international affiliations, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

SYRIZA

According to its statute, SYRIZA is structured on three levels: individual members, territorial branches and national congress. The congress, which convenes every three years, is 'the supreme body of the party' (SYRIZA, 2013, p. 12), as it votes on the programmatic and strategic course of the party. It also elects the Central Committee, which is the highest political body of the party and is responsible for implementing the decisions taken at the congress. The Central Committee also coordinates various thematic departments, including an International Relations and Peace Affairs Department.

Founded initially as a coalition of many groups of various left-wing orientations, SYRIZA had a confederated character before becoming a unified party in 2013. This entailed a

‘loose organizational structure’ that was ‘very far from most versions of the mass Leninist-inspired party model’, as favoured by most of its thirteen constituent groups (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 111). Such a structure accommodated the ideological diversity of those groups and, indeed, created ‘a culture of tolerance among the previously competing left traditions’ (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 108).

However, the pluralist character of SYRIZA came with certain downsides, as the many different voices within the organisation affected the party’s cohesion (Moschonas, 2013, p. 35). Although SYRIZA became more homogenous after turning into a unitary party, it still allowed the existence of internal tendencies, which has led sometimes to ‘a confusing polyphony’ (Douzinas, 2017, p. 42). However, the 2015 split of the more radical elements from the party, most of whom went on to establish the Popular Unity party, arguably rendered SYRIZA as a more homogenous party than before, particularly over the question of the EU.

At the same time, SYRIZA claimed to be a more democratic and inclusive party than the traditional organisations of the radical left, a claim inherited from SYN, who had always tried to portray itself as a ‘party of its members’ (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 10). Indeed, SYRIZA’s statute emphasises that its members represent the social foundation of the party (SYRIZA, 2013, p. 8). However, the cooperation of SYRIZA’s constituent groups remained limited at the level of their leaderships, with no genuine integration of the local branches (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 11). The pre-eminence of the leadership was also reflected in the increased emphasis, after 2012, on the personality of the leader, Alexis Tsipras (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 14).

Indeed, SYRIZA is said to have become increasingly top-down and centralized since 2013, a process that only enhanced after 2015 electoral victory (Kouvelakis, 2016, p. 21). According to Stathis Kouvelakis, a former member of the SYRIZA’s Central Committee and of the Left Platform (now in Popular Unity), ‘the high circles of the government and the key centers of political decision making acquired absolute autonomy from the party’ (Kouvelakis, 2016, p. 22). Indeed, around the time of signing the deal with the Troika, the party’s leadership was accused by critics from the left of the ‘evasion of internal democratic procedures’ (Panayiotakis, 2015, p. 42). However, interestingly enough, such a development was not completely unprecedented, as SYN had been similarly detached from its membership back in 1989 when it participated in the short-lived Tzannetakis government (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 4).

In terms of linkages, SYRIZA’s relatively weak presence and influence in the labour movement (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013), was coupled with the suspicion shared by many of

SYRIZA's, and before it SYN's, younger activists towards trade unions, which they perceived as 'too bureaucratic and dominated by mainstream political forces' (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 11). Nonetheless, SYRIZA tried to overcome this disadvantage by setting up in 2007 the SYRIZA Network of Trade Unionists, which was meant to coordinate the party members who were active in trade unions but also to attract new people to its ranks, particularly from the newer unions. While that initiative has not managed to considerably strengthen SYRIZA's influence over the labour movement, it did succeed in attracting trade unionists disillusioned with PASOK or KKE (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 15). However, since coming into government and implementing further austerity measures, SYRIZA's relation to the labour movement is arguably weaker than ever when not openly confrontational, particularly following the government's plan to limit the right to industrial action (Smith, 2018).

Its relatively weak position in the trade union movement only reinforced SYRIZA's attempt to appeal to the youth, hence the significant role played by its youth organisation. While following the general political line of the party, Youth of SYRIZA (YoS) 'maintains complete organizational autonomy from the party' and 'is responsible for the development of its policy in relation to youth problems' (SYRIZA, 2013). Most importantly, YoS has a strong internationalist outlook, just like its predecessor, SYN's youth organisation (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 11). They believe that transnational cooperation of left-wing youth organisations is a key element of the struggle for 'a new Europe on a completely different basis' (Youth of SYRIZA, 2016).

As a party that also targets what it calls 'the progressive intelligentsia' (SYRIZA, 2013, p. 1), SYRIZA has its own political foundation, the Nicos Poulantzas Institute (NPI). Established in 1997 as the political foundation of SYN, NPI's declared aims are to provide theoretical and ideological support to the programme of 'the renewed, radical and ecological Left' and to assist the political education of SYRIZA's cadres (Nicos Poulantzas Institute, 2018). Most importantly, NPI seeks to be linked to the 'polymorphous social movements in many countries and the accompanying new forms of internationalism' and be part of the 'the dialogue that is unfolding all over the world' (Nicos Poulantzas Institute, 2018). As shown in Chapter 3, NPI plays a role in the party's transnational networking and cooperation with the other two.

Finally, in terms of international linkages, SYRIZA (2015a) describes itself as a 'very active' and 'influential' member of both GUE/NGL and the PEL – the two main transnational organisations of LPs in the EU today. At the same time, SYRIZA's MEPs play a key part in the Progressive Caucus in the EP, established in 2017 together with social democratic and Green

MEPs with the aim ‘to strengthen progressive voices in the European Parliament’ (Progressive Caucus, 2018), as discussed in Chapter 4.

Bloco

The organisational structure of Bloco is highly stratified. The party is divided in nuclei (composed of at least five members), local coordinating committees, local assemblies, regional coordinating committees, regional assemblies, a political committee, a national committee, and the national convention (Bloco, 2016a). The latter is the highest body of the party, meeting biennially to vote for the political platform that will guide the party’s programme and strategy for the following two years. Any group of at least twenty party members has the right to put forward a platform up for discussion and voting.

Each platform also proposes a slate for the National Committee, whose composition (roughly 80 members) reflects the votes scored by each platform. Thus, Bloco’s leadership is described as ‘shared hegemony’ (Esquerda.net, 2015). The national board then elects the Political Committee (between 15 and 20 members), which takes the major political decisions in between the national conventions and thus represents the executive body of the party. The coordinator of the Political Committee, currently Catarina Martins, is considered the party’s leader (Esquerda.net, 2016).

Initially though, Bloco adopted a looser internal structure, so that the three main founding organisations were able to maintain their ideological traditions, while allowing other individuals to join the new party without attaching themselves to any of those groups. Thus, Bloco explicitly defined itself as a ‘pluralist organization’ (Esquerda.net, 2015). Also, according to its statute, Bloco (2016a) ‘defends and promotes a civic culture of democratic political participation and action’. Thus, Bloco aimed to foster strong links between the party’s leadership and its rank-and-file, which would allow for a decentralised, bottom-up decision-making process (Lisi, 2013, p. 25).

However, the life of the party has been characterised by ‘factionalism’ (Lisi, 2013, p. 26), with the founding groups much better represented in the internal structures of power than those who joined Bloco on an individual basis. According to Lisi, this factionalism ‘was an important factor that demobilised members and limited both leadership and programmatic renovation’ (Lisi, 2013, p. 26). Indeed, despite the party’s formal commitment to pluralism, in 2017 the National Committee expelled six members belonging to an emerging, more militant,

tendency in the party, gathered around the Trotskyist group Revolutionary Socialism, on the basis that the latter had ‘infiltrated’ the party (Inverno, 2017).

Indeed, the relation between the leadership and the rank-and-file became increasingly vertical and the decision-making process gradually more centralised, particularly following the good electoral result in 2005. It was then that the new party statute was adopted, which saw the creation of the powerful political committee and of the position of coordinator. That strengthened the leadership’s control of the party and further contributed to the disillusionment of its rank-and-file members (Lisi, 2013, p. 25).

In contrast to the PCP, Bloco had from the start a relatively poor presence in the labour movement, particularly in CGTP, the main trade union confederation (Lisi, 2013, pp. 30-32). While the party has managed over the last few years to attract young activists from campaigns against precarious work, they are mostly non-unionised, so this has not changed the fact that Bloco’s ‘political influence within the trade unions is negligible’ (Príncipe, 2016, p. 167). Hence, Bloco cultivated strong links with other sections of the civil society, particularly social movements, student associations and NGOs (Lisi, 2013, p. 27). Indeed, the political committee includes a position designed to specifically handle the party’s relations with social movements, although those movements have no formal channels to influence the party’s programme and strategy (Lisi, 2013, pp. 28-29).

To strengthen its links to the youth, Bloco has a youth organisation called the Youth of Bloco (YoB). It describes itself as an anti-capitalist political organisation that wants to avoid the past ‘sectarianism’ of similar organisations (Youth of Bloco, 2007). By encouraging its members to intervene in their schools, universities, workplaces, and local community groups, YoB aims to act as a catalyst for social movements (Youth of Bloco, 2015a). Special attention is given to student work, which is why in 2010 YoB established a separate organisation dedicated to that, called Young Students of Bloco. YoB’s openness towards cooperation is also reflected at an international level, where YoB is an active member, together with YoS, of the Youths of the European Left network (Youth of Bloco, 2017). At the same time, as of 2016, Bloco has an organisational structure for pensioners and other people over 60 called Group +60.

Also, similarly to SYRIZA, Bloco has strong ties with the academic world. Data from the 2011 party convention showed that a third of the members of the National Board are teachers or university professors (Lisi, 2013, p. 31). However, unlike SYRIZA, Bloco does not have an official political foundation, but it has developed a strong relation of cooperation with the Cultural Cooperative of Labour and Socialism (CUL:TRA). The latter is part of the same

Transform! Europe network, although it has less ambitious goals than NPI and mostly limits itself to the production of ‘research, training and publications in the fields of history, political science, economy, sociology and cultural issues related to the working classes’ (Transform, n.d.*b*).

Finally, Bloco is internationally affiliated to GUE/NGL and the PEL, just like SYRIZA. As of 2016, the party is also involved, alongside Podemos and other LPs, in the Plan B initiative, which aims to offer ‘an alternative political program to break up with these [EU] treaties favour of an area of peace, democratic cooperation and solidarity’ (Esquerda.net, 2017). In 2018, Bloco and the other participants in Plan B launched the similarly Eurosceptic movement ‘Now, the people!’, as discussed in Chapter 4. Last but not least, while the main Trotskyist tendency inside Bloco dissolved itself in 2013 in a new, broader current, it still maintains links to the Trotskyist international USFI, which will be shown later to have some influence over Bloco’s relations with Podemos.

Podemos

For a party with roots in a social movement that advocated ‘horizontality’ (Fominaya, 2015), Podemos has a rather hierarchical structure. At the base, the party is made up of branches called ‘Circles’, which can be either territorial (covering a certain geographical area) or sectorial (covering a certain thematic or professional area). There are Circles all across the Spanish state as well as abroad, in several Latin American and European countries (but not Greece or Portugal though). Anybody can start a Circle, even non-party members, as long as they respect the documents approved by the Citizens’ Assembly (Podemos, 2018*a*).

The Citizens’ Assembly is the party’s national congress, which takes place every two years to vote on the programmatic and strategic direction of the party. It also elects the 62 members of the Citizens’ Council, which constitutes the party’s executive body and whose key function is to implement the decisions from the congress. The Council’s main body, which deals with the party’s day-to-day affairs, is the Coordination Council. Both councils are led by the general secretary, position occupied by Pablo Iglesias since the party’s creation in 2014. The Citizens’ Council also includes thematic departments, representatives of the circles, regional general secretaries, and the Commission of Democratic Safeguards, which ensures that members’ rights and internal regulations are complied with (Podemos, 2018*b*).

The congresses are broadly similarly to Bloco’s, with different tendencies within the party putting forward a programme and a slate for the Citizens’ Council. At the first party

congress in the autumn of 2014, the winning tendency was *Claro que Podemos* [Of course we can], led by Iglesias. Despite Iglesias' (2015a, p. 18) claim that 'from the start we wagered on processes that would allow popular participation in the most important decisions', his platform adopted a decision-making process that would only take place online and not in a collective and deliberative way, rejecting the idea of mandatory regular assemblies. That attracted criticism from several party figures, including two MEPs, and alienated some of the party's rank-and-file, as reflected in the declining numbers of participants in subsequent votes, from 120,000 during the congress to 53,000 during the primaries for the 2015 general elections (Stobart, 2016, p. 182). Arguably, roughly one year since its creation, Podemos was already becoming a 'top-down party with a monolithic central leadership' that would 'announce major changes without prior discussion' (Stobart, 2016, p. 182).

In reaction to such accusations, the document resulting from the second congress in 2017 emphasises the importance of a de-centralised, transparent and democratic decision-making process: 'a big step in the direction of political decentralisation is one of the key objectives of the new phase of Podemos' (Podemos, 2017, p. 37). In that respect, the active participation of rank-and-file members is strongly encouraged, as well as the transfer of competencies and resources to regional and local branches (Podemos, 2017, pp. 35-38). Indeed, the party aims to become a mass party of 100,000 militants and 1 million members, seen as 'the only way we can progress' (Podemos, 2017, p. 36). At the same time, the party aims to avoid the internal divisions from the past (see Stobart, 2016, pp. 181-182) by opening up the debate within the Circles, fostering a culture of comradeship and not spilling the differences outside the party structures.

Given the strong influence exerted by PCE and PSOE over the trade union movement and how new Podemos is, the party has even weaker links to the trade unions than SYRIZA and Bloco. Instead, the party has links with several youth movements, including *Juventud Sin Futuro* [Youth Without a Future], which played a key role in the emergence of the Indignados movement back in 2011. Indeed, as of 2016, Podemos has its own official youth wing, *Marea Joven* [Young Tide], which aims to 'build a project for those who have been stripped of the ability to live a decent life' (Riveiro, 2016), in a country where unemployment for people under 25 is still close to 40%, second only to Greece in the EU (White & Rodríguez, 2017). However, the youth organisation is not as developed as those of SYRIZA and Bloco, being mostly concentrated around Madrid (Riveiro, 2016) and without any visible links to youth organisations in other countries.

Podemos also has a political institute, called the 25M Institute for Democracy (25MI), whose goal is rather broad – ‘political and cultural analysis and formation’ (*Instituto 25M Democracia*, 2018). Its main activities are organising the party’s summer school and editing a book series on current political affairs, *Argumenta*. The institute is not a member of the Transform network, but only an observer, which is largely due to Podemos itself not being a member of the PEL, where Spain is represented by the PCE and its front organisation IU.

At a transnational level, Podemos’ five MEPs are part of GUE/NGL. The other pan-European projects that Podemos is involved in are the aforementioned Plan B and ‘Now, the people!’ movement, where the MEP Miguel Urbán is particularly active. Indeed, Urbán’s grouping within Podemos, *Anticapitalistas*, belongs to the same Trotskyist international organisation, USFI, as some of the prominent Trotskyist elements within Bloco.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comparative discussion of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos to set the ground for the discussion of their transnational networking and cooperation in the core chapters of the thesis. Each section discussed, in turn, the origins, programme, strategy and organisation of each party. These four categories have been chosen because they tend to be the standard analytical comparators in the literature on political parties but also because of the thesis’ assumption that the parties’ similarities and differences relative to these four categories are particularly relevant for the assessment of their cooperation.

In terms of origins, all three parties came about as new left alternatives to both a hegemonic but increasingly neoliberal social democratic party and a communist party deeply rooted in the labour movement but unable to recover from the fall of the Eastern Bloc and capitalise on social democracy’s shift to the right. In other words, their emergence came in reaction to a gap on the left in their countries, in between a left that was not left anymore and a radical left that was not relevant anymore.

While being seen or even calling themselves ‘radical left’, the three parties adopted early on a rather social democratic agenda in defence of the welfare state and social rights, with limited elements of anti-capitalism, which was coupled with a focus on New Left issues. If anything, their programme has de-radicalised over time, albeit not in a linear manner, as the parties became more electorally successful. Indeed, since implementing neoliberal policies

from a position of government, it is even questionable whether SYRIZA can still be seen as a left party, which points to the key difference between this and the other two parties – governmental experience, which will prove to be significant in the dynamics of the parties’ transnational networking and cooperation.

That process of de-radicalisation was also reflected at the level of strategy. All three parties started with a strong orientation towards social movements and popular mobilisation, partly explained by the parties’ weak links to the trade unions but also by the role of movements in the parties’ formation, particularly in the case of Podemos. However, all three parties gradually shifted towards a strategy focused on electoral and parliamentary politics. While that shift took place against the background of a relative decrease in spontaneous popular mobilisation, it confirms Tsakatika and Lisi (2013, p. 8) when saying that ‘when radical left parties pursue office, they tend to de-emphasise linkage’. Perhaps the reorientation towards an office-seeking approach also explains why SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, which nominally cherish internal pluralism and democracy, have become increasingly top-down and centralised over the years, drawing the criticism and disillusionment of their rank-and-file members.

The most significant and relevant difference among the three parties is with regard to transnational linkages. While all three parties belong to the GUE/NGL in the EP, only SYRIZA and Bloco are members of the Euro-party, the PEL. Also, only their political institutes are members of Transform, whereas Podemos’ 25MI is only an observer. On the other hand, Bloco and Podemos are linked via the Plan B and ‘Now, the people!’ initiatives, which SYRIZA is not involved in, as well as, to a lesser extent, via the USFI Trotskyist international. In contrast, SYRIZA’s MEPs have initiated the Progressive Caucus together with several social democratic and Green MEPs, but without the involvement of any MEPs from either Bloco or Podemos, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In sum, it has been shown that SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos share enough subjective similarities to warrant the assumption that they would seek to engage in transnational networking and cooperation with each other. The following chapter aims to show that, particularly since the start of the Eurozone crisis in late 2009 and the austerity-centred management of that crisis, these parties have also shared sufficient objective, or context-related, similarities for their transnational networking and cooperation to enhance. Thus, Chapter 2 deals with the European and national contexts of SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos since the start of the crisis and the developments of the three parties in those contexts, with an emphasis on how the parties reacted to the crisis both programmatically and strategically.

Chapter 2

The Eurozone crisis: National contexts and party developments

This chapter analyses the evolution of the European and national contexts of Greece, Portugal and Spain since the start of the Eurozone crisis in late 2009 and the developments of the three parties in those contexts. The first section provides a brief outline of the Eurozone crisis and its austerity-centred management, understood by the European left as manifestations of the neoliberal paradigm that all three parties staunchly oppose. Of course, given the space limits, this outline will not do justice to the high complexity of the Eurozone crisis. It rather aims to sketch the broad perspective that much of the European left, including the three parties studied here, shares with respect to this crisis and its causes.

The following sections discuss in turn each national context and the respective party since the start of the crisis, particularly focusing on how the parties reacted to the crisis both programmatically and strategically. Thus, the second section deals with the post-2009 economic, social and political context of Greece and with SYRIZA's developments in that context, the third section discusses Portugal and Bloco, while the fourth section deals with Spain and Podemos. There is more space allocated to SYRIZA as it is the only of the three parties with governmental experience. The conclusion sums up the key similarities and differences between the parties' post-2009 domestic contexts and developments.

Neoliberalism, the Eurozone crisis and the 'austerity consensus'

Both the Eurozone crisis and the broader 2007-2008 financial crisis which preceded it have been largely interpreted as crises of neoliberalism, not only by scholars of various orientations (see Flassbeck & Lapavistas, 2015; Panitch, Gindin & Aquanno, 2015; Palley, 2013; van Apeldoorn, De Graaff & Overbeek, 2012; Harvey, 2010; Stiglitz, 2010; Gamble,

2009; Turner, 2009) but also by the three parties studied here (see Iglesias, 2015a; Podemos, 2017; Tsipras, 2014; Bloco, 2010).

Despite its variegated manifestations and interpretations (Macartney, 2010), neoliberalism is commonly understood today to have emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as the intellectual revival of nineteenth-century economic liberalism and its fundamental belief in the primacy of the free market (see Hayek, 1990; Friedman, 1962). Navarro (2007, p. 48) identifies three core principles that stem from this belief: firstly, limited state interventionism in economic and social affairs; secondly, deregulation of labour and financial markets; thirdly, free movement of capital, labour, goods, and services. More specifically, neoliberal policies generally support privatization of public assets and services, low taxation of businesses and high-income earners, relative stagnation of real wages, flexible labour markets (including anti-trade union legislation), free trade and capital mobility, and a growing importance of the financial sector (see also Gamble, 2009, p. 86; Hermann, 2007, p. 62).

Following the mid-1970s crisis of the Keynesian paradigm that had prevailed in the aftermath of the Second World War, neoliberalism rose to political prominence in the Western world throughout the 1980s, first in the United States and Britain as well as within international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF (Panitch, Gindin & Aquanno, 2015, pp. 114-115). The fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and social democracy's turn to the right allowed neoliberalism to proliferate across the world and consolidate itself throughout the 1990s as the new consensus of our times (Harvey, 2010; Gamble, 2009; Navarro, 2007). At the level of the EU, that consensus prevailed through the establishment of the Single European Market and then the Economic and Monetary Union, which more or less directly promoted most of the policies outlined above (see Palley, 2013; Hermann, 2007; van Apeldoorn, 2001).

Coupled with the deregulation of financial markets, the aforementioned relative stagnation of real wages led to the emergence of a credit culture meant to fuel consumption and demand, but which also generated an ever-growing indebtedness of households and banks alike (Harvey, 2010, p. 17). This laid the basis for the collapse of the US subprime mortgage sector and housing market in 2007, which triggered one year later the implosion of the US banking system that had been heavily relying on mortgage-backed securities. In turn, that resulted in a world-wide economic decline that was largely seen as the most serious crisis of capitalism since the one triggered by the 1929 financial crash (Gamble, 2009, p. 5).

On the background of a high and complex integration between the US economy and that of the EU (see Panitch, Gindin & Aquanno, 2015, pp. 120-121), the Eurozone crisis, also referred to as the European sovereign debt crisis, started as a banking crisis in late 2009. It

amounted to several governments in the Eurozone bailing out banks that were most affected by the crisis of the American financial sector. In the case of countries like Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy, those bailouts substantially increased their public debts.

Lacking the means to finance that debt through either their central banks (given the transfer of monetary power to the ECB by joining the euro) or the ECB (given its political independence that prevents it from financing the debt of member states), these countries had to rely on the financial markets. However, the financial markets had become wary of these countries' capacity to pay back any further loans and therefore significantly increased interest rates while downgrading their credit ratings. Faced with the possibility of defaults that would undermine the stability of the entire Eurozone and particularly of the financial sector, the EU institutions advanced the solution of bailing out the countries themselves.

In May 2010, the Eurozone member states and the IMF agreed to grant Greece a €110 billion loan, which was followed by bailouts for Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus through the newly created European Financial Stability Facility (aimed at granting financial assistance to Eurozone member states and since 2012 incorporated in the European Stability Mechanism). In exchange for the bailouts, these countries were conditioned to implement austerity measures to reduce their public deficits, under the supervision of the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF – the so-called Troika. As Amini (2015, p. 17) defines it, austerity 'means reduction of wages and public spending, and raising taxes to reduce government deficit and hope that it will raise labour productivity and improve competitiveness' (see also Blyth, 2013, for an increasingly mainstream understanding of austerity among scholars).

The official rationale for austerity as a solution to the problem was that the problem lay exclusively with the indebted countries. According to this view, these countries had been 'fiscally irresponsible' and therefore the crisis was 'rooted in a failure of political will' (Hall, 2012, p. 357) on behalf of successive governments. Moreover, as Petry (2013) points out, this type of explanation was framed in a wider narrative perpetrated by political leaders, the media and high-profile commentators about Europe being divided between a 'hard-working and prudent North' and the 'lazy and irresponsible South' (see Greenspan 2011; Joffe, 2011). Indeed, that narrative was openly endorsed by the creditor institutions (Knight, 2013), such as the IMF, whose director Christine Lagarde stated that Southern Europe 'had a good time ... now it's payback time' (Aitkenhead, 2012). Along similar lines, the Prime Minister of Germany (the single largest contributor to the European Stability Mechanism), Angela Merkel, claimed that 'it is also about not being able to retire earlier in countries such as Greece, Spain,

Portugal than in Germany, instead everyone should try a little bit to make the same efforts' ("Merkel tells southern Europeans", 2011).

However, that narrative arguably helped obscure the deeper, interdependent roots of the Eurozone crisis that several economists and political scientists have pointed out over the last years (see Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015; Panitch, Gindin & Aquanno, 2015; Becker, 2014; Hall, 2012; Palley, 2013; Young & Semmler, 2011). Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the rise of neoliberalism entailed a break with the previous consensus that saw wages growing in line with productivity. The new policy of wage stagnation created a demand gap, which was temporarily filled by decreasing nominal interest rates that fuelled a credit-based consumption, which in turn led to, among other things, housing bubbles in countries like the US or Spain (Palley, 2013, p. 40).

Secondly, as of the late 1990s, the German economy became characterised by a policy of capping real wages in order to boost its exports. Indeed, a similar approach was also adopted in Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Belgium or Austria (Bellofiore, Garibaldo & Halevi, 2010). That boost in trade did occur, but at the expense of other Eurozone member states – not only those in the Southern periphery but also France and Italy – who did not adopt the same wage policy. Hence, the latter group of countries started to experience increasing trade and current account deficits and lose much of their international market share, also on the background of rising trade competition from economies in South-East Asia. As Flassbeck and Lapavitsas (2015, p. 25) put it, 'Germany has operated a policy of "beggar-thy-neighbour" but only after "beggaring its own people" by essentially freezing wages' – which indeed raises more fundamental questions about the possibility of a truly united Europe on the basis of capitalist economies inherently competing against each other.

Thirdly, by joining the Eurozone, member states voluntarily ceded their monetary powers that had previously allowed them to reduce current account deficits, such as currency devaluation or the printing of money. Furthermore, the very architecture of the ECB prevents it to help governments finance their budget deficits and manage the interest rates on their debt (Lanzavecchia & Pavarani, 2015; Palley, 2013). Palley (2013, pp. 42-43) captures this key issue quite aptly: 'The old national banking systems made European governments masters of the bond market. The euro's architecture makes bond markets master of national governments'. At the same time, it is important to note that governments in Mediterranean countries often deemed Eurozone membership not just as a matter of prestige and retaining influence in the EU, but also saw it as an opportunity to facilitate neoliberal policy adjustments that otherwise

would have been harder to implement against the opposition from trade unions and other political forces.

Fourthly, with growing deficits that surpassed the 3% limit of the GDP set by the Stability and Growth Pact, and lacking the monetary means to address them, Southern countries appealed to loans from banks in Northern, surplus economies. Thus, at the end of 2008, Eurozone countries excluding Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain held 67% of Spain's debt, 65% in the case of Portugal and 66% in the case of Greece (Lapavitsas et al., 2012, p. 82). Indeed, the aggregate exposure of German, French, Dutch and Belgian banks to the private and public debt of Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain amounted to more than 120% of those banks' equity (Leblond, 2012, p. 60). Even so, most of these countries reached significantly higher debt levels than other member states only after the start of the crisis, when they bailed out the banks by borrowing more money (Palley, 2013, pp. 41-42; Young & Semmler 2011, p. 17).

This counter-narrative of the crisis was endorsed by much of the European left, including SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, also receiving growing support among scholars (Amini, 2015, p. 14; Laskos & Tsakalotos, 2014, p. 78). Indeed, there is growing consensus that austerity policies have failed both economically (see Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015; Schui, 2014; Blyth, 2013; Semmler, 2013) and socially (see Knieling & Othengrafen, 2016; Matsaganis & Leventi, 2014; Matthijs, 2014; McKee et al., 2012). Even economists working for the IMF ended up acknowledging that 'The increase in inequality engendered by financial openness and austerity might itself undercut growth, the very thing that the neoliberal agenda is intent on boosting' (Ostry, Loungani & Furceri, 2016, p. 41).

At a political level, while austerity and the wider management of the crisis have been said to represent a reinforcement of the neoliberal paradigm (Parker & Pye, 2017; Worth, 2013; Marquand, 2010), it has also led to substantial electoral losses for the mainstream parties implementing it, particularly in the countries most affected by it, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal. Thus, over the past decade, these countries experienced a multiple crisis, economic, social and political, which opened up favourable opportunities for neo-reformist left parties with an anti-austerity agenda to increase their electoral support. The following sections discuss the developments experienced by SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos in their post-2009 national contexts.

Greece and SYRIZA since 2009

Greece's economic, social and political crises

Greece was the first country to be hit by the Eurozone crisis and also the first to receive a bailout from the Troika in May 2010. The deal, also known as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), stipulated that Greece would receive a €110 billion loan over a period of three years, with €80 billion coming from the other Eurozone member states and €30 billion from the IMF. In exchange, Greece agreed to bring down its public deficit from the 2009 level of 10.6% to less than 3% by 2014. A second MoU was signed in March 2012, which gave Greece an additional €110 billion for the period 2012-2014, with the new target of reaching a primary surplus of 4.5% of the GDP by 2016.

Those goals were to be achieved, under the close supervision of the Troika, through austerity measures, more exactly by reducing public expenditure for the period 2010-2012 and then by increasing taxes for the period 2013-2014. The two austerity packages were implemented first by the PASOK and after the 2012 elections by the government led by New Democracy in coalition with PASOK and – until 2013 – the Democratic Left (DIMAR). Those measures included slashing 150,000 jobs and 20% of the wages in the public sector, a reduction of 22% in the minimum wage, the privatisation of public assets and services worth of €20 billion, deregulation of the transport and energy sectors, and substantial cuts in healthcare, social services, pension plans and education (Toloudis, 2014, p. 40; Spourdalakis, 2013, pp. 105-106).

These policies did reduce the public deficit to 2.4% by 2011 and even reached a primary surplus of 0.4% in 2014 (OECD, 2015). On the other hand, the two bailouts led to an increase in the public debt from 130% of the GDP in 2009 to 177% in 2014. That was not only due to the new loans taken by Greece but also to the fall in GDP, which contracted by 22% after the implementation of the austerity measures (Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015, pp. 89-90). As a result, the Greeks lost on average up to 50% of their pre-2009 incomes (Douzinas, 2017, p. 180). Overall, as Tsatsanis and Teperoglou (2016, p. 2) put it, ‘even though other countries in the European periphery are still struggling to recover from the economic slump of the post-2008 period, none has experienced the economic devastation Greece has done during the same period and none maintains such bleak prospects for the future.’

The social impact of that economic decline and the austerity measures has been very significant. The unemployment rate increased from less than 10% in 2009 to around 27% in

2014, remaining at around 20% as of 2018 (Trading Economics, 2018). Youth unemployment scored even higher: almost 50% in 2015 and 43% as of 2017 (Eurostat, 2018). Small enterprises were particularly affected, 25% of them declaring bankruptcy by 2012. The number of people living in poverty rose by 50% (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 106) and the number of rough sleepers by 25% in the first two years of crisis (Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015, p. 111). Indeed, Greece experienced a demographic change, with 2015 being the first year when the number of deaths was higher than the number of births (Douzinas, 2017, p. 171).

Such developments were met with mass mobilisations, whose peak was reached between June 2011 and June 2012 (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 9). The trade unions organised no less than forty general strikes between 2010 and 2015. They were coupled with sectoral strikes and occupations of workplaces, some of which lasting for several months. According to Payiatsos (2017, p. 15), ‘in the autumn of 2011 there was hardly a governmental building in Athens that was not covered with huge banners saying “under occupation”’.

Several social movements also emerged, with the most prominent of them being the *Aganaktismeni* [‘Indignant’] movement, which started in the central square of Athens in May 2011, having been inspired by the *Indignados* movement from Spain (Tsaliki, 2012). It protested against the austerity measures taken under the first MoU signed by the government but also against the two mainstream political parties, PASOK and New Democracy, seen as responsible for the country’s dire socio-economic situation. The movement, which soon extended to other cities and towns across the country, occupied the square up until September that year.

The spring of 2011 also saw the beginning of the mass campaign of civil disobedience called *Den Plirono* [‘Won’t pay’], composed of ordinary citizens refusing to pay for road tolls, bus tickets or the €5 fees for doctors’ consultations introduced as part of the austerity measures. The campaign spread across the country and received support from more than half of the population and from most left-wing parties. Similar to the *Aganaktismeni* movement, *Den Plirono* was targeted against both the harsh economic conditions and the political establishment (Chrisafis, 2011).

Indeed, the anti-establishment mood grew stronger and stronger, to the extent that by late 2011 Greece was in a ‘full-scale political crisis’ (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 13). The PASOK government was facing increasing opposition within the Parliament over the measures of the first MoU, which had divided the political landscape and even the party itself across pro-MoU vs anti-MoU lines (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 17). This eventually led the PASOK Prime Minister George Papandreou to resign in November 2011.

The snap elections that took place in May 2012 showed the scale of the legitimacy crisis faced by the Greek biparty system – once one of the most stable in Europe – that had ruled the country since its return to democracy in 1974 (Moschonas, 2013, p. 33). The aggregate vote scored by PASOK and New Democracy fell from 77.4% in 2009 (which had been itself a post-1981 low) to 32.1% in May 2012. Given that no party was able to form a government, a new round of elections was held the following month, when the two mainstream parties together scored 42% of the votes, which compelled them to form, for the first time ever, a coalition government. Nevertheless, the verdict of the dual elections was clear: Greece’s post-1974 two-party system had just collapsed (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 13).

That political development opened up significant opportunities for marginal, anti-establishment parties such as SYRIZA and KKE on the left and the Independent Greeks (ANEL) and Golden Dawn on the right (Tsakatika, 2016). Indeed, the 2012 elections saw SYRIZA become the second party in the country and the main opposition party. Three years later, SYRIZA became the first left-of-social-democracy party to win general elections and form government in an EU member state, apart from AKEL in Cyprus. As Spourdalakis (2013, p. 107) puts it, ‘the social and political developments caused by the Memoranda proved especially conducive to SYRIZA’s rise, given its political background, orientation and strategy’. The following section explores SYRIZA’s evolution in that post-2009 social and political context.

SYRIZA in post-2009 Greece

The social and political impact of the economic crisis provided SYRIZA with a fertile ground to grow. According to Moschonas (2013, p. 36), ‘Without the shock of the economic crisis, SYRIZA’s meteoric rise would not have occurred’. The party opposed the austerity policies from the very beginning and called for their abolition as well as for an end to ‘bipartisanism’, which it saw as being, together with the Troika, responsible for Greece’s socio-economic crisis (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 9; Spourdalakis, 2013, pp. 111-112).

Sharing the counter-narrative of the Eurozone crisis outlined earlier, SYRIZA’s leader Alexis Tsipras (2013*b*) argued that ‘the strategy of European elites and the Greek government cannot provide a viable prospect of exit from the crisis. The only thing that austerity has accomplished is to plunge Europe into economic depression and to throw Greece in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.’ But, according to him and his party, austerity was not simply an uninspired economic solution to the crisis but a conscious political choice: ‘The

neoliberal European establishment, Ms Merkel and her political allies have taken advantage of the crisis in order to rewrite Europe's post-war political economy, and to impose the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal capitalism.' (Tsipras, 2014)

While the other significant left party in Greece, the KKE, displayed a similar anti-austerity and anti-establishment discourse, it failed to electorally capitalise on that favourable context as much as SYRIZA. That was mainly due to SYRIZA's – and SYN's up until 2012 – pluralist organisation and very successful strategy of linking up with and drawing on the support of the anti-austerity social movements and campaigns (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013). By contrast, in a manner characteristic of orthodox communist parties, the KKE initially dismissed those movements, which in turn triggered the latter's hostility towards this party (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 107; Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 15).

According to Spourdalakis (2013, pp. 109-111), SYRIZA, and in particular its main component SYN, actively participated in the movements by respecting their own dynamics and without trying to take them over. Its active involvement included participation in the panel discussions organised in the squares (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, 2013, p. 15) as well as giving political, technical and legal support when the protesters were met with violence by the police and other state institutions. Furthermore, SYRIZA offered financial and logistical support to *Solidarity 4 All* (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 9), an NGO aiming to connect and support the numerous initiatives of social solidarity that developed in reaction to the social impact of austerity, from networks distributing food and clothes to groups providing free healthcare and education (see *Solidarity 4 All*, 2013).

At the same time, the few SYRIZA MPs acted as the only mouthpieces in the Parliament for the movements' social demands. More than that, SYRIZA started to articulate its own programme around those demands, a programme that thus became 'the linchpin between the active and militant presence of Syriza within and outside the public institutions and its claim to governmental power' (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 110). In other words, SYRIZA managed to establish itself as the political arm of the anti-austerity movements and campaigns (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013).

In the run-up to the 2012 early elections, while building popular mobilisation in its support through open rallies in all major cities (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 111), SYRIZA asserted its commitment to govern the country, which for Tsakatika (2016, pp. 11-12) constituted one of the key factors in the growth of the party's electoral appeal. As part of that approach, SYRIZA aimed to persuade the public of its competence to form a 'government of the Left' by attracting economists in key positions, whose 'technical knowledge was meant to inspire confidence

among the voters of the left as well as among the citizens who switched their vote to SYRIZA' (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 12).

In both May and June elections, SYRIZA finished second, with 16.8% and 26.9% of the votes respectively, compared to only 4.6% in 2009, a few months before the crisis started. The significant difference between the results from May and June was mainly explained by its refusal to join a New Democracy government (Tsakatika, 2016, p. 6) as well as by the sectarian attitude of the other two anti-establishment left-wing parties, KKE and DIMAR, who refused any possible collaboration with SYRIZA (Spourdalakis, 2013, p. 113).

That breakthrough was consolidated in the 2014 European elections, when SYRIZA gained 26.6% of the votes to become the first party other than PASOK or New Democracy to win a nationwide election in the post-1974 period. In parallel though, SYRIZA's strategy was gradually moving away from popular mobilisation and engagement with social movements towards institutional and parliamentary politics. According to Tsakatika (2016, p. 9), that happened on the background of a wider decrease in the level of spontaneous social mobilisation. Participants in the previous movements and campaigns had now become SYRIZA supporters and were waiting for the party to get into power and implement the anti-austerity demands (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016).

That waiting ended in January 2015, when SYRIZA won the snap general elections with 36.3% of the votes, in a victory that triggered jubilation among the anti-austerity left forces across Europe and apprehension among domestic and European political elites (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016, p. 6). Being short by two seats to secure a parliamentary majority and facing continuous hostility from the KKE, SYRIZA formed a government coalition with the right-wing party ANEL, who shared SYRIZA's opposition to austerity and the Troika. While this marriage of convenience, which is still in place four years later, reveals a potential convergence between the anti-establishment populism of the left and that of the right, it was primarily motivated by SYRIZA's lack of options in forming a government – a case of political pragmatism prevailing over ideological coherence, arguably a key feature of the newer LPs in Europe today (Keith, 2010).

SYRIZA won those elections with its least radical manifesto ever, the so-called Thessaloniki Programme. Domestically, it promised to break with the austerity policies by 'gradually restoring salaries and pensions' and 'rebuilding the welfare state' (SYRIZA, 2014). Growth would be promoted through public investment, incentives for small and medium enterprises and energy subsidies to the industry. Internationally, SYRIZA would engage in negotiations for a write-off of most of the public debt and an extension of the period for paying

the remaining part of it, the ability to run a balanced budget rather than having to produce a primary surplus, quantitative easing provided by the ECB and, at a broader scale, a ‘European New Deal’ of public investment funded by the European Investment Bank (SYRIZA, 2014).

At the same time, the possibility of an exit from the Eurozone was utterly excluded, despite being advocated as a backup plan by the members of the Left Platform (SYRIZA’s radical current at the time) and despite SYRIZA’s overall critical view of the ‘the current neoliberal and undemocratic Europe of fear and Memoranda’ (Tsipras, 2014). Thus, the former slogan of ‘No sacrifice to the euro’ from the 2012 electoral campaign was dropped (Kouvelakis, 2016, p. 20). That is largely explained by SYRIZA’s commitment to European integration, which stems from its fundamental view, echoing the party’s Eurocommunist roots, that the long-term struggle for socialism can only take place in a pan-European, international framework (SYRIZA, 2013). According to Nikolakakis (2016, p. 10), ‘the party’s left Europeanism is a direct by-product of ... the party’s negation of Stalin’s version of “socialism in one country”.’

However, SYRIZA’s hope to convince the Troika meet its demands while reasserting its intent to remain in the Eurozone regardless of Troika’s response to those demands soon proved rather misplaced. After several months of negotiations and despite channelling most public funds towards the repayment of the debt in order to prove its good faith (Payiatsos, 2017, p. 19), the SYRIZA-led government obtained no concession from the Troika. Instead, in late June the latter made an offer that broadly reasserted the existing provisions of the two MoUs. The SYRIZA government declined it and announced a referendum over it, to which the ECB reacted by stopping the flow of liquidity to the Greek banks. That compelled the government to impose capital controls in order to prevent a full-scale bank run that would have likely paralysed the economy, while refusing to pay a scheduled €1.6 billion instalment of the loan to the IMF (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016, p. 8). In that context, the referendum took place on 5 July, with 61.3% of the voters endorsing the government’s position and rejecting the Troika’s offer.

However, in a dramatic U-turn, on 13 July the SYRIZA government signed a deal with the Troika that entailed harsher conditions than the ones rejected in the referendum in exchange for a third bailout for Greece of €86 billion and ‘a vague promise to revisit the topic of debt restructuring in the future’ (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016, p. 12). By agreeing to this third MoU, the SYRIZA government accepted to not only abandon its electoral promise to reverse the austerity measures taken by previous governments but implement further austerity measures, including widening the tax base, reforming the pension system and cutting more

public spending in order to achieve a primary surplus. In addition, the Greek government pledged to privatise €50 billion worth of public assets under the direct supervision of the Troika, which would also have to approve any economic policy intended by the government (Douzinas, 2017, p. 49).

As Tsatsanis and Teperoglou (2016, p. 11) put it, ‘the exact decision-making process that led to the Greek government’s spectacular U-turn a few days after its resounding political victory in the referendum will probably never be fully ascertained’. Nevertheless, a prevailing, albeit speculative, explanation has been that the Tsipras government had come to realise before the referendum that, given its firm commitment to stay in the Eurozone, it would have to give in to Troika’s conditions. Tsipras thought that in a referendum the population – 76% of which wanted the country to stay in the Eurozone according to most polls (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016, p. 9) – would back the Troika’s offer, thus giving the government the legitimacy to accept it and break with its own electoral promises (see Payiatsos, 2017; Varoufakis, 2017; Tsebelis, 2015).

SYRIZA’s Left Platform opposed the deal and its MPs voted against it in the Parliament. They argued that there was an alternative to that U-turn and it would have amounted to an exit from the Eurozone and the introduction of a national currency (whose initial devaluation would have likely boosted exports), a democratic audit of the public debt resulting in a significant write-off, the introduction of quantitative easing to fund public services, infrastructure and job creation, debt relief for SMEs and households, nationalisation of banks under democratic control and a comprehensive development policy to rejuvenate the country’s industry (see Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015, pp. 95-115; see also Payiatsos, 2017, pp. 20-21, for the sketch of a more radical alternative).

While Tsipras secured the Parliament’s approval of the deal with the help of MPs from PASOK and New Democracy, 25 SYRIZA MPs opposed it. Hence, he dissolved the Parliament and announced new elections for September. Arguing that the deal with the Troika was not a genuine choice but the only way to avoid ‘national suicide’ and also warning against the return to power of the political forces that ‘brought the country to its knees, and brought the memoranda’ (Tsipras, 2015*b*), SYRIZA won with 35.5% of the votes and formed a new government with ANEL. The Left Platform and other radical elements from SYRIZA split to form the new party Popular Unity, which gained only 2.9%, however, and thus fell short of the 3% threshold for parliamentary representation. Following that split, SYRIZA now only allows the formation of internal so-called tendencies but not organised factions (Douzinas, 2017, p. 42).

Since these last elections, the SYRIZA government has implemented the measures stipulated by the third MoU, which triggered a general strike in early 2016 and even attacks on the party's offices and public events (Douzinas, 2017, p. 70). Those measures included the reduction of the tax threshold from €700 to around €400 a month, cuts to pensions above €700 per month, increased indirect taxation on certain goods, and the partial or complete privatisation of fourteen regional airports and the Port of Piraeus (Payiatsos, 2017, pp. 10-11; Sotiris, 2016, pp. 10-11).

At the same time, the government implemented several measures aimed at easing the social impact of austerity, such as providing food vouchers, subsidies for rent and free electricity to three hundred thousand families, free health care to two million uninsured people, free meals for school children, and banning the seizure of family homes for non-serviced loans (Douzinas, 2017, p. 49). Furthermore, the government granted citizenship to immigrants, legalised civil union for same-sex couples and decriminalised conscientious objectors and draft evaders (Douzinas, 2017, p. 76).

In August 2018, the country officially terminated its eight-year bailout programme, although the Troika will maintain its supervision to ensure that the target of a 2.2% primary surplus by 2022 will be met (Brunsdon & Khan, 2018). In the meantime, unemployment remains at 20%, with 43% unemployment among the youth (Henley, Boffey & Smith, 2018). Finally, in January 2019, the Greek Parliament adopted by vote an agreement over the long-standing dispute regarding the official name of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, recognised from now on as the Republic of Northern Macedonia – a diplomatic success that Tsipras has tried to capitalise on in the perspective of the general elections later this year (BBC News, 2019).

Coming back to the key questions of this thesis, the 'painful compromise' (Tsipras, 2015a) that the Tsipras government made in the summer of 2015 reinforced SYRIZA's belief that the Troika cannot be kept in check or defeated politically by one country alone. Hence, SYRIZA hoped that like-minded parties would win elections in other, particularly Southern member states, as reflected, for example, by the party's statement on the eve of the Spanish elections in December 2015: 'What is at stake is whether ... the Spanish people will choose to side with the Greek and Portuguese people, in a path of containment of austerity and riddance from another conservative government and ally of the German and European conservative leadership.' (SYRIZA, 2015b)

Indeed, since from this perspective the struggle against austerity and the Troika can only be transnational, 'SYRIZA is for cooperation and coordinated action of the left forces and

social movements on an all-European scale’ and committed to transforming the EU ‘in the direction of a democratic, social, peaceful, ecological and feminist Europe’ (SYRIZA, 2015a). In the light of this, it is not surprising that SYRIZA’s realisation of the need for transnational networking and cooperation with like-minded parties came before 2015, in the first years of the crisis (Sheehan, 2016, p. 56). At a public meeting in London in 2013, Tsipras (2013b) made it clear that ‘We will not be able to achieve our aims without the solidarity and the help of the European Left. ... Our struggle is the same.’

However, from early on, SYRIZA’s appeal to transnational cooperation has not been limited to the non-social democratic left but was extended to social democratic parties too (see Tsipras, 2013a, p. 45). Following the 2015 deal, the party has increasingly focused on transnational networking and cooperation with elements from social democratic and Green parties that broadly share SYRIZA’s vision of a reformed EU. That was recently reasserted, for instance, by the Secretary of the Central Committee of SYRIZA, Panos Skourletis (2018), who said in a speech delivered in September 2018 to the Executive Board of the PEL that LPs have to ‘play a leading role in the battle for the unity of all progressive forces which currently pursue the implementation of an alternative, democratic and social model for Europe – forces from the Greens and European Socialists’.

Thus, SYRIZA has had bilateral meetings with social democratic parties (Chatzistavrou, 2016, p. 39) and Tsipras started to attend as an observer the meetings of the PES (see Sideris, 2018). This has fuelled the claim of SYRIZA’s social democratisation and even led to the speculation that SYRIZA might try to join the PES, which was however denied by Gianni Pittella, the leader of the social democratic group in the EP (Michalopoulos, 2016). Moreover, at the fourth Summit of the Southern European Union Countries in 2018, Tsipras signed together with the other prime-ministers of Southern member states, including the right-wing Spanish prime-minister at the time Rajoy, a declaration that called on the EU to ‘to fully combine economic growth and social wellbeing’ (“Bringing the EU forward”, 2018), although that call has not translated so far into more concrete coordination among these governments.

As Calossi (2016, p 176) has pointed out, SYRIZA’s rapprochement with sections of European social democracy ‘could be interpreted as the first steps towards a centre-left alliance (potentially with the inclusion of the green parties too), as an alternative to the *grosse coalition* style, which has long characterized the EU institutions.’ The most significant evidence in that direction so far has been the creation of the Progressive Caucus in 2016, which includes SYRIZA’s MEPs and several social democratic and Green MEPs. Particularly relevant though, Bloco’s and Podemos’ MEPs are not involved in this project; instead, they are involved in the

‘Plan B for Europe’ initiative and the ‘Now, the people!’ movement, all of which are discussed in Chapter 4.

Portugal and Bloco since 2009

Portugal’s economic, social and political crises

After its accession to the EU in 1986, Portugal experienced sustained economic growth that brought it in the group of developed countries for the first time in the last century (Cabral, 2013, p. 32). However, in the early 2000s the economy entered a period of decline following the adoption of the euro, which, according to Cabral (2013, p. 27), ‘removed the automatic stabilisers that helped maintain the levels of net external debt and balance of income deficits in check’. Thus, in the case of Portugal, the Eurozone crisis came on the background of an economic recession, with a growth of minus 3% in 2009, which led to 8.6% budget deficit in the following year. At the same time, the government bailed out two private banks, which resulted in a growth of the public debt from 68% in 2007 to 83% in 2009.

In order to contain the growing levels of public deficit and debt, between 2009 and 2011 the PS government introduced, at the direct recommendation of Brussels and with the parliamentary support of the centre-right parties, three successive austerity packages known as Stability and Growth Programmes (SGPs). The third SGP, implemented in the autumn of 2010, was the most substantial, including 10% cuts in the wages of public sector employees, the increase of the personal income tax and the VAT, the freezing of pensions and cuts to social programmes (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2012, p. 180).

However, by the beginning of 2011 the three SGPs had failed to show any positive economic impact. Instead, the deficit decreased only to 9.1%, while the debt increased to 94% of the GDP. Indeed, unemployment increased to 12.4%, which triggered in November 2010 the first general strike of the two main trade union confederations since 1988. Moreover, in March 2011, 200,000 people took the streets of Lisbon, Porto and other major cities to protest against austerity.

On that background of social upheaval, in March 2011, the entire parliamentary opposition rejected a fourth SGP that the government had negotiated with the Troika without consulting either the President or Parliament. As a result, the minority PS government led by José Sócrates resigned. Nevertheless, while snap elections were announced for June, in April

the caretaker government of Sócrates requested a €78 billion bailout from the Troika, with the backing of the right-wing opposition, despite the fact that the bailout entailed the same austerity measures as, if not worse than, the ones that had just been rejected in Parliament (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2012, p. 182).

Following the June elections, those measures were implemented by the new right-wing government coalition and included increases in income and property taxes, in fees for public services such as healthcare and transport, and a freeze on any hiring or promotions in the public sector, with the key target of reducing the public deficit to 3% by 2013 (Cabral, 2013, p 29). However, just like the previous packages of austerity measures, these ones largely failed to improve the economic situation as anticipated: between 2011 and 2012, the public debt rose from 108% to 124% of the GDP, while the deficit target of 3% was achieved only in 2017.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate reached 17.5% at the beginning of 2013, with over 40% youth unemployment at the time, which contributed to making Portugal, which had already experienced significant levels of emigration, the EU member state with the largest proportion of the population living abroad (Eurofound, 2016). Thus, as Cabral (2013, p. 30) summed it up at the time, ‘after two years of “austerity”, the well-being (consumption and investment) of Portuguese families, businesses and government has regressed by more than the gains made in the previous 13 years.’

The ongoing austerity measures and their social effects led to new protests and mass mobilisations. Inspired by the Spanish *Indignados* and US Occupy movements, a similar movement started in the autumn of 2011, and on 15 October 100,000 people took the streets of Lisbon calling for the unilateral cancellation of the public debt, the nationalisation of banks and a general strike. The strike took place in the following days and, for the first time ever in the country’s history, it was accompanied by mass street protests (Romeiro, 2018). Such turmoil continued until the summer of 2013, including five one-day general strikes and two mass demonstration of a million people each (in a country with a population of around 10 million, including more than half a million who migrated since the start of the crisis).

The popular mood against austerity was also reflected in the 2015 general elections, although those elections did not bring about a similar collapse of bipartyism as witnessed in Greece earlier that year. Thus, the main right-wing party, the Social Democratic Party, won the elections with 38.6%, but was short of a majority. The three main parties perceived as on the left, the PS, Bloco and the PCP, gained together over 50% of the votes, which allowed the former to establish a minority government with the parliamentary support of the latter two.

While austerity measures and protests against them have resumed ever since, the GDP has experienced sustained positive, albeit limited, growth and unemployment decreased to under 8% as of 2018. That was largely due to a boom in exports, including tourism, over the last few years (Klein, 2018), but was also facilitated by quantitative easing provided by the ECB, which Greece has not been granted with (Príncipe, 2018). Indeed, the divergent paths to economy recovery of Greece and Portugal constitute one of the key differences in the national contexts of SYRIZA and Bloco, thus revealing a less homogenous experience of the crisis in Southern Europe than it is usually perceived.

This relative economic recovery has led to high approval rates for the PS government, which according to polls at the beginning of 2019 was given as a clear winner of the general elections, albeit still short of an absolute majority (Salvador, 2019). PS' success, an exception for European social democracy today, caps the growth potential of the parties to its left, Bloco and KKE, which will nevertheless remain relevant as long as the PS will require their parliamentary support in order to stay in government.

Bloco in post-2009 Portugal

In Portugal, the austerity measures preceded the bailout from the Troika and started as early as 2009 in reaction to the country's economic problems. Since those initial measures were introduced by the PS government, that created early on into the crisis opportunities for the parties to its left, particularly Bloco, to benefit from people's dissatisfaction with those measures. Thus, in the general elections held in September 2009, PS still won but with over eight percentage points less than in the previous elections, while Bloco increased its share from 6.4% to 9.8%, its best score up until then.

From the beginning, Bloco attributed the crisis mainly to external factors, such as 'finance globalization', while the EU was criticised for the bad management of the crisis. According to a 2010 party document, Bloco has 'no trust whatsoever in the policies and institutions in charge of the Union, nor any expectations regarding its reform or aptitude to stand up to the crisis' (Bloco, 2010). That is coupled with an opposition to austerity measures, which Bloco deems as 'a tool to enable transfers to finance capital' (Bloco, 2010), with negative effects on jobs, wages and public services. Indeed, austerity is seen as a 'vicious circle' (Bloco, 2010) that only prolongs the crisis by cutting down consumption and demand. Hence, all Portuguese left parties should take 'refusing to accept the European Austerity Plan as a starting point' (Bloco, 2010).

However, unlike SYRIZA in Greece around the same time, in 2010 Bloco was not yet calling for full the cancellation of the austerity measures implemented until then or of the public debt. Furthermore, the idea of leaving the Eurozone, put forward by the PCP, was rapidly dismissed by Bloco: ‘The choices before the Portuguese left-wing parties are not about leaving the Euro or not, but on how to bring forward alternative policies which create jobs and implement democratic decision methods to fight finance speculation’ (Bloco, 2010).

In relation to the anti-austerity movements, Bloco played a similarly pro-active role to SYRIZA. As Lisi (2013, pp. 33-34) points out, whereas the PCP was more sceptical of the effectiveness of such mobilisations, Bloco provided logistical organisational and programmatic support to these movements. The party’s activists participated in them, sometimes even in their leadership, while Bloco MPs gave an institutional articulation to their demands through several legislative bill proposals. For instance, the party established close links with FERVE, a group founded in 2007 to represent independent or precarious workers (Lisi, 2013, p. 37). In other words, just like SYRIZA in Greece, Bloco aimed to become the political arm of the anti-austerity movements.

However, unlike SYRIZA, Bloco failed to capitalise electorally on the links it had managed to build with the social movements. On the contrary, in the 2011 snap elections, Bloco received only 5.2%, a bit more than half of the votes from 2009. On the one hand, the social impact of austerity and the popular disillusionment with mainstream parties was not as deep in Portugal as in Greece. That meant that there was a smaller window of opportunity for anti-establishment parties like Bloco in the former than in the latter, where SYRIZA saw its electoral score increase six-fold in the following year (Príncipe, 2018). On the other hand, Bloco largely failed to present itself as a credible alternative to the political mainstream and particularly to the PS, because of its relatively moderate stances on the questions of debt, austerity and the EU, as well as its support for the PS candidate in the presidential elections held the same year (Lisi, 2013, p. 32).

It is not surprising, therefore, that after 2011 Bloco slightly radicalised its discourse. Thus, a 2012 resolution of the party’s National Committee called for the cancellation of all austerity measures, which ‘has become a question of human rights’ (Bloco, 2012), as well as of the public debt. Moreover, it proposed the nationalisation of two private banks that the state had recapitalised by more than €5 billion. Finally, the opposition to the Troika, seen as the main guilty party in Portugal’s deep social and economic crisis, was more explicit: ‘the left is now asked to demand a courageous political program to break with the IMF, ECB and EU policies and with austerity, and to recover our economy against the debt tyranny’ (Bloco, 2012). This

rhetorical turn towards more radical positions was also enabled by the more moderate elements within the party – gathered around the former Eurocommunist group *Política XXI* – splitting away to form a new centre-left party (Simões do Paço & Varela, 2015, p. 112).

After 2013, the social movements gradually faded away against a background of massive youth emigration, with 200,000 of 20-to-40-year olds having officially left the country since 2010 (Simões do Paço & Varela, 2015, p. 112). Thus, the epicentre of the anti-austerity struggle moved back to parliamentary politics (Romeiro, 2018, p. 7). In this context, Bloco almost doubled its votes in the 2015 general elections, reaching 10.2%, largely due to its more confrontational stance on austerity and particularly the EU (Príncipe, 2016, p. 172). Indeed, one of the key slogans of their campaign was ‘No more sacrifices to the euro’ and, for the first time ever, the exit from the Eurozone was taken into consideration as a last resort in the fight against austerity (Bloco, 2015). As Príncipe (2016, p. 172) emphasises, ‘after openly voicing reservations about Portugal’s future in the EU and eurozone, Left Bloc won better electoral results than ever before’.

Following the 2015 elections, Bloco and the PCP agreed to lend parliamentary support to the new PS minority government. Bloco justified its decision by claiming that it could not allow the right to govern for another four years. However, the parliamentary support for the PS government has since hindered Bloco to significantly challenge the latest austerity measures (albeit less harsh than in previous years), the rising precarity of workers and the funding crisis confronting the healthcare and education sectors (Príncipe, 2018). Indeed, the latter two sectors have witnessed significant strikes and demonstrations over the last two years, but Bloco failed to link up with them and, thereby, to consolidate its image as a left alternative to the PS (Romeiro, 2018). Thus, by legitimising the ‘left-wing aura’ of the PS government (Romeiro, 2018), Bloco has undermined its own potential for growth, as reflected by its stagnation in polls for the next general elections (Salvador, 2019). As Príncipe, (2018) aptly sums it up, ‘the Left Bloc is today hostage to the PS’.

Despite its collaboration with social democracy in the national arena, Bloco does not – unlike SYRIZA – entertain such relations at a European level. That is largely due to Bloco’s confrontational position and strategy towards the EU institutions, increasingly so following SYRIZA’s U-turn in 2015. In contrast with SYRIZA’s commitment to the EU, Bloco’s leader, Catarina Martins, now argues that ‘The EU is working against us ... is the greatest threat to people in Europe’ and, therefore, ‘it’s time to dismantle the EU so that we can begin to build a Europe of cooperation’ (De Jongh, 2017). Hence, Bloco has been involved in the staunchly

Eurosceptic Plan B and ‘Now, the people!’ initiatives, alongside Podemos but not SYRIZA, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Spain and Podemos since 2009

Spain’s economic, social and political crises

Similarly to the United States or Ireland, the crisis in Spain was triggered by a real estate bubble, in a country where the construction sector had become twice as big as the average size in the other member states of the Eurozone (Klotz, Lin & Hsu, 2016). That was mainly enabled by malpractices in the banking sector that fuelled an unsustainable credit culture and a housing surplus that did not match the real needs of the economy. When the property bubble burst in 2008, the housing prices dropped dramatically, which meant that banks could no longer cover their losses from nonperforming loans by simply repossessing people’s houses and then selling them on the market. This led to a financial crisis that saw the Spanish state bail out several banks, thus increasing the levels of public debt and deficit, from 40% and 4.4% respectively in 2008 to 86% and 10.5% in 2012.

Despite the bailouts, in June 2012 the Spanish government agreed with the Troika for a €100 billion loan that would be used to recapitalise the Spanish banks and prevent further increases in the country’s deficit and debt, which had resulted in the downgrading of the country’s credit rating. In exchange for the money, the government led by the right-wing PP agreed to a new wave of austerity measures, on top of those it had already taken in answer to the crisis of the banking sector. These new measures included €10.7 billion worth of cuts in the healthcare and education sectors, the increase in VAT for certain products and services from 8% to 21%, the increase of the retirement age from 65 to 67, the decrease in wages of public sector workers by 18% on average, as well as the reduction of unemployment and child benefits (Amini, 2015, p. 23).

The financial crisis and the austerity measures that accompanied it saw Spain lose nearly 15% of the GDP between 2008 and 2013 (World Bank, 2014), with the purchasing power dropping by 18% overall (Amini, 2015, p. 23). Furthermore, the unemployment rate went up from 8.2% in 2007 to 26.2% in 2013 at the peak of the crisis, with 55.5% unemployment among the youth (Eurostat, 2015). Despite some economic recovery over the last few years, the unemployment rate was still high at the end of 2018, at 14.7%, almost

double the Eurozone average (Eurostat, 2019), not accounting for the increasing precarity of existing jobs. As Stobart (2016, p. 176) puts it, ‘Although some growth and job creation has finally occurred, it has been accompanied by squeezed and stagnant wages, widespread use of insecure work contracts, the removal of bargaining rights, and slashed welfare provisions.’

The worsening economic conditions resulted in increasing social unrest, which found its strongest expression in the 15-M/*Indignados* Movement that started in May 2011. Organised initially by the grassroots civic platform *¡Democracia Real YA!* [Real Democracy Now!] and the youth movement *Juventud Sin Futuro* [Youth Without a Future], 15-M developed into the largest protest movement in the recent history of the country, involving between 6.5 and 8 million Spanish citizens, with 76% of the population endorsing the demands of the protesters (RTVE, 2011).

The broader demands centred around the defense of social rights to housing, work, healthcare and education and the opposition to austerity measures, the two-party system and the banks. The key slogan of the first mass demonstration on 15 May was ‘We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers’ (*El País*, 2011). As Stobart (2016, p. 176) points out, ‘These were protests against the failure of representation (expressed in the central slogan “they don’t represent us”) as much as against cuts and economic mismanagement’. Indeed, the hostility towards the political establishment engulfed even the traditional organisations of the left, such as the PCE-led *Izquierda Unida* (IU), to the extent that their representatives were asked to leave the squares (Stobart, 2016, p. 180).

Besides the 15-M, other movements against austerity developed in the following years, most prominently the so-called *mareas* (tides) of workers from various public sectors such as healthcare and education. For example, the ‘white tide’ of healthcare workers organised demonstrations, strikes and occupations against the government’s cuts to the sector and attempts to privatise it (Méndez de Andés, 2014). Also, the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) emerged as early as 2009 in reaction to the thousands of evictions across the country, which they opposed through direct action, court appeals and legislative pressure (Méndez de Andés, 2014). PAH also attracted high rates of support among the population, varying between 70% and 90%, with its main spokesperson, Ada Colau, becoming in 2015 the first female mayor of Barcelona.

The popular disillusionment with the mainstream political parties was illustrated by the general elections held since the start of the crisis (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, p. 6). The two main parties, PP and PSOE, went from an aggregate vote share of 83.8% in 2008 to 73.4% in 2011 to 50.7% in 2015, the lowest share in the post-Franco era. This was mirrored by two newly

formed parties, the left-wing Podemos and right-wing *Ciudadanos* [Citizens], gaining together over 34% in the 2015 elections.

The vote in those elections was so fragmented that the PP was unable to form a government, requiring new elections in 2016, which PP won once again but once again fell short of a majority. Hence, it only managed to form a government due to the support from several parties, including PSOE, whose MPs abstained in the investiture of the new Rajoy government under the pretext of avoiding a third election in a row. However, in June 2018, a corruption scandal led a regionalist party to withdraw its support for the PP government, which fell after losing a motion of confidence in the parliament. This saw PSOE form a minority government with support from Podemos and other smaller parties, but after failing to pass the budget at the beginning of 2019, new elections have been announced for the end of April, with a broad PSOE-led government coalition as one of the likeliest outcomes.

Thus, on the one hand, the political crisis of the mainstream parties in Spain was not on the same scale as in Greece, largely due to the less dramatic economic and social circumstances. PSOE did not suffer the same collapse as PASOK, which meant that Podemos did not match SYRIZA's favourable context to win elections and come into government. On the other hand, the losses for the two mainstream parties and particularly for PSOE, who went from 43.9% in 2008 to 22.6% in 2016, proved substantial enough to create a window of opportunity for the creation of this new left, anti-austerity party and for its elevation, within less than two years, as the third biggest parliamentary force. However, since 2016 PSOE has improved its standing in polls, largely at the expense of Podemos.

Podemos in post-2014 Spain

More so than the other two parties, Podemos can only be understood in the context of the crisis. In other words, having been created in early 2014, Podemos is a direct product of the crisis and particularly of the crisis of political representation that has characterised Spain over the last decade (Iglesias, 2015a, 2015b; Di Pietro, 2014). Hence, much of the party's evolution in the context of the crisis has already been covered in the previous chapter, with this subsection emphasising some of the key aspects of those developments.

Podemos understands the crisis that engulfed the Eurozone and particularly its Southern member states as a consequence of the neoliberal project that started in the 1970s and which subsequently shaped the institutional structure of European integration and in particular of the Economic and Monetary Union (see Iglesias, 2015a, pp. 106-135). Furthermore, according to

them, the crisis was dealt with in favour of international capital, or what Iglesias calls the ‘Party of Wall Street’, by converting bank debt into sovereign debt, which ended up being paid for by ordinary people through austerity measures (Iglesias, 2015a, p. 119).

However, according to Iglesias (2015b, p. 10), those measures have been mainly targeted at Southern member states, which are ‘being forced to surrender historic social rights through austerity policies that Germany and its northern allies would never impose at home.’ Thus, the opposition to austerity is a key element of Podemos’ vision, as austerity ‘poses a threat to our societies’ and needs to be substituted for ‘an economic model that places the interests of social majorities above those of the privileged, the banks, and the corporations’ (Podemos, 2016). That opposition has been facilitated in Spain – and in Southern Europe in general – by the ‘regime crisis’ that has resulted from the worsening economic situation and initial lack of credible political alternatives, a crisis understood by Iglesias (2015b, p. 10) as ‘the exhaustion of the political and social system that emerged from the post-Franco transition.’

That ‘regime crisis’ included the crisis of PSOE, which Podemos took better advantage of than IU (the traditional force to the left of PSOE), which despite never having participated in power, was largely seen as part of the mainstream (Ramiro & Gomez, 2016, pp. 14-15). On top of that, ‘the stubborn conservatism of the IU leaders, incapable of taking on other styles or perspectives’ (Iglesias, 2015b, p. 15), also played a role in IU’s failure to capitalise on a favourable objective context. As Ramiro and Gomez (2016, p. 14) show, those who are dissatisfied with all mainstream political parties and not just the government are more likely to vote for Podemos than the IU. Thus, in the 2015 general elections, Podemos scored 20.7% of the votes and IU only 3.7%.

Indeed, according to Iglesias (2015b, p. 12), the very creation of Podemos was a result of the dissatisfaction of the anti-austerity movements and the younger generations with the existing political organisations of the left. Thus, while SYRIZA and Bloco did link up with the anti-austerity movements in their countries, the birth of Podemos was intrinsically tied to those movements, particularly 15-M Movement and Youth Without a Future. As Iglesias (2015a, pp. 214-215) acknowledges, ‘many of those who acquired an experience of leadership there came to join Podemos; the party’s leading ranks are largely filled by people from the social movements’. Even the name of the party was inspired by one of PAH’s slogans, ‘*Sí se puede!*’ [Yes, it’s possible!].

However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, in the run-up to the 2015 general elections, the party adopted a strategy focused rather on parliamentary and electoral politics than on mass mobilisation and bottom-up militancy, as acknowledged by Iglesias himself (see

Iglesias, 2015b, p. 22). That shift was also reflected in the party's electoral alliance with IU, called *Unidos Podemos* [United We Can], which gained 21.2% in the 2016 elections (actually 3.3% less than the aggregate vote of the two parties in the 2015 elections) and was still intact as of March 2019, one month before the general elections.

Despite Iglesias' call at the party congress in early 2017 for a return to a more militant, protest-oriented strategy, the party still seems to prefer an institutional approach. For example, during the political crisis in Catalunya around the question of independence, which peaked in the autumn of 2017, the Podemos leadership urged the pro-independence movement to abandon the street protests for the unilateral declaration of independence and engage in a 'dialogue' with the then still PP-led Spanish government, within the existing constitutional framework of the state that the movement is trying to break away from (*La Vanguardia*, 2017). Overall, Podemos' retreat from the streets perhaps accounts for the party's decline in polls, as it is now seen as rather part of the political mainstream rather than an alternative to it. Instead, it is the relatively new right-wing populist party Vox that seems to be capitalising on the ongoing anti-establishment mood in society (*Poll of polls*, 2019).

Podemos' leadership has adopted a similar strategy of dialogue and compromise at the European level. While highly critical of 'the model of EU governance under German hegemony' (Iglesias, 2015a, p. 206), Podemos emphasises the need to negotiate with EU institutions in the sense of adopting policies such as fiscal reform, increased public investment, more spending for social policies, the restructuring of the debt. For that purpose, while contending that a Spanish left government would have a bigger space for manoeuvre than its Greek counterpart given the bigger size of Spain's economy, the party is very much aware of the need for transnational alliances. As Iglesias (2015a, p. 170) openly admits, Podemos' main task is to 'work on the construction on alliances in Europe and the world, because it is highly unlikely that a government of change could ever implement its programme without external allies'.

Just like in the domestic arena, however, there is no indication that extra-parliamentary protest might play a part in Podemos' dealings with the EU (Stobart, 2016, p. 185). Indeed, as Stobart (2016, p. 190) observes, 'there is little evidence that the Podemos grass roots is having this discussion.' Thus, as developed in the following chapters, Podemos lacks a truly coherent vision and strategy with regards to the EU (Souvlis, 2016). What is clear is the party's focus on building transnational alliances across Southern Europe, as 'the crisis completed the articulation of a Europe along a north/south, creditor/debtor axis to cement the division of labour orchestrated by the rich countries' (Iglesias, 2015a, p. 128). Indeed, the initial strategy

of the SYRIZA government was endorsed by the leader of Podemos, despite the acknowledged differences between the two national contexts (see Iglesias, 2015a, pp. 204-205).

However, after SYRIZA's U-turn in July 2015, the latter seems to have become less of a model for Podemos, which also became more confrontational towards the EU, particularly with the more radical current Anticapitalistas largely in charge of the party's foreign affairs. Thus, in contrast with SYRIZA's attempts to forge alliances with other political families at a European level with the aim of reforming the EU, Podemos has joined Bloco and other LPs in the more Eurosceptic initiatives Plan B and 'Now, the people!', whose statements are implicitly critical of SYRIZA's European strategy, as developed in the following chapters.

Conclusion

The Eurozone crisis developed on the background of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, hitting Southern European member states the hardest, as they reached high levels of public debt after bailing out the banks. This led to the so-called Troika bailing out the countries themselves, in exchange of harsh austerity packages. The reckless fiscal policy and corruption of the latter were deemed as the main causes for the crisis, all framed in a moralistic narrative about the cultural differences between Northern and Southern Europe. However, a counter-narrative emerged among scholars of various strands that pointed at the neoliberal architecture of the EMU as the root cause of the crisis and criticised the austerity-led management of the crisis.

Indeed, austerity measures did little, at least initially, in terms of reducing the levels of public debt and deficit. Furthermore, they had a substantial social impact in all three countries, as reflected in the rising unemployment rates. However, that social impact proved significantly worse in Greece, which witnessed levels of poverty never seen since the end of the Second World War. In turn, while the worsening socio-economic conditions generated in all three countries a political crisis of the bi-party systems that had characterised them since the mid-1970s, SYRIZA benefitted the most from it.

With the virtual collapse of the social democratic PASOK, SYRIZA capitalised on the anti-austerity and anti-establishment mood in society to win the elections in early 2015, although after only six months in government it retreated from its anti-austerity programme and signed a third bailout for the country. In Portugal and Spain, Bloco and Podemos respectively

also scored good electoral results that same year, although the smaller scale of the political crises in their countries prevented them from being as successful as SYRIZA, merely allowing them to lend parliamentary support to social democratic minority governments.

Their different degrees of electoral success notwithstanding, the three parties proved to be among the most effective of all European LPs in capitalising on the favourable context facilitated by the Eurozone crisis, in contrast with the traditional left parties, i.e. the CPs. They did so not only due to the more severe manifestation and impact of the crisis in their countries but also thanks to their ability to link up with the protest movements against austerity and become, more or less, the political mouthpiece of those movements. Indeed, in the case of Podemos, the party itself was to a large extent the political product of such anti-austerity movements. However, all three parties have since moved away from popular mobilisation and focused increasingly more on parliamentary and electoral politics, which might explain their stagnation and even regression in the case of Podemos.

The three parties also share the aforementioned counter-narrative of the Eurozone crisis, which they deem as an effect of decades of neoliberal policies in their countries and at the EU level. Indeed, they place much of the blame for the crisis and particularly for the austerity-centred management of it on the Troika, which together with the national political elites is accused of using the crisis as a pretext to further erode social rights and public services. The parties also concur that the Troika and its politics of austerity cannot be fought against on a national basis, as illustrated by the defeat of the SYRIZA government in July 2015. In other words, the transnational cooperation of anti-austerity forces is a prerequisite for success – a strategy that might seem self-obvious given the left's internationalism but is not necessarily championed by all LPs in the EU (see Janssen, 2013).

However, since 2015, while SYRIZA has pursued broader alliances at EU level, including with elements of European social democracy, Bloco and Podemos have limited their transnational cooperation to their political family, despite propping up social democratic minority governments in their own countries. Indeed, their stance on the EU is ostensibly more confrontational than SYRIZA's, as illustrated by their key roles in hard Eurosceptic initiatives that SYRIZA is not involved in – a divergence that might also be explained by the Iberian parties' greater latitude to pursue more radical positions as long as they have no governmental responsibility, as explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

Informal transnational networking and cooperation

This chapter deals with the informal transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. As defined in the introduction, ‘informal’ broadly refers to the networking and cooperation that ‘is not codified but, rather, is shaped by habits among and links between individuals’ (Salm, 2016, p. 11). In other words, informal networking and cooperation is understood here as taking place outside the official, formalised party channels, the EU’s institutional framework and other transnational party-based initiatives, which are discussed in the next chapter.

The substantial role of informality in the process of European integration has been widely acknowledged, particularly starting with the early 2000s (see Stacey, 2010; Kaiser, 2008; Héritier, 2007; Mak & Van Tatenhove, 2006; Heisenberg, 2005; Christiansen & Piattoni, 2003). Indeed, as Salm (2016) proves with regards to social democratic parties in the 1970s, informal channels of cooperation may play a more important role than the formal ones.

However, the literature on informal party networking and cooperation in the EU is still rather scarce (see Salm, 2016; Kaiser, Leucht & Gehler, 2010; Kaiser, 2007; 2013) and virtually absent in the particular case of LPs. This gap in the literature persists despite the reasonable expectation that, given the LPs’ limited influence over the EU’s policy-making through the existing formalised channels (i.e. the EU institutions), this party family would find informality particularly important. Thus, the discussion here represents one of the thesis’ most original contributions to the field.

The chapter deals in turn with three types of channels that are likely to create channels for the informal networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos: social movements, academic networks and political foundations. The traditional social partners of LPs, the trade unions, have been left out because the collected data revealed no link between them and the transnational networking and cooperation of the three parties. When asked whether the transnational cooperation of trade unions impacted upon the transnational cooperation among the parties after 2009, the interviewees rated that impact as short of

‘somewhat significant’, having little to say about trade unions in general, which will be elaborated on in the final chapter.

Each section starts by outlining the respective type of channel in relation to LPs in general and SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos in particular, revealing its potential relevance for their transnational networking and cooperation. It then maps informal networking and cooperation among the three parties via that type of channel, comparing – where possible – the periods before and after the start of the Eurozone crisis. The chapter ends with a conclusion summing up the main findings.

Thus, the aims of this chapter reflect the two-fold goal of the thesis: to establish whether this informal process of networking and cooperation has increased in the propitious context provided by the crisis and, at the same time, to fill a gap in the literature on party cooperation by mapping the informal networking and cooperation among three of the most prominent LPs in Europe today, with potentially useful insights for the study of other party families.

Social movements

The major setback suffered by LPs following the downfall of Soviet-style socialist states has already been noted. It took place as part of a broader trend of party decline across Europe (and beyond) that had started before 1989 (Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012; Scarrow, 1996; Katz et al., 1992). That process created space for social movements, understood here following Diani (1992, p. 1), as ‘networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities’.

In particular, the GJM, also referred to as the anti-globalisation or alter-globalization movement (used interchangeably hereon), became in that context an increasingly significant framework for channelling popular dissatisfaction with the globalising neoliberal consensus (March & Mudde, 2005; Heartfield, 2003). Thus, the 1990s saw the emergence of a plethora of progressive social movements, or a ‘network of networks’ (Porta, Andretta, Mosca & Reiter, 2006), concerned not only with opposing and finding alternatives to neoliberal globalisation but also with issues such as animal rights or environmentalism (Mudde, 2002).

The pronounced transnational character and propensity for transnational cooperation of these new social movements came as no surprise. Firstly, transnationalism had always been a

feature of previous social movements, from the nineteenth century campaigns against slavery or for women's suffrage (Keck & Sikkink, 1998) up to the anti-missile movement of the 1980s (Hudson, 2000, pp. 28-29). Secondly, that feature intensified over the last few decades, as the acceleration of globalisation simultaneously compelled social movements to become more global themselves in order to challenge the increasingly global sources of power (Castells, 2010) and also facilitated that process through the spread of new technologies and affordable long-distance travel (Alston, 2014).

Indeed, in a period when LPs were still struggling to find a pan-European replacement for the CPs-led internationalism, the GJM provided not only the first significant challenge to the neoliberal consensus (March, 2011, p. 6) but also some of the first and most prominent instances of 'radical left' transnational networking and cooperation in Europe after 1989 (March & Mudde, 2005, p. 42). As March (2011, p. 167) puts it, 'new social movements in general and the Global Justice Movement in particular offer a reinvigorated radicalism and internationalism that has provoked the most widely realised global challenge to the political establishment'.

LPs themselves became increasingly aware of the need for transnational cooperation in a globalising world shaped by neoliberal policies, particularly the new wave of LPs that emerged at the turn of the century (Moschonas, 2013, p. 8). As their traditional civil society partners, the trade unions, were also in decline (March, 2011, p. 167), these parties came to realise that they needed to engage in cross-border cooperation with the GJM in order to build a broad opposition to the transnational neoliberal status quo (March & Mudde, 2005, p. 41). As the then leader of the PRC, Fausto Bertinotti, was writing back in 2003, 'An alternative European left can find its strategy only within the anti-globalisation movement. ... Unless they move in this direction, the European anti-capitalist left-wing parties risk disappearing in terms of political representation.' (Bertinotti, 2003) The PRC proved to be one of the LPs that took the lead on building links with the new social movements and was followed in that respect by other new LPs, including SYN (SYRIZA's forerunner) and Bloco (March, 2011, p. 178).

However, the interaction between LPs and the GJM was never smooth, given the latter's pronounced 'anti-party, anti-political, neo-anarchist sentiment' (March, 2011, p. 167). As Bertinotti (2003) himself acknowledged, the rise of the anti-globalisation movement 'challenged the model of a party leading the movement, proposing instead the notion of networks and links among groups, associations, parties and newspapers'. Furthermore, while the GJM's broad left-wing character can hardly be denied, its explicit aim to avoid ideological uniformity also contributed to a deep suspicion towards political parties, despite some parties

eventually managing to build good relations with certain sections of the GJM in their countries, such as the PRC in Italy (see Porta et al, 2006, pp. 41-43).

Thus, both the World and European Social Forums, arguably the main organisational articulations of the GJM, excluded party officials from their organisation and programme (March, 2011, p. 177). Nevertheless, that did not prevent members of LPs from participating in these annual summits (March & Mudde, 2005, p. 41), even though they tended to do it via the youth wings or political foundations of their parties (March, 2011, p. 178; Porta et al, 2006, p. 43). Indeed, despite the social movements' wary attitude vis-à-vis parties, the currently limited literature on the relation between the two argues that social movements that strive for political change will sooner or later also interact with political parties (see Piccio, 2016; Rucht, 2004). That interaction naturally enables interaction between various parties as well, as part of what Porta et al (2006, p. 46) call 'interorganisational exchanges'. As shown in the following subsection, the GJM and its offshoots provided several frameworks where such interaction did take place, where members of SYN and Bloco were able to meet each other.

Before 2009: The GJM

The European Social Forum (ESF) was arguably the most significant transnational articulation of the GJM in Europe (March, 2011; Porta et al., 2006). It was launched in 2002 as a series of summits that initially took place annually and, later on, biannually up until 2010, with the six summits being held in Florence (2002), Paris (2003), London (2004), Athens (2006), Malmö (2008) and Istanbul (2010). Emulating the World Social Forum (WSF) that had started in 2001 in Porto Alegre (Brazil) as an alternative to the World Economic Forum (WSF, 2001), the ESF aimed to enable the networking, exchange of ideas and potential strategic coordination among social movements, NGOs, trade unions and other activist networks sharing a broad opposition to neoliberal globalisation (Tormey, 2004).

Despite many participants' hostility towards political parties (Candeias, 2004; Tormey, 2004), parties did become involved in the ESF from the very first summit in Florence, particularly the PRC and the British Socialist Workers' Party through its front organisation Globalise Resistance (Porta et al., 2006, pp. 42-43). That was reflected in the relatively high share of the total participants who declared to belong to a political party – over 42% (Porta et al., 2006, p. 45). Moreover, the finding of Porta et al. (2006, p. 48) that the ESF in Florence was marked by 'the creation of channels of interorganisational communication' indicates the likelihood for members of various political parties present at the summit to also interact with

one another, which is why both the ESF and the WSF were included in the questionnaire used in the present research.

The data collected through the ten interviews conducted with the people involved in or close to Bloco and SYRIZA (as Podemos did not exist before 2009) seem to indicate that the parties' participation in the ESF was one of the spaces that harboured some of the first instances of interaction between members of the two parties. On a scale from 1 to 4 (where 1 means 'insignificant', 2 'somewhat significant', 3 'quite significant' and 4 'very significant'), the ten interviewees rated the role of the ESF, on average, at 2.8, i.e. just short of 'quite significant'.

However, there is a stark contrast between the answers of the people related to the two parties. On the one hand, all the four SYRIZA interviewees who knew how to answer the question rated ESF's significance at either 3 or 4. Thus, according to Giorgos Karatsioubanis, a former member of the Central Committee of SYN and since 2015 of SYRIZA and also a member of the party's departments for international and European affairs, 'We were [active in the ESF] from the first moment, but they were there through other organisations, not Bloco as such' (G. Karatsioubanis, personal communication, April 2017), thus referring to the groups composing Bloco at the time.

On the other hand, of the five interviewees from Bloco, one did not answer the question, two rated the ESF at 1, one at 2 and one at 3. However, the interviewee who rated it at 2 is the only one who was a party member at the time. He is Luís Fazenda, a founding member and former parliamentary leader of Bloco, long-standing member of its Political Committee and currently the head of the party's department of international affairs. He stated to have attended back then a meeting in Florence in preparation of the first ESF, where he did meet people from SYN. Therefore, despite the contrast in the answers of the interviewees from the two parties, the ESF seems to have acted as a space for people from SYN and Bloco to at least meet each other, at a time when the PEL was not yet established and Bloco did not have any representation in the EP (their first seat in the EP came with the 2004 elections).

Even people who do not belong to either party but have been involved for years in the wider transnational networking and cooperation of LPs in Europe, including at the time of the first ESF summits, acknowledge the latter's importance in bringing members of different LPs together. For instance, Walter Baier, the coordinator of Transform, to which the political foundations of both SYRIZA and Bloco are affiliated, believes that 'before its decline, it [the ESF] was relevant', rating it as 'quite significant' (W. Baier, personal communication, May 2017). Also, Hibai Arbide Aza, a Spanish left-wing journalist who has been close to people in

Podemos and now works in Athens for *teleSUR* (the left leaning television network funded by several Latin American governments), said with regards to the ESF and people from the three parties concerned that ‘this is where they met for the first time’ (H. Arbide Aza, personal communication, August 2017), including here some of today’s leaders of Podemos, particularly Iglesias, who ‘was there ... at the beginning of the anti-globalisation movement in 1999 and 2000’.

However, while the ESF clearly was a space that allowed people from SYN/SYRIZA, Bloco and even from nowadays Podemos to meet each other, it does not seem to have necessarily enabled any concrete relations of cooperation or coordination among these people and their parties. That is reflected in the low rating given to the ESF by Bloco interviewees – merely 1.8 on average, i.e. less than ‘somewhat significant’. The greater significance assigned to it by the SYRIZA interviewees might be accounted for by two things.

Firstly, the ESF is perceived as significant for SYN establishing links with the wider European left, including here not only parties but also social movements. For example, Angelina Giannopoulou, who works as a researcher for NPI as well as for Transform, claimed that

‘The ESF made the Italian left, the Spanish left, the Greek left etc. to think European. ... It was a very significant political development because it brought all these forces of the European left together and it gave us the opportunity to influence the anti-globalisation movement and to create a new basis of cooperating with the movements.’ (A. Giannopoulou, personal communication, May 2017)

Nikos Sverkos, a Greek journalist who has been covering SYRIZA since 2006, also confirmed the importance of the ESF for SYN connecting to the rest of the European left:

‘the actual point that caused all these meetings and all this cooperation between SYN and other European parties was the making of the ESF. ... This was the thing that blended SYN inside the whole [web of] social movements and other radical parties, around Europe and around the world. This was the best opportunity for SYN to come together and have contacts with parties such as Bloco.’ (N. Sverkos, personal communication, September 2017)

Indeed, in an interview given back in 2010 to March and Dunphy (2013, p. 524), Karatsioubanis stressed the importance of the ESF in galvanising the broader pan-European cooperation of LPs and particularly the process that culminated in the formation of the PEL: ‘the anti-neo-liberal social movements strengthening after the 2002 European Social Forum in Florence, growing opposition to US militarism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Eastern EU enlargement increased the sense of momentum (Karatsioubanis, 2010)’.

Secondly, as described in Chapter 1, the ESF and the broader social movements represented a key factor in SYN setting up SYRIZA as a coalition back in 2004. According to Vasileios Katsardis, former member of SYN Youth and current press officer for SYRIZA MEPs, ‘there were 37 Greek left-wing parties; ten of them, including SYN, decided to come together in the Greek Social Forum, which was part of the European Social Forum, which was part of the World Social Forum.’ (V. Katsardis, personal communication, April 2017). His colleague, Karatsioubanis, particularly elaborated on this point about the relevance of the ESF to the process that led to the creation of SYRIZA but also on the key role played by the youth organisation of SYN in linking the party to the emerging transnational social movements:

‘The youth organisation played an important role starting with 1999 by pressuring the party on many things, like the participation in the WSF, ESF. ... In 2004, as a result of the participation of the Greeks in the new social movements and mainly in the ESF, there was a network that was called International Action, a network of the different smaller or bigger [Greek] left forces that were going to these European events. They said “we’ll go as one, each one of us with their own flags, identities and so on, but we have coordination” – that was the first step of the Greek Social Forum. ... The cooperation through the GSF of these forces was the beginning point of SYRIZA, because it was through the cooperation in the movements that we said we have to make another step.’ (G. Karatsioubanis, personal communication, April 2017)

Indeed, Bloco’s own creation took place in the context of the rise of the GJM, as already acknowledged in the existing literature (see Príncipe, 2016, p. 162; Lisi, 2013, p. 35), and particularly of the ESF, as pointed out by one of the interviewees from Bloco, José Manuel Pureza, current MP and member of the party’s National Board:

‘Bloco was born at a time when the Social Forum was at the heart of this search for alternatives and, at that time, we had the perspective ... of a strong social movement at the national level, at the European level, conducing to political entities able to bring their voice to the institutions and to the political decisions.’ (J. M. Pureza, personal communication, September 2017)

Even the broader WSF is seen as relevant to the interaction between European LPs, particularly by SYRIZA interviewees, who rated it on average at 3.3, i.e. more than ‘quite significant’. Thus, according to Giannopoulou, ‘the WSF brought together many European leftists’, while Karatsioubanis even recalled the participation of Bloco in the WSF: ‘they were active through different networks; not that active as we were from Greece, but they were active.’ Arvide Aza also mentioned the importance of WSF, which was at the time the ‘only thing that would take place every year, only constant framework’. However, he points out that this framework did not necessarily entail any coordination among the LPs concerned here, as ‘the Europeans had no clear agenda when going there’.

At the same time, the WSF is also acknowledged as an influence over the formation of SYRIZA. Christos Kanellopoulos, a member on SYRIZA's Secretariat of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy, believes that participation in the WSF

'was a formative experience for SYRIZA. That's why we became what we are today: we changed from a post-communist party to a new left socialist party with a hegemonic vision. We learned from the experience of Chavismo, of Kirchner, Lula, but today it has declined in importance.' (C. Kanellopoulos, personal communication, September 2017)

Bloco interviewees also mentioned WSF and their participation in it, although they ascribed it a much lower level of significance than SYRIZA – 1.5 on average, halfway between 'insignificant' and 'somewhat significant'. Thus, as summed up by Nuno Pedrosa, an assistant of Bloco's MEP Marisa Matias, 'We participated [in the WSF], but it wasn't a huge thing' (N. Pedrosa, personal communication, May 2017).

Another significant actor in the anti-globalisation movement was the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens, best known by its acronym ATTAC. It was established in 1998 in France, following an editorial in the left leaning publication *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Ramonet, 1997) that made the case for setting up an organisation to campaign in favour of the so-called Tobin tax (named after the Keynesian economist James Tobin), amounting to a 0.1% tax on speculative transactions on the currency markets – a rather modest demand that arguably reflected the ideological retreat of the left at that time. In 1999, ATTAC developed into an international network, with branches and partner organisations agreeing to a common platform in around forty countries, including Greece, Spain and Portugal (ATTAC, 1998). Indeed, ATTAC (n.d.) is described as a founding organization of the alter-globalization movement on its website as well as in the existing literature (see Steger, 2008, pp. 199-201; Porta et al., 2006, pp. 32-36).

Moreover, as Porta et al. (2006, p. 33) point out, in several European countries members of LPs engaged with the ATTAC branches. Because of that, as well as ATTAC's presence in all the three countries concerned here, the interviewees were asked to rate its importance in the transnational networking and cooperation between SYN/SYRIZA and Bloco before 2009. However, ATTAC was rated overall at only 1.8, i.e. less than 'somewhat significant', with no notable differences between the interviewees from the two parties. Indeed, the Portuguese interviewees had nothing to say about ATTAC, with two of the Greek interviewees even questioning whether ATTAC was ever active in Portugal. Sverkos even questioned how transnational the character of ATTAC truly is, deemed as 'a French-oriented project'.

Finally, a couple of interviewees also mentioned specific protests and demonstrations linked to the wider GJM that their parties participated in together. For example, Fazenda from Bloco recalled meeting people from SYN ‘in Spain, in a march against globalisation in the early 2000s – so we’ve been meeting many times’. On a more general note, Karatsioubanis mentioned the 2001 anti-G8 protest in Genoa, Italy: ‘we’ve had a very big participation from Greece, fourteen or fifteen buses going there’. The role of that particular protest as one of the catalysts for the emergence of a new European left, markedly oriented towards social movements and popular mobilisation, has already been noted in the literature (see Hudson, 2012, pp. 108-109; March & Mudde, 2005, p. 39). Even some in Podemos – a party created more than a decade later – ascertained the relevance of that protest in Genoa for linking party activists from different countries. According to Enrique Maestu, one of the first members of Podemos and assistant to MEP Tania González Peñas at the time of the interview, ‘the leaders of Bloco, SYRIZA and Podemos were there, they were struggling together against neoliberalism, capitalism...’ (E. Maestu, personal communication, May 2017).

Thus, within the broader anti-globalisation movement, it was not only relatively formalised and durable frameworks like the WSF and the ESF but also one-off events that allowed activists of new LPs to meet each other, although not necessarily to also create any actual channels of communication and cooperation. Starting with the mid-to-late-2000s, the GJM began to decline, particularly in Europe, as reflected in the termination of the ESF in 2010 (March, 2011, pp. 174-175). As Maestu from Podemos summed it up, the anti-globalisation movement and particularly the ESF failed to develop because ‘every summit was in the same point of the debate’.

After 2009: The anti-austerity movement(s) and the AlterSummit

The Eurozone crisis that started in late 2009 and the austerity measures that followed have led to the emergence of new social movements opposing austerity and the political establishments seen as responsible for it. The most prominent such movements developed over the first half of 2011 in two of the three countries concerned here, the movements of the Indignants in Spain and Greece (Flesher Fominaya & Hayes, 2017). While not as consistent, significant anti-austerity movements also took place in Portugal.

Just like in the case of the respective LPs from these countries, given the transnational character of the crisis and of the austerity policies, it would be reasonable to expect that such anti-austerity social movements would seek to cooperate with each other at a transnational

level. In turn, such cooperation could potentially provide an incentive for furthering the cooperation among the parties themselves, particularly given their links to these movements and their own transnational orientation.

To a certain extent, there were some obvious connections between the anti-austerity movements from different countries and particularly between the Indignants [*Indignados*] movement from Spain and the eponymous movement [*Aganaktismeni*] that started around the same time in Greece (Tsaliki, 2012). However, according to some of the existing literature, while the remnants of the GJM were partly involved in some of the anti-austerity movements (Calossi, 2016, p. 94), the latter were markedly less transnational in character than the former (Calossi, 2016; Porta, 2014). Porta (2014) claims that, whereas ‘at the start of the millennium the work of movements for global justice concentrated on the elaboration of a critical perspective on Europe, today anti-austerity protests appear to be marked by the defence of what remains of national sovereignty, at least in the weakest economies’ – that is, precisely in the economies of countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal.

Thus, at least at the level of social movements, the economic crisis seemed to have had rather the opposite effect than the expected one: instead of coming together at a pan-European level, social movements opposing austerity have tended to be rather nationally oriented. As Porta (2014) also points out,

‘increasing regional inequalities and the asymmetry of the effects of the global crisis make coordination at the European level more difficult. Attempts to build alliances of movements at the transnational level remain sporadic and suffer from a lack of catalytic events, such as anti-EU summits and European social forums.’

The findings of the present research partly confirm this decline of the transnationality of social movements. Firstly, they confirm the decline in the importance – from these European parties’ perspective at least – of the WSF. Thus, when asked about the significance of the WSF for the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties after 2009, even the SYRIZA interviewees, who had rated it at 3.3 for the pre-2009 period, now rated it only at 2.2. Overall, including the answers from Bloco (which rated it on average at 1.5) and Podemos (2.2), the post-2009 significance of WSF was rated at 2, i.e. barely ‘somewhat significant’.

More precisely, according to Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA, the WSF ‘used to be much more important’ but not anymore, while Alejandro Merlo from Podemos, a long-standing member of the International Secretariat of *Anticapitalistas* and current assistant to MEP Miguel Urbán, said that the WSF is significant only ‘in a historical sense’ (A. Merlo, personal communication, April 2017). Also from Podemos, Jorge Conesa de Lara, assistant to MEP Lola

Sánchez Caldentey, stressed that while Podemos sent a delegation to the previous WSF summits in Tunis (2015) and Montreal (2016), ‘it’s not a key melting point for the European left’ (J. Conesa de Lara, personal communication, November 2016).

The only interviewee who rated at 4 the post-2009 significance of the WSF for the transnational networking and cooperation among the three LPs, Maestu from Podemos, also did it from a rather historical and ideational point of view: ‘many of the core elements of the ideas of Podemos and SYRIZA come from here ... the values of the WSF – about participative democracy, about governing the country for the people, of social justice.’ Finally, Hibai Arbide Aza also downplays the significance of the WSF today for the networking and cooperation of European LPs: ‘Maybe they drink a beer when they go there but it’s not the place where they go to meet each other.’

Secondly, it is telling that the last ESF summit took place in 2010 (which is why the interviewees were not asked about its post-2009 significance), at the beginning of a pan-European financial crisis with severe economic, social and political repercussions. The main initiative that has emerged since to try and fill the vacuum left by the termination of the ESF is called *AlterSummit*. A network of trade unions, social movements, NGOs, research networks and political foundations, AlterSummit aims to build ‘more convergence between movements opposed to the current anti-social and anti-ecological policies promoted by European governments and institutions’ (AlterSummit, 2013*d*). According to Sheehan (2016, p. 68), an Irish left-wing academic who participated to its first summit in Athens, AlterSummit was primarily ‘a convergence of forces from the European Social Forum’.

The Athens summit took place in June 2013 and called for things such as an end to ‘debt slavery’, the cancellation of austerity measures, restoration of wages and social rights, increased regulation of the banking sector (AlterSummit, 2013*c*). More importantly, AlterSummit’s manifesto was explicitly transnational in character, as ‘the struggle of the Greek social movements is a European struggle’, thus aiming to draw ‘a large variety of organizations and movements’ (AlterSummit, 2013*d*) from across the continent.

The organisers had a rather ambiguous position towards linking up with political parties, which ‘may not be members – even if we actively seek the support of political personalities from various groups and dialogue with them – we ask them to share our struggle, but not to represent us’ (AlterSummit, 2013*a*). Nevertheless, representatives of many European LPs attended the summit in Athens, including SYRIZA, Die Linke or IU (with someone from Podemos, Daniel Albarracín, attending the second summit in November 2016 in Brussels), as well as Transform and the political foundations associated with SYRIZA and Bloco

(AlterSummit, 2013*b*). Indeed, the finale of that summit consisted of a speech from the leader of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras (Sheehan, 2016, p. 70). That was followed by a march in the centre of Athens, partly confirming the social movement credentials of AlterSummit.

Sheehan's (2016, p. 70) assessment of the summit is mixed:

'Overall, I found the experience of the AlterSummit a bit underwhelming ... others found it a bit disappointing too, as attendance from abroad was not what was expected, and attendance from Greece, despite posters all over town, was far less than hoped. This was attributed to a sense of downturn on the Greek left. Nevertheless, it did strengthen the bonds between the different sections of the European left and built networks for ongoing practical initiatives.'

One concrete example of such practical initiatives came two years later ahead of the referendum in July 2015 over the deal offered by the Troika to the SYRIZA government, when AlterSummit launched a petition of solidarity with 'the citizens of Greece' and endorsed the *Oxi* vote, i.e. against the deal (AlterSummit, 2015).

Overall, the AlterSummit's importance in fostering transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos was rated at 2.3, i.e. 'somewhat significant', without any major differences in the answers between the three parties. This rating is lower than the one for the ESF for the pre-2009 period, whose significance was rated at 2.8 overall. Thus, according to Kanellopoulos, 'AlterSummit is more movements, non-institutional civil society', which 'because of the general retreat of the movements, it has retreated in importance also'. Karatsioubanis sees AlterSummit, as suggested already, as the closest thing to have carried on the legacy of the ESF, but he rated it as less significant (4 for ESF and 3 for AlterSummit): 'all the experience with the ESF was practically inexistent in 2014. And then there were some thematic networks that remained from the ESF and continued to exist through the AlterSummit, but this cooperation is mainly thematic, not that much wider, as we had before.' Finally, Pedrosa from Bloco confirmed the relative lack of relevance of AlterSummit for transnational party cooperation: 'Haven't heard much of AlterSummit lately ... it was more in Greece'.

With regards to ATTAC, some of the events it organised after the start of the crisis were attended by people from at least two of the three parties, such as its summer school in 2014, where representatives of Podemos and SYRIZA were among the key speakers (Benatouil, 2014). Thus, ATTAC's perceived importance in the post-2009 transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties was rated slightly higher than for the pre-2009 period, at 2.2. Nevertheless, according to Kanellopoulos, ATTAC 'was important around 2009, at the beginning of the decade, but it has declined', while Karatsioubanis went further to say that 'We

have it [in Greece] but it's like a ghost organisation'. That is somewhat confirmed by the website of ATTAC Greece, whose 'News' section has not been updated since 2015. Also, while Podemos interviewees rated ATTAC at 2.3, none of them gave any concrete example of how ATTAC might have facilitated their interaction with people from SYRIZA or Bloco.

The only other broad transnational initiative centred around social movements that emerged during the crisis and which some of the parties studied here participated in has been *Blockupy*. Self-described as 'part of a European wide network of various social movement activists, altermondialists, migrants, jobless, precarious and industry workers, party members and unionists ... from many different European countries', Blockupy aims to 'create a common European movement, united in diversity, which can break the rule of austerity and will start to build democracy and solidarity from below' (Blockupy, n.d.). Between 2012 and 2015, it organised several mass demonstrations in Frankfurt, where the headquarter of the ECB is located.

In the 2015 protest, high profile representatives of both SYRIZA and Podemos, such as MEP Miguel Urbán, also participated (BBC, 2015). That same year in July, Blockupy sent a few people to Athens to meet and interview people from SYRIZA and the social movements, discussions and debates which were then uploaded as videos on a dedicated YouTube channel called 'Blockupy goes Athens'. However, the videos had extremely low visibility, especially for a supposed grassroots movement, with views of between 53 and 394 views per video as of November 2018. It is no surprise then that only one interviewee, Giannopoulou, mentioned Blockupy as a significant framework for the cooperation among the three parties. Indeed, the initiative seems to have been inactive for the last three years, as the last call/statement on its website dates back from 2016.

There are, of course, more thematic transnational activist networks that party members, rather than the parties per se, might be involved in, such as the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City. According to Tatiana Moutinho from Bloco, a party coordinator in Porto who also works for CUL:TRA and Transform, that initiative organised an action camp in Lisbon in September 2018 (Demony & Almeida, 2018), which was attended by Bloco activists who are also involved in housing campaign groups in Portugal, like Habita. However, the European Action Coalition, despite having member organisations also in Spain and Greece, was not mentioned by neither Podemos nor SYRIZA interviewees, which means that it is unlikely to have played any role in these parties' transnational networking and cooperation so far.

The only thematic instance of social movements-based transnational cooperation that has been mentioned by interviewees from at least two parties is the campaign against the decision of the Spanish government in 2017 to extend the life of the Almaraz Nuclear Power Plant, which is located very close to the Portuguese border. Activist groups from both countries have been involved in this campaign, including members of Podemos and Bloco, as revealed by both Merlo and Pureza respectively. It is not clear though whether the two parties have coordinated their interventions in this campaign. In any case, it is likely that such thematic campaigns might open new opportunities for interaction and cooperation among parties, particularly between Bloco and Podemos, given their geographical proximity. For example, Moutinho mentioned the women strike that Bloco is preparing, together with Portuguese feminist groups, for the 8th of March 2019:

‘one feminist grassroots movement that is clearly related to Bloco – they are going to Spain to learn from the Spanish comrades; we are also trying to bring Spanish feminists to Portugal ... the feminist movement in Spain is quite politicised, of course it has people from Podemos, IU.’ (T. Moutinho, personal communication, October 2018).

Thirdly, one question posed to interviewees from all three parties explicitly aimed to assess the significance of social movements’ transnational cooperation for the post-2009 transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties. For, as pointed out earlier, it would be expected to see in the potential transnational networking and cooperation among such movements a factor for increased networking and cooperation among the parties themselves. Overall, the significance of this factor was rated at 2.8, i.e. somewhere between ‘somewhat significant’ and ‘quite significant’. Like in the previous case of the ESF, there are differences between the answers provided: while interviewees from SYRIZA and Podemos rated this factor as an incentive for party cooperation at 3 and 3.5 respectively, Bloco interviewees only rated it at 1.6, i.e. almost halfway between ‘insignificant’ and ‘somewhat significant’.

However, that contrast is rather superficial, as even those who assigned this factor with a high degree significance admitted that it has exerted little influence on transnational party cooperation as such. For example, on the one hand, Giannopoulou sees the links established between anti-austerity movements from different countries as influential in terms of strategy: ‘they realised, these parties and the left in Spain and in Greece in particular, that they have to face the same problems, they have to develop a strategy and that it’s not only a national issue any more, it’s a European one’. On the other hand, despite rating this factor at 4, she admitted that ‘the links between social movements didn’t translate into links between parties’. Daniel

Albarracín from Podemos, a political advisor for GUE/NGL and for various committees in the EP, also gave this factor a 4 while pointing out the failure of parties to take advantage of the rise of akin anti-austerity movements in their countries: ‘We had austerity measures in Greece and Spain at the same time, the living standards and labour rights deteriorated – conditions for triggering social movements, but the parties didn’t understand that well’.

Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA is more consistent, as he rated the influence of social movements over transnational party cooperation as ‘insignificant’, explicitly stating that ‘the development of social movements was a formative experience for both of us, and Podemos actually was born out of that, but I don’t think that they’ve played a role in our cooperation’. That was also confirmed by someone from outside of SYRIZA but very familiar with its activity, Yiannis Balabanidis, a Greek left-wing political scientist who also works at the Minister of Economy, according to whom

‘There is no transnational cooperation of these parties at the level of social movements. Especially SYRIZA and Podemos are parties based on social movements, but I can’t recall an event of social mobilisation where the two parties joined together. Not in Greece, not in Spain, not even at a European level, like a manifestation in Brussels. ... and that is quite impressive given that, for these parties, social movements are a fundamental element.’ (Y. Balabanidis, personal communication, September 2017)

Thus, it is not only that SYRIZA and Podemos have not worked together via social movements, but they seem to have not even employed at a European level the strategy of social mobilisation that previously proved so successful in their rise within their domestic arenas.

Some of the more general obstacles to the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties that are discussed in the final chapter may also help explain the relatively marginal role played, after 2009, by social movements and their transnational cooperation in the cooperation among LPs. However, the key specific reason seems to lie with the already mentioned decline of social movements themselves. That is how Karatsioubanis, for example, explains why SYRIZA has not strengthened its ties with Podemos via social movements: ‘If we talk of the level of social movements, it’s different, because after 2014, when Podemos was created, the European social movements were declining, so it was not so [significant].’ In fact, as someone else from SYRIZA, Kanellopoulos, points out, the very birth of Podemos and the rise of SYRIZA were to a great extent made possible by the decline of social movements:

‘They have failed. The *Indignados* movement and the squares movement [in Greece] actually failed to stop austerity, so we passed on to the other level, to the institutional level. It’s like they

assigned SYRIZA and the other parties to work now at the institutional level, because they failed to stop austerity; but, of course, they succeeded to change party systems in Europe, both in Spain and Greece. They've had a huge success in reshaping the political scene, but they've failed in their main target, which was to stop austerity.'

The MP from Bloco, Pureza, argues on the same lines, identifying a perceived transfer of responsibility for social change from the social movements to the parties:

'It is one of the dramas in Portugal – the inexistence or the fragility of social movements, both classic and new social movements; for example, one of the most puzzling situations that I find at this moment is that this kind of political situation would hopefully be an incentive for the creation of social movements, to press the political decision, but on the contrary, people are calmly waiting for the government, for you – I mean you Bloco, PCP etc. – to solve things as they should be solved; they are more de-mobilised than ever, which is completely dramatic.'

This finding, which connects the decline of social movements to the rise of LPs, addresses a gap in the current literature, as already signalled by Treré, Jeppesen and Mattoni (2017, p. 417), who call for further research to establish 'whether the emergence of political parties out of broad-based social movements provides a voice for the movement, or conversely demobilizes it ... perhaps risking further co-optation by the top-down political process'.

That decline is also perceived by the interviewees from Podemos. According to Albarracín, 'Podemos was a political instrument for a social movement, when the 15M [*Indignados*] movement was going down'. Also, in an interview given to the left-wing magazine *Jacobin*, Josep Maria Antentas, a member of the Anticapitalistas inside Podemos, argued that 'the strategic hypotheses prevalent in the 1990s and the 2000s – changing the world without taking the power, creating free spaces, engaging in social activism while ignoring party and electoral politics, engaging in NGO institutional lobbying – simply got suddenly old' (Souvlis, 2016). At the same time, other Podemos interviewees did not seem to acknowledge such a decline, partly because their party's very emergence was so directly linked to the anti-austerity movements. As one of the MEP assistants, Conesa de Lara, put it when speaking of Podemos' presence in the EP, 'we are a delegation of a social movement'.

While there seemed to be a consensus among the interviewees regarding the current weakness of social movements and particularly of transnational social movements, there was no clear consensus regarding how parties should react to that. For example, Merlo suggested, among other things, that parties 'invest resources to support social movements coordinate themselves', while Albarracín went further than that, saying 'We need social movements ... we need to connect with new social movements'. More concretely, Maestu believes that the left

more broadly needs to ‘set up a European movement, involving the parties and the social movements, to coordinate the strategy towards Europe’. Also, Pureza from Bloco, in line with his previous comments, argued that ‘the capacity to develop social movements, both at the national and the European level – that would be at the heart of resistance and of the [left] alternative’.

Others seemed less open to the idea of parties trying to develop or coordinate social movements. As Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA explained,

‘There is also a tradition in our parties of being involved in the social movements but not trying to lead them, to manipulate them. SYRIZA and probably Bloco are not that powerful in civil society structures and there is a certain apprehension, ambivalent feelings towards SYRIZA in the civil society: “What are these people trying to do? Are they trying to manipulate us?”. Because behind us there is the communist tradition of not participating in anything that you cannot control, so SYN and SYRIZA tried to change that tradition and to respect the independence of social movements. It is unconceivable that the leadership of SYRIZA would discuss with the leadership of Podemos to lead a movement or to organise a movement; it just encourages others to participate.’

Thus, parties like SYRIZA may be reluctant to take the lead in the development and mobilisation of social movements given the latter’s own reluctance to engage with political parties. At the same time, it is worth stressing what has been noted in the previous chapter: that all three parties studied here have, at various degrees, moved away from their initial orientation towards social movements and strategy of social mobilisation as they became more successful electorally. Moreover, people in SYRIZA might be particularly reluctant to take the lead on the revival of social movements given that their party has been implementing austerity measures from a governmental position for the last three years.

Academics and academic networks

The involvement of intellectuals in left-wing politics is a well-researched topic in the wider humanities and social science literature, be it critical essays that have become classic references on the subject (e.g. Aron, 1955/2017; Benda, 1928/2017) or more specific studies focused on the relation between intellectuals and particular parties (e.g. Hazareesingh, 1991). Indeed, the transnational networking of left-wing intellectuals, which goes as back as the mid-

nineteenth century and the correspondence between Marx and Proudhon, has also received its share of attention: from books on the links between Western intellectuals and their Soviet counterparts in the interwar period (e.g. Stern, 2007) to studies on the influence of Western European Marxism on the Latin American intellectual left in the post-WWII era (e.g. Harris, 1979).

However, there is virtually no research specifically dealing with transnational networking of left-wing intellectuals in Europe following the fall of the Soviet-style regimes. That is in spite of the fact that the vacuum on the radical left that resulted from the post-1989 decline of LPs was partly filled not only by social movements, as pointed out in the previous section, but also by broader intellectual networks (Daiber & Hildebrandt, 2010, p. 1; Löwy & Stanley, 2002, pp. 128-129).

Furthermore, apart from some personal and highly anecdotal accounts (e.g. Sheehan, 2016), there is no published research on the current links between intellectuals and political parties in Southern Europe, despite their prominent presence, academics in particular, within the higher ranks of the three parties studied here. Thus, as detailed below, several high-profile SYRIZA politicians have a background in academia and so do many of Bloco's and Podemos' leading figures and elected representatives.

At the same time, the need for exchange and diffusion of ideas is one of the key incentives of party networking and cooperation (Macklin, 2013). The crisis should have seen that need increase for the three LPs concerned, as their shared opposition to austerity should have compelled them to exchange ideas, not only in terms of analysing the crisis and criticising austerity but also in terms of providing alternatives to it. Overall, the interviewees rated the need to exchange ideas as a factor in the post-2009 transnational cooperation among the three parties at 2.9, i.e. just short of 'quite significant'.

In this context, and given the historical prevalence of academics on the left and in these three parties in particular, it would be reasonable to expect that the informal cooperation among these parties would also take place via the academic or wider intellectual networks that these party academics might be involved in. Such a nexus can be conceived of in two ways: parties asking or encouraging their academics to cooperate with each other and academics putting pressure on their parties to cooperate with each other – both approaches are illustrated in this section.

By building on the backgrounds of the academics prominently involved with the three parties, where an academic is understood as someone with a teaching- or research-based career in academia, this section aims to identify whether there is any networking among them. If there

is, does it play any role in the transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos? The focus is, therefore, on academics, the potential links among them and how that might relate to their parties' networking and cooperation rather than on the content of such potential networking.

SYRIZA

In contrast to the staunchly working-class social base of the KKE, SYN was rather seen as the party of 'urban bourgeois intellectuals' (Kalyvas & Marantzidis, 2002, p. 681), not only in terms of membership but also of the voting base, as illustrated by a 2012 study identifying SYRIZA as the party with the highest number of PhD holders among the Greek electorate (cf. Quinn & Gani, 2015). That was also confirmed by Balabanidis, a left-wing intellectual himself, according to whom 'from the era of Eurocommunism and the KKE-Interior, there is a tradition of intellectuals joining the party, because it was always a pole of attraction for academics, authors, actors and stuff like that'.

But while SYN/SYRIZA has had for long such a profile, Balabanidis believes this did not play a role in the party's strategy until the 2012 electoral breakthrough. On the contrary: 'Until 2009, left academics were like some funny people that are stuck with Marx. But after the rise of SYRIZA, after 2012, the left-wing academics became really fashionable'. It was then when SYRIZA decided to tactically exploit this profile in order to persuade voters that it had the kind of experts needed to govern the country. As Balabanidis put it, 'SYRIZA used all this tradition of [having] academics to form a strong team of economists so as to show, "yes, we have the competence to govern the country, we have the know-how"'.

According to Wainwright though, it was not just about SYRIZA attempting to enhance its public credibility. The strategy of putting its academics to work, some of whom had no previous political experience (e.g. Costas Douzinas), also stemmed from the sheer need to fill in many public positions once coming into government. A British left-wing academic herself, who personally knows the current SYRIZA Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos, Wainwright pointed out in the non-structured interview given to the author that

'Given that they got into government so rapidly after they gained popular support, there was very little period of preparation as an opposition party. They needed expertise, so maybe the people with expertise were given fast track. Maybe they didn't do enough – and this is a wider problem – to identify the skills within their own ranks.'

Thus, of the 12 members of the first Tsipras cabinet who were also members of or close to SYRIZA (as the rest of the cabinet was made of independents or members of ANEL, SYRIZA's junior partner in the government coalition), half of them were academics (see *Table 2*). Similarly, out of the 17 SYRIZA members who have served at some point in the second Tsipras cabinet, 7 of them have a significant background in academia (see *Table 3*).

Table 2. SYRIZA academics in the 1st Tsipras cabinet³

Name	Governmental role	Relevant intellectual background
Giannis Dragasakis	Deputy Prime Minister	Political science and economics studies at LSE (late 1960s)
Giorgos Stathakis	Minister of Economy	PhD in economics at Newcastle University (1983)
Yanis Varoufakis	Minister of Finance	PhD in economics at the University of Essex (1987); taught economics at the University of Essex, University of East Anglia, University of Cambridge (1982-1988)
Nikolaos Kotzias	Minister for Foreign Affairs	Taught politics at the University of Oxford
Aristides Baltas	Minister of Culture and Sports	PhD in theoretical physics at the University of Paris XI (1971)
Nikos Pappas	Minister of State	PhD in economics at the University of Strathclyde (2013)

Table 3. SYRIZA academics in the 2nd Tsipras cabinet

Name	Governmental role	Relevant intellectual background
Giannis Dragasakis	Deputy Prime Minister	Political science and economics studies at LSE (late 1960s)
Giorgos Stathakis	Minister of Environment and Energy	PhD in economics at Newcastle University (1983)
Euclid Tsakalotos	Minister of Finance	PhD in economics at Oxford University (1989); taught economics at the University of Kent (1989-1993)
Nikolaos Kotzias	Minister for Foreign Affairs	Taught politics at the University of Oxford (?)
Konstantinos Gavroglou	Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs	PhD in physics at Imperial College (?)
Nikos Pappas	Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information	PhD in economics at the University of Strathclyde (2013)
Dimitris Tzanakopoulos	Minister of State and Government Spokesperson	PhD in law at the University of Oxford; taught law at UCL, Glasgow University, King's College, and Oxford University

³ The information about the academic background of the SYRIZA academics was gathered from the website of the Greek Parliament (n.d.) and, where available, the Wikipedia pages and personal websites of the people concerned, as well as the websites of their (previous or current) academic institutions. However, the information is not perfectly homogenous because of the limits of the information available online.

What stands out when looking at the ‘Relevant intellectual background’ column in both tables is that, despite coming from different generations, almost all SYRIZA academics who, over the past four years, have been part of the two Tsipras-led governments have studied and/or taught in one or several UK universities: five out of six in the first cabinet and seven out of seven in the second cabinet. Most of them have an expertise in economics or political science, which reflects SYRIZA’s strategic choice to present itself as a party of experts suited to run the country.

Outside the government, there are several other prominent SYRIZA members with a background in British universities, such as MPs Costas Douzinas and Fotini Vaki, or the Regional Governor of Attica, Rena Dourou. Thus, as shown in *Table 4*, fifteen people who, at some point, occupied significant political positions as members of SYRIZA since the start of the crisis – some of which are not party members any longer – have had ties with British academia. This striking feature has been noted in a couple of articles in the British press (Howarth, 2015; Quinn & Gani, 2015) but has not yet been discussed in the academic literature. As a result, there is only rather anecdotic evidence as to what explains that feature. The most significant source in that regard is the article by Quinn and Gani in *The Guardian*, the main British left-leaning newspaper.

One of the Greek academics living in the UK – although not affiliated to SYRIZA – whom they questioned, Vassilios Paipais, a lecturer in international relations at the University of St. Andrews, suggests that the lack of job opportunities in Greece forced many current Greek intellectuals to complete their studies and pursue academic careers in the UK. That differs from the older generations of Greek intelligentsia, who used to go to France to study or/and teach, from Nicos Poulantzas to the aforementioned minister Baltas. A factor that facilitated such a cultural reorientation is, according to Paipais, that English is now taught in Greek schools from an early age: ‘You rarely find a Greek nowadays that doesn’t learn English in school’ (Quinn & Gani, 2015). Elli Siapkidou, another Greek intellectual living in London quoted in this article, believes that the higher degree of pluralism to be found in British society and particularly London also explains the influx of left-wing Greek academics: ‘There is more room for different voices in the UK compared to other places. Marx used to live in London for example. I think it is a quite liberal society in terms of political view, so their work is objectively appreciated and not stigmatized’ (Quinn & Gani, 2015). Indeed, London also hosts every autumn the Historical Materialism Conference, one of the key events gathering radical left academics and intellectuals from around the world, where several SYRIZA academics, such as

Michalis Spourdalakis or Panagiotis Sotiris (now in Popular Unity), have attended over the time (Sheehan, 2016, pp. 54-55, p.167).

Table 4. Current or former SYRIZA high-profile members with ties to UK universities

Name	Key political role	UK university affiliation(s)
Giannis Dragasakis	Deputy Prime Minister	Political science and economics studies at LSE (late 1960s)
Giorgos Stathakis	Minister of Environment and Energy	PhD in economics at Newcastle University (1983)
Euclid Tsakalotos	Minister of Finance	PhD in economics at Oxford University (1989); taught economics at the University of Kent (1989-1993)
Yanis Varoufakis	Ex-Minister of Finance	PhD in economics at the University of Essex (1987); taught economics at the University of Essex, University of East Anglia, University of Cambridge (1982-1988)
Nikolaos Kotzias	Ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs	Taught politics at the University of Oxford
Nikos Pappas	Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information	PhD in economics at the University of Strathclyde (2013)
Dimitris Tzanakopoulos	Minister of State and Government Spokesperson	PhD in law at the University of Oxford; taught law at UCL, Glasgow University, King's College, and Oxford University
Konstantinos Gavroglou	Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs	PhD in physics at Imperial College
Costas Douzinas	MP for Piraeus A	PhD in Law at LSE; Taught law at Middlesex University and Lancaster University; Professor of Law and Director of the Institute for the Humanities at Birkbeck
Fotini Vaki	MP for Corfu	PhD in philosophy at the University of Essex
Rena Dourou	Regional Governor of Attica	MA in political science at the University of Essex
Marina Prentoulis	UK spokesperson of Syriza Member of Labour Party in London	PhD in political science at the University of Essex; Teaches politics and media at the University of East Anglia
Theano Fotiou	MP for Athens B	Taught architecture at UCL
Costas Lapavistas	Ex-MP for Imathia	PhD in economics at Birkbeck (1986); teaches economics at SOAS
Stathis Kouvelakis	Ex-member of SYRIZA's Central Committee	Teaches political theory at King's College

The links between SYRIZA and the UK are strong enough for the party to open a branch there in June 2012. Besides establishing links with the British left and activist groups

like the Greek Solidarity Campaign, SYRIZA UK has focused on recruiting among the substantial Greek student community there. The branch's membership 'is peppered with PhD students and academics, including some with tenure and others with PhDs through working in other sectors' (Quinn & Gani, 2015). As Siapkidou puts it, 'if Syriza represents the most highly educated of Greek society, then Syriza UK has that in an even more pronounced form' (Quinn & Gani, 2015).

The significant presence of left-wing Greeks in the British academia allowed them to forge links with British left-wing academics and intellectuals. In the aforementioned interview, Wainwright mentioned her own experience as an example of networking between SYRIZA academics and British left-wing academics leading to some more concrete form of cooperation:

'I worked once in the Greater London Council with an economist who had been Euclid's [Tsakalotos] teacher, Robin Murray; and he sent me and Murray papers about what the Troika were trying to do, just to see if we had any comments and if we could advise on how to combat the Troika. Obviously, we were limited in what we could do, but once we went over and talked to him and his officials about what criticisms were of the Troika; but I wouldn't want to say it was terribly important – maybe about a year ago, 2016, after the referendum.'

In conclusion, most of SYRIZA's prominent academics have ties with the UK universities, with a few others linked to German and French universities, and the rest to academic institutions in their own country. Most importantly, none of them seems to have any background in either Spanish or Portuguese universities. As Hibai Arbide Aza confirmed, some of SYRIZA's intellectuals have been 'close friends with many European intellectuals, but mainly intellectuals with Anglo-Saxon roots.'

Bloco

A salient presence of academics can also be noticed in the case of Bloco. Francisco Louçã, one of the party's co-founders and its former coordinator (1999-2011), is also a Full Professor of Economics with the Higher Institute of Economics and Management at the University of Lisbon (the Technical University of Lisbon until 2013), where he also completed his studies. Even his successor at the head of the party, Catarina Martins, although coming from a career in acting, still has a PhD in Languages and Modern Literatures from the Open University in Lisbon. Bloco's only MEP, Marisa Matias, gained a PhD in Sociology in 2009 at the University of Coimbra, where she also taught and did research as part of the Centre for Social Studies.

Furthermore, five of Bloco's nineteen MPs still seem to have a career in academia. As shown in *Table 5*, the backgrounds of Bloco's academics are overwhelmingly centred around domestic universities, in particular the Technical University of Lisbon/University of Lisbon and the University of Coimbra.

Table 5. Bloco academics in prominent political positions⁴

Name	Key political role	Relevant academic background
Francisco Louçã	Former party leader, currently a member of the Council of State	Professor of Economics at the University of Lisbon
Marisa Matias	MEP	PhD in Sociology and taught sociology at the University of Coimbra
Heitor de Sousa	MP	Economist, BA in Economics at the University of Lisbon
José Manuel Pureza	MP	Sociologist and author, professor of international relations at the University of Coimbra; visiting lecturer in Spain at the University of Seville and the University of the Basque Country
José Soeiro	MP	Sociologist and author, PhD in Sociology at the University of Coimbra
Mariana Mortágua	MP	Economist and author, MA in economics at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon; started PhD in economics at SOAS
Pedro Soares	MP	Professor of Geography at the University of Lisbon
Sandra Cunha	MP	Taught sociology at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon

Thus, they seem to have no significant connections to Greek or Spanish academia. The only exception is that of José Manuel Pureza, who had brief teaching spells at several universities in Spain. Also, Bloco's academics have no links to the UK either, apart from Mariana Mortágua, who before becoming an MP in 2013 had started a PhD in Economics at SOAS in London (the same academic institution where former SYRIZA MP Costas Lapavitsas teaches economics).

Of the people in the table above, only Pureza was interviewed by the author. He said his international academic contacts are 'mainly from Spain; I don't think I have had contact before with Greek scholars'. Indeed, he took part 'in the development of networks with Spanish people and an important part of them are now involved in or close to Podemos'. However, during the interview he was not able to remember any name in particular, but only mentioned 'an important group around the University of Seville, where there's a more heterogenous group, but some of them are involved in Podemos'.

⁴ The information about the academic backgrounds of Bloco academics was gathered from the party's parliamentary website (Bloco, n.d.) and, where available, the Wikipedia pages and the personal websites of the people concerned, as well as the websites of their (previous or current) academic institutions. However, the information is not perfectly homogenous because of the limits of the information available online.

Podemos

A clearer pattern can be detected in the academic backgrounds of the prominent academics in Podemos. The leader, Iglesias, has had the bulk of his relatively rich academic career (see Iglesias, 2013) at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), where he completed most of his studies and was a lecturer in political science from 2008 until being elected to the EP. Errejón, Podemos' secretary for policy, strategy and campaigning and an MP until his departure from the party at the beginning of 2019, also tied his academic career mostly to the UCM, as shown in *Table 6* below.

Table 6. Podemos academics with ties to UCM⁵

Name	Political roles	Relevant academic affiliation(s)
Pablo Iglesias	Podemos' Secretary-General; MP	MA in communication (2011) at the European Graduate School in Switzerland (2011); PhD in political science at UCM (2008); taught political science at UCM (2008-2014)
Íñigo Errejón	Podemos' secretary for policy and strategy and campaigning; MP	PhD in political science at UCM (2011); research visit at the University of California (2007-08)
Juan Carlos Monedero	Co-founder of Podemos; leading figure up until April 2015 but still involved with the party	Doctoral studies at the Heidelberg University in Germany (1989-1992); PhD in political science at UCM (1996); professor of political science and administration at UCM
Carolina Bescansa	Co-founder of Podemos; MP	Predocoral course at the San Diego University of California (1999-2000); PhD in political science at UCM (2005); professor with the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology at UCM
Pablo Bustinduy	Former head of Podemos' international secretariat; MP	BA in political science at UCM (2006); MA in history and political thought at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris (2007); started PhD in philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York
Eduardo Maura	Responsible with culture in Podemos; member of the board of the 25M Institute; MP	Started PhD in philosophy at UCM in 2011; taught and researched in the fields of critical theory and political philosophy at UCM and School of Visual Arts in New York
Txema Guijarro García	MP; General Secretary of the parliamentary confederal group of <i>Unidos Podemos</i>	Expert in sociology of consumption at the UCM; member of the Center for Political and Social Studies Foundation
Federico Severino	Director of Podemos' political foundation, the 25M Democracy Institute	BA in philosophy and sociology at the UCM; postgraduate studies at the LSE

⁵ The information about the academic background of the Podemos academics was gathered from the 'Transparency' page of the party's website (Podemos, 2019) and, where available, the Wikipedia pages, the personal websites of the people concerned and the websites of their (previous or current) academic institutions. However, the information is not perfectly homogenous because of the limits of the information available online.

A generation older than Iglesias and Errejón, Juan Carlos Monedero, one of Podemos' co-founders and its number-three man up until his resignation in April 2015 (Manetto, 2015), also developed his academic career around UCM, and so did the party's third co-founder, Carolina Bescansa, currently the general secretary of Podemos' group in the Congress of Deputies. Also, Pablo Bustinduy, who led the party's international secretariat before being elected in the Spanish parliament and will head the list for the upcoming European elections, studied political science at the UCM (2001-2006).

Overall, of all the party's 61 MPs (including those already mentioned) and 5 MEPs, 16 – i.e. nearly 25% of the total of 66 – have come to politics from academic careers, out of which 6 have studied and/or taught at the UCM (see *Table 6*). Other 5 of them (three MPs and two MEPs), without being academics as such, have also studied at UCM. Thus, the involvement with the UCM represents the main pattern of the academic background of Podemos' intellectuals, including its leading figures, past and present. Most other academics in the party are linked to other Spanish universities.

Only a few of them have studied or/and taught in academic institutions abroad, most of them in the USA, and not in Greece or Portugal, nor in the UK (apart from Federico Severino and the short research stays of a couple of others), which so many SYRIZA academics are linked to. The sole notable exception in this regard seems to be Nacho Álvarez Peralta, the party's secretary for the economy, who had a research fellowship at the University of Lisbon in 2014 – a connection that is discussed below. The only other pattern, although not strictly linked to their academic careers, has to do with the party leaders' work as consultants for several left-wing governments in Latin America, a connection that neither SYRIZA's nor Bloco's intellectuals display.

Transnational connections

As shown above, apart from Pureza's rather generic connections with Spanish academics from the University of Seville, some of whom are linked to Podemos, but which Pureza did not develop on, there are no visible connections between the intellectuals of any of the three parties and the academic environment from any of the other two countries. In other words, there seem to be no substantial links between the SYRIZA academics and Portugal or Spain, nor between the Bloco academics and Greece or Spain, nor between the Podemos academics and Greece or Portugal.

The one significant exception to this is the aforementioned case of Nacho Álvarez Peralta, whose academic career took him to Lisbon in 2014. Indeed, although this cannot be confirmed from the information available online about him, according to one of the Podemos interviewees, Alejandro Merlo, Peralta ‘is a close alumni/disciple of Louçã’, one of Bloco’s leading figures and academics. However, Merlo did not develop on that, so it cannot be determined whether their individual connection from academia has had any impact at all on the relationship between their respective parties.

Furthermore, while many of SYRIZA’s academics have been or still are linked to the UK, where they have studied and/or taught at university level, no such links are true of either Bloco’s or Podemos’ academics, with some very few and transient exceptions. Indeed, the backgrounds of the academics from the two Iberian parties are mainly linked to their respective countries, with a concentration of Podemos academics around the UCM and with most Bloco academics connected to either the University of Lisbon or the University of Coimbra (the Centre for Social Studies in particular). However, none of these three universities are linked to any academic from the other two parties. Also, while some of Podemos’ academics have had connections to universities in the USA, such links are not noticeable in the case of SYRIZA or Bloco academics.

In any case, it is interesting to note that if these academics have links to universities abroad, they are not somewhere else in Southern Europe but rather in Northern Europe (or North America) – one of the many expressions of the North-South cleavage that informs this thesis. Indeed, it would be worth investigating to what extent the crisis might have affected the transnational mobility and networking of academics in Southern Europe. Furthermore, it would be worth investigating to what extent the Europe-wide marketisation of higher education (see Lynch, 2006) might have undermined academics’ capacity to engage in public life, including political activism. Finally, language might also be a factor in the relative lack of links among the academics from the three parties, as it was indicated by several interviewees to be hindering party networking itself, as discussed in the final chapter of the thesis.

Of course, the absence of links between the academics from any of the three parties and the universities from any of the other two countries is not enough to firmly conclude that there is no networking among them, as they might have established contact at international conferences and other similar events. However, evidence of such contact has not been found, either in the existing literature, media materials, the biographical information available online or the data provided by the interviewees (which explains why this section lacks the kind of data visualisation typically employed in social network analyses). The only intellectual link, with

roots in academia, that any of these parties share relates to the ideas of left populism elaborated by Laclau and Mouffe, which both Podemos and SYRIZA exhibit to certain extents (Kiouпкиolis & Katsambekis, 2018; Ferraresi, 2016; Segatti & Capuzzi, 2016).

In the case of Podemos, the influence of the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe are explicitly acknowledged, both by Iglesias (2015*b*, p. 14; 2015*c*, pp. 23-28) and particularly by Errejón (2014). Indeed, Errejón and Mouffe (2016) co-authored an article together for the *Soundings* journal, and more recently Mouffe (2018, p. 95) mentioned Errejón in the acknowledgements of her latest book, *For a left populism*. As Ferraresi (2016, p. 55) also claims, Podemos ‘is the most consistent with Laclau’s ideas, being the one where the link with the philosopher is strongest and most evident’, although that might change following Errejón’s departure.

In the case of SYRIZA, the influence of Laclau and Mouffe is not as manifest. Ferraresi (2016, p. 58) points out that ‘none of Syriza’s members explicitly mentions him [Laclau] as intellectual mentor of the party, and there is no document, like Errejón’s doctoral thesis, that can testify their deliberate intention to follow his thought’. Nevertheless, the link between SYRIZA and Laclau and/or Mouffe is not displayed simply by the party’s rhetorical strategy but is also suggested by the connection of several former or current SYRIZA academics to Essex University, where almost 4,000 Greeks studied over the last few decades (Quinn & Gani, 2015). For this is also where, starting with the 1980s, Laclau and Mouffe taught for many years and where they established the so-called Essex School of discourse analysis.

More precisely, MP Fotini Vaki, Regional Governor of Attica Rena Dourou, and ex-Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis (not a member of SYRIZA any longer) studied or/and taught at Essex in the period when Laclau (who died in 2014) and Mouffe (who now teaches at the University of Westminster) were also there. Indeed, according to Howarth (2015), who is currently Co-Director of the Centre for Ideology and Discourse Analysis at the University of Essex, ‘the ideas that Dourou was exposed to while studying at Essex have had a clear influence on herself and Syriza. Her MA course was inspired by the late Professor Ernesto Laclau.’ (Howarth, 2015)

However, there is no evidence that Podemos’ intellectuals influenced by Laclau and/or Mouffe, such as Errejón, had any contact with those from SYRIZA, such as Dourou, at least not via Essex University. There is only one member of Podemos who works full-time for the party and who also studied at the Essex University, where he specialised in discourse analysis and theory of hegemony and populism – Adrià Porta Caballé. But there are no apparent links

between him and any of the SYRIZA intellectuals who have been affiliated with the Essex University.

Errejón, on the other hand, who has no visible connection to Essex, got in touch with Laclau' and Mouffe's ideas during a seminar in the last undergraduate year at UCM, as stated in the obituary he wrote following Laclau's death (Errejón, 2014). Later on, during a one-year research stay in Bolivia, he read Laclau's 2005 book *On populist reason*, which significantly influenced his own PhD thesis about the left populist government of Bolivia (Errejón, 2014). Thus, it was the concrete application of the populist strategy by the left-wing governments in Latin American countries like Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador – for which Errejón, Iglesias and Monedero worked as consultants – that won Errejón over to populism, subsequently also adopted by the rest of the Podemos leadership (Tremlett, 2015; Ferraresi, 2016, p. 56). It is, therefore, the Latin American connection (which is not present in the case of SYRIZA) rather than the Essex connection that explains the ideational influence of Laclau and Mouffe over Podemos.

Moreover, according to Hibai Arbide Aza, Podemos' leading intellectuals, inspired as they were by the example of those governments in Latin America, would have tried to help SYRIZA apply a similar populist strategy in Greece:

'Many intellectuals from Podemos started trying – because they worked as councillors in Venezuela or Ecuador – to do the same in Greece, come here and say, "we are the specialists and we have a plan for you", but they realised that SYRIZA had their own plan so they didn't need the Spanish specialists.'

However, that interesting claim was not corroborated by any other interviewee or by any piece of evidence in the existing literature and available media materials. Thus, despite sharing a populist influence, there are no concrete examples of intellectual networking between the academics of SYRIZA and those of Podemos.

Hence, it is no surprise that, overall, the interviewees have rated the significance of academic institutions and networks in the informal networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos at 2, i.e. merely 'somewhat significant', as shown in *Table 7* below. When it comes to their significance for the overall (formal and informal) process of networking and cooperation among the parties, the scores are similar if not lower – 1.3 for the pre-2009 period and 2.1 for the post-2009 period. While there is an increase since the start of the crisis, it is not particularly substantial, as academic networks are not even seen as quite significant, but barely as somewhat significant for the overall networking and cooperation among the three parties.

SYRIZA interviewees rated the significance of academic networks for the informal networking and cooperation among the three parties even below the overall average, at only 1.5. For example, Kanellopoulos admits that making use of academic networks ‘is our lack, we need to work on that. There is only Transform’. This shortcoming was also acknowledged by Giannopoulou: ‘I don’t think that as a left we have academic networks or what we have is not so active’. Thus, as Arbide Aza summed it up, while the three parties would probably want to make more use of their academics and their networks, ‘they have no time, they are too busy winning elections, or running the government in the case of SYRIZA.’

Table 7. Perceived significance of academic networks and institutions on a scale from 1 to 4 (where 1 = insignificant, 2 = somewhat significant, 3 = quite significant, and 4 = very significant)

	SYRIZA	Bloco	Podemos	Others	Overall
For informal networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos	1.5	1.7	2.5	2	2
For networking and cooperation between SYRIZA and Bloco before 2009	1.3	1.3	N/A	1.7	1.3
For networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos after 2009	2.3	1.5	2.5	2	2.1

That perception was also shared by the Bloco interviewees, who rated academic networks below 2 in each of the three categories. Pedrosa, while claiming that ‘most of the militants at the beginning were academics’, does not ‘see the relation’ between academia and his party’s transnational networking and cooperation. Also, José Gusmão, assistant of Bloco’s MEP Marisa Matias, member of the Political Bureau and second on the list for the upcoming European elections, maintained that ‘Louçã has a world-wide network of Marxist academics, but it didn’t play a role in the relations with these two parties’ (although Louçã himself spoke at the 2015 summer school organised by Podemos’ political foundation, 25MI, whose role is discussed in the following section).

The only of the five Bloco interviewees who assigned a role to academic networks is Pureza, although he did it from a subjective perspective:

‘Talking about my personal experience, I believe that one of the bases of further developments in political discussions between Greeks, Spanish and Portuguese was the kind of academic

debate which some of us were involved in, namely in the area of economics, the area of European studies, or European history and European integration, or social sciences more broadly. The fact that these people shared a critical approach to that area of study facilitated transforming the academic discourse into political action.’

However, he did not make it clear whether, and how, the ‘academic debate’ or the ‘shared critical approach’ mentioned by Pureza also translated into networking among academics – including himself – from these parties and, if it has, then among which academics more exactly. Perhaps that is why he only rated the role of academic networks at 2 rather than 3 or 4.

Only the interviewees from Podemos assigned, on average, a higher degree of significance than the overall average – 2.5. Indeed, two of them, Martínez Lobo and Conesa de Lara, both assistants of MEP Lola Sánchez Caldentey, rated the importance of academic networks at 4, the only ones of all interviewees to do so. According to the latter, ‘there are figures within universities that sometimes create the excuse for all the left to converge together on debate’. However, the two figures mentioned by him, Jeronim Capaldo (economist and research fellow at Tufts University in the USA) and Alfred-Maurice de Zayas (human rights expert at the UN), are not linked to any of the three parties (although Capaldo also attended the aforementioned summer school organised by 25MI).

Moreover, another interviewee from Podemos, Albarracín, admitted that among the academics from the three parties there are ‘only personal links in the academic environment’, without giving any concrete examples though. Indeed, as Maestu summed it up rather prosaically, ‘There hasn’t been networking among the academics of the three parties.’ Thus, even the responses of Podemos’ interviewees failed to indicate the existence of any concrete networking, not to mention cooperation, among the academics from the three parties.

Wider networking and cooperation of left academics and intellectuals

The lack of any visible or significant networking and cooperation among the academics from these three parties does not mean that other European left-wing academics do not play a role at all in the wider transnational networking and cooperation of the parties concerned here. SYRIZA in particular came to the forefront of much of the international left’s attention and solidarity in the run up to and the aftermath of its electoral victory in January 2015.

For example, during the referendum week in Greece in the summer of 2015, SYRIZA asked Costas Douzinas (who was not an MP at the time but still teaching in London) to coordinate a petition (see “Greeks, don’t give in”, 2015) to be signed by international academics and intellectuals in support of the *Oxi* [‘No’] vote in the referendum. Douzinas,

whom Balabanidis identified as one of those ‘who work and intervene in the transnational networks of intellectuals’, without giving any more details though, recalls this moment in his 2017 book, *SYRIZA in power*:

‘On the Tuesday morning [of the week of the referendum], I received in London a worried phone-call from SYRIZA headquarters in Athens. I was asked to draft and circulate among international academics and intellectuals a petition supporting Oxi. ... It was published on the *Guardian* website the same afternoon and in its pages the following day. By Wednesday morning, when I flew to Athens, close to one thousand prominent academics had signed the petition. Moving messages of support and solidarity accompanied the signatures. A well-known Italian Law professor wrote that ‘it would be important to have available Greek flags to hang on the balconies of the people through Europe in solidarity as we did with the Rainbow flags during the Iraq assault’. ... While the European establishment was going all out in an attempt to cow the Greeks into submission, academics the world over saw the referendum as an opportunity for democracy.’ (Douzinas, 2017, p. 157)

The initiative reflected SYRIZA’s strategy to present itself as a party of experts that, more than that, is supported by international experts from various academic fields. Such an appeal came on the background of the party’s relative political isolation at the EU level, at least at the time, and of sustained attacks from the political opposition and biggest part of the mass media at home – one of the key incentives for SYRIZA’s transnational cooperation, as discussed in the final chapter.

The petition was signed by famous left-wing academics and intellectuals like Étienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Alain Badiou, Tariq Ali and, indeed, Chantal Mouffe (some of whom continued to publicly defend the SYRIZA government even after its U-turn in July 2015 – see Žižek, 2015). However, out of the 85 names available on the *Guardian* website, there is only one Spanish intellectual (Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon), who has no identifiable connection to Podemos though, and there are no Portuguese intellectuals at all. This example supports, therefore, the earlier conclusion regarding the lack of networking among the academics from the three parties.

By contrast, during the campaign for the 2016 Spanish elections, 177 economists from universities all around the world signed a manifesto in support of Unidos Podemos (Podemos’ electoral alliance with IU). The signatories included Francisco Louçã from Bloco, who was presented simply as a professor at the University of Lisbon, and Marica Frangakis from SYRIZA, who was presented merely as a member of the Board of Nicos Poulantzas Institute, SYRIZA’s political foundation (Europa Press, 2016). Avoiding their party affiliations while emphasising their academic or intellectual affiliations might indicate that Unidos Podemos

wanted, similarly to SYRIZA, to show that it has the support of experts rather than members of other LPs. However, it cannot be established whether the support given by Louçã and Frangakis was due to their links to Podemos or to IU, which also has its own, older, links with Bloco and SYRIZA respectively, not the least via the PEL (which Podemos is not a member of). Furthermore, it is rather telling that none of the prominent economists of SYRIZA, such as Giorgos Stathakis, Yiannis Milios or Euclid Tsakalotos, was among the 177 signatories. That might be explained by developments in the two parties' relationship, discussed in the next chapter.

Helena Sheehan (2016) provides a personal account of her interaction with SYRIZA and the wider Greek left between 2012 and 2016, in what represents one of the very few primary sources on networking and cooperation among left-wing intellectuals in Europe today. Sheehan, a Professor emerita in philosophy at Dublin City University and a well-known figure of the Irish left, recalls several instances where international intellectuals engaged in solidarity with SYRIZA or people from SYRIZA sought such solidarity. For instance, in a conversation from the autumn 2012 with Costas Lapavistas (a UK-based academic and at the time a member of SYRIZA's Left Platform), 'he stressed the need to build international solidarity. He put a proposition to me, asking me to be part of an international network of political thinkers that they were forming. I said that I would be honoured.' (Sheehan, 2016, p. 28)

That idea did not come to fruition. What SYRIZA did do was to help establish, in 2016, the Institute for Alternative Policies (ENA), which is independent of the party's political foundation (NPI). ENA describes itself as 'an initiative of social, economic, political and legal scientists operating democratically', whose 'critical research activity aims at finding and promoting responses to critical economic, social, environmental and cultural problems in Greece and Europe' (ENA, n.d.). Indeed, there is an explicit focus on the possibilities of social change in Southern Europe: 'A new model could thus be created in Greece and the other countries of the European South, combining advanced forms of democracy, social self-interest and social justice on a strong economy of needs and a broad base of common goods' (ENA, n.d.).

Balabanidis was the only interviewee though to talk about ENA:

'It is mostly an independent network of intellectuals and policy makers ... a quite interesting effort to gather intellectuals, not only from Greece, but also from the European level, and it is quite close to SYRIZA and it is something parallel to the NPI; but it is more focused on the policy-making, which is something that SYRIZA never had, and now that they are in

government they try to make networks not generally of intellectuals but specialists in public policy and policy-making.’

Despite what Balabanidis said and despite ENA’s own claims that its ‘Advisory Council [is] formed through the participation of distinguished members of the academic community and of Greek and international citizens’, the Council only consists of Greek academics, including some of the SYRIZA academics mentioned above, such as Costas Douzinas and Aristidis Baltas. Thus, Lapavitsas’ idea was implemented only at a national level. Moreover, Sheehan (2016, p. 172) makes the very interesting claim that Lapavitsas’ own ‘internationally respected’ economic expertise was ignored by his government while he served as a SYRIZA MP between January and September 2015. Most likely, that was due to Lapavitsas being one of the few high-profile SYRIZA politicians advocating the need for an exit from the Eurozone (see Flassbeck & Lapavitsas, 2015), which would suggest that SYRIZA sought expertise to the extent that it suited its ideological outlook, in this case its commitment to Eurozone membership.

Finally, the most explicit initiative to bring international left-wing academics together and make use of their expertise came from Transform, which in 2013 launched the Akademia Network. Self-described as ‘a network of left-wing academics contributing to counter hegemonic thinking’ (Transform, 2014a), it is made of several working groups corresponding to the fields of history, economy and sciences. The network was established on the same assumption as this section, that

‘there are new potentialities of cooperation between critical researchers and the European Left, as well as an emergency to build political and intellectual dynamics – not only in favor of a breach with the neoliberal logic, but also to contribute in providing alternatives’ (Transform, 2014b).

The coordinating team has four members, including Elena Papadopoulou from the NPI, who at the time was also a scientific advisor to SYRIZA’s parliamentary group.

According to the archive of events on Transform’s website (Transform, 2019), the Akademia Network organised five events between January 2014 and May 2015, out of which one was attended by a SYRIZA academic, one by a Bloco academic and one by academics from both parties. The latter conference took place in Madrid in January 2014 under the title “University, Science and Research: European Resistances and Alternatives”, in which Sissy Velissariou from SYRIZA and Irina Castro from Bloco participated as guest speakers. However, there is no sign of activity from the Akademia Network as of 2015, while its website (<http://www.akademia-left.org>) was not active at the time of writing in March 2019. The

limited lifespan of this network might explain why none of the interviewees mentioned it, not even those working for Transform; however, that might also be due to it being assimilated to the role played by Transform in the process of left-wing networking and cooperation, discussed in the following section.

Political party foundations and Transform

As outlined in Chapter 1, the three parties either have political foundations of their own, such as NPI in the case of SYRIZA and 25MI in the case of Podemos, or a political foundation close to the party, such as CUL:TRA in the case of Bloco. All these three foundations are affiliated, to different degrees, to the Transform, the political foundation of the PEL. Regardless of the differences in the degree of autonomy from their respective parties, all these foundations are distinct organisations, which is why they are discussed in this chapter rather than the following one on formal networking and cooperation.

This section aims to establish whether these party foundations as well as the pan-European network they are associated with play a role in the networking and cooperation among the three parties and, if so, whether that role has become more significant since the start of the crisis. For that purpose, the discussion builds not only on the data provided by the interviewees but also on a thorough examination of the foundations' online archives to reveal which events they might have participated together in, such as conferences, workshops, summits, summer schools, forums, book launches etc. For these events, generically labelled as 'conferences and summits' in the questionnaire, have been indicated by the interviewees as the most important vehicles for transnational informal networking and cooperation among the three parties, with an overall average score of 3.2 (i.e. more than 'quite significant'). Therefore, like the previous one, this section is concerned with the patterns and frequency of the process of networking rather than its content.

NPI (SYRIZA)

Just like the party, NPI has a salient transnational orientation. It aims to build links with the 'polymorphous social movements in many countries and the accompanying new forms of internationalism' and, thereby, take part in 'the dialogue that is unfolding all over the world' (Nicos Poulantzas Institute, 2018). Thus, among its key activities, NPI

‘organises – either autonomously or in collaboration with other institutions in Greece or abroad – research, seminars, conferences, lectures, workshops, festivals ... Collaboration and coordination of activities with other institutes in Greece and abroad – research foundations, universities, political organisations, cultural institutions etc. – for the development of common activities, exchange of documentation and ideas, participation in common research or other programmes on issues that relate to Institute’s aims.’ (Nicos Poulantzas Institute, n.d.)

Transnationally, NPI is a founding member of Transform, whose board included from the beginning Haris Golemis, the director of the NPI between 1999 and 2017, who now is Scientific and Strategic Advisor to the Board of Transform. Angelina Giannopoulou, who works for Transform from the NPI headquarters in Athens, stressed that NPI ‘is a key member organisation of Transform ... we have a close cooperation’.

NPI also mentions its links with the PEL and GUE/NGL via Transform rather than via SYRIZA itself, which might indicate a certain degree of autonomy from the party in its transnational affairs (although many NPI members are also SYRIZA members). That relative autonomy is arguably reflected in NPI’s willingness to engage with organisations that do not necessarily see eye to eye with the party and might even criticise it. At SYRIZA’s 2nd Congress in October 2016, Golemis (2016) called for the party to engage with both ‘groups and initiatives friendly to or tolerating SYRIZA (i.e. the Party of European Left, GUE/NGL, Transform, AlterSummit, even the pro-European DiEM25 of Yanis Varoufakis) or/and hostile to it (i.e. PLAN B)’.

Furthermore, in that same speech, Golemis (2016) argued for SYRIZA to seek

‘alliances at a geographic level (with the countries of Southern Europe) ... [and] pursue a policy of “enhanced cooperation” with the Southern Europe’s parties of the radical Left, aiming to promote common policy proposals and coordinated interventions at EU Councils of Ministers (mainly at ECOFIN), at the Eurogroup, but also within the European movements’.

Hence, it would be expected for the NPI – which Golemis was still director of at the time of the speech – to reflect in its activities this orientation towards ‘parties of the radical Left’ in Southern Europe and/or their respective political foundations.

Giannopoulou confirmed the emphasis that both the NPI and Transform place on cooperation among left forces in Southern Europe and the three parties in particular:

‘Not only me, Transform and also Haris Golemis, as director of NPI, strongly believe that we have to create a strategy for regional cooperation of the South of Europe. And these parties, SYRIZA, Podemos, IU and Bloco should have a key role in this. The European South shares similarities: economic, political, societal etc. The left is quite strong in the South. We have to optimise all these factors in order to create in the South a regional cooperation within the

European one, maybe take lessons from the integration process in the Latin American countries. But we have to do something so our countries can survive but also to transform European politics; and we know for sure that Greece cannot do it by itself, Spain cannot do it by itself etc.’

Indeed, according to her, after 2009 the NPI ‘took many initiatives, they organised many events where they invited many international speakers, European leaders of the left’. That is also confirmed by Balabanidis, who claimed ‘the NPI has organised [debates] here in Greece all these years. They’ve done a really nice work in gathering intellectuals from different radical left parties here in Athens and discussing the Greek crisis and the crisis in the European South’.

However, that does not seem to be particularly reflected in the events organised by the NPI – at least not in the light of the information available in the online archive of Transform’s (2019) website, as the NPI’s English web page is very scarce, with only two other materials in English apart from the text of presentation referenced here. As shown in *Table 8*, since 2010 and up until the end of 2018, out of the 14 events with the NPI as a main organiser that had international participants (all held in Athens), 8 involved SYRIZA members and of those only 2 involved also members from Bloco and/or Podemos or their respective foundations. Overall, only one event (number 10 in the table), co-organised with SYRIZA, Transform and PEL, featured participants from all three parties or respective foundations: nineteen from SYRIZA/NPI, one from Bloco and one from Podemos. The other event (number 2), which involved only someone from Bloco but not Podemos, was also a joint endeavour with SYRIZA, Transform and PEL.

The information in *Table 8* only covers the period since 2010, so a comparison with the pre-crisis period is not possible in this particular case. Nevertheless, it is still rather striking that during the crisis NPI (co-)organised in Athens only two events where anybody from Bloco/CUL:TRA or Podemos/25MI took part in as speakers and only one event where representatives of both these two parties or their foundations attended. Even those two events were not organised by the NPI alone but in collaboration with SYRIZA, the PEL and Transform. Thus, there seems to be a gap between rhetoric and deeds when it comes to the NPI’s orientation towards left cooperation in Southern Europe.

This assessment seems to also be confirmed by the SYRIZA members who have been interviewed, who have not had anything to say about the NPI (Giannopoulou and Balabanidis, quoted above, are not party members). That was in spite of the fact that the questionnaire featured three questions about the role of political foundations in party networking and

cooperation: regarding pre-2009 period, post-2009 period and informal networking and cooperation in particular.

Table 8. International events with NPI as main organiser since 2010.

	International events	Relevant participants*
1	Conference: “The Past of Three PIGS” – June 2010, Athens	–
2	International Conference: “Public Debt and Austerity Policies in Europe” – February-March 2011, Athens	Rena Dourou (SYN), Dimitris Vitsas (SYN), Yiannis Dragasakis (SYN), Panos Trigazis (SYN), George Stathakis (SYN), Euclid Tsakalotos (SYN), Theodore Paraskevopoulos (SYRIZA), Yiannis Baniias (SYRIZA), Panagiotis Lafazanis (SYRIZA), Yianis Milios (SYN), Dimitris Papadimoulis (SYN), Yiannis Tolios (SYN), Yiannis Bournous (SYN), Nasos Iliopoulos (SYN), Natasa Theodorakopoulou (SYN), Nicos Houndis (SYRIZA), Yianis Varoufakis (SYRIZA), Nikos Kotzias (SYRIZA&NPI), Gabriel Sakellaridis (SYN&NPI), Nikos Petralias (NPI), Maria Karamessini (NPI), Elena Papadopoulou (NPI), Sissy Velissariou (NPI), Haris Golemis (SYRIZA&NPI); Mariana Mortágua (Bloco)
3	5th Annual Nicos Poulantzas Lecture: Erik Olin Wright – December 2011, Athens	Euclid Tsakalotos (SYRIZA)
4	6th Annual Lecture in Memory of Nicos Poulantzas: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on “Europe and the Bull Market” – December 2012, Athens	–
5	A Series of History Talks in Athens: First World War: The Beginning of a New World – January-March 2014, Athens	Sía Anagnostopoulou (SYRIZA)
6	Left Strategy Project 2014: International Workshop. Police Democratisation in Europe – November 2014, Athens	Haris Golemis (SYRIZA&NPI), Theofanis Papageorgiou (SYRIZA), Dimosthenis Papadatos Anagnostopoulos (SYRIZA), Tasos Mavropoulos (SYRIZA), Andreas Karitzis (SYRIZA), Dimitris Tsoukalas (SYRIZA), Tasia Christodouloupoulou (SYRIZA), Athina Athanasiou (NPI), Aristidis Baltas (SYRIZA&NPI), Vasiliki Katrivanou (SYRIZA)
7	Michel Bauwens in Athens: Applied Policies and the Concept of ‘Commons’ – November 2014, Athens	–
8	International Poulantzas Conference: “Crisis, State and Democracy. Working with Nicos Poulantzas’ theory to confront authoritarian capitalism” – December 2014, Athens	Konstantinos Tsoukalas (SYRIZA), Georgios Daremas (NPI), Haris Golemis (SYRIZA&NPI), Makis Kouzelis (NPI), Aristidis Baltas (NPI), Marica Frangakis (NPI), Eleni Portaliou (SYRIZA)
9	Series of panel discussions: “From Debt and Austerity to a Reclaim of Democracy” – April-June 2015, Athens	Athena Athanasiou (NPI), Haris Golemis (SYRIZA/NPI), Tasos Koronakis (SYRIZA)
10	International Conference: “Building Alliances to Fight Austerity and Reclaim Democracy in Europe” – March 2016, Athens	Panos Rigas (SYRIZA), Rania Antonopoulou (SYRIZA), Fotini Vaki (SYRIZA), Kostas Chrysogonos (SYRIZA), Yiannis Dragasakis (SYRIZA), Euclid Tsakalotos (SYRIZA), Dimitris Papadimoulis (SYRIZA), George Ververis (SYRIZA), Marika Frangaki (SYRIZA), Chara Kafantari (SYRIZA), Giorgos Chondros (SYRIZA), Yiannis Mouzalas (SYRIZA), Costas

		Douzinas (SYRIZA), Haris Golemis (SYRIZA&NPI), Vassiliki Katrivanou (SYRIZA), Nasos Iliopoulos (SYRIZA), Athina Athanasiou (NPI), Maria Karamesini (NPI); Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA); Marisa Matias (Bloco), Renato Soeiro (Bloco & PEL); Tania Gonzalez Peñas (Podemos)
11	Copyright Against Community – April 2016, Athens	–
12	European Conference: “Inequalities, Neoliberalism and European Integration: Progressive Answers” – November 2017, Athens	Maria Karamessini (NPI), Marica Frangakis (NPI), Yannis Dragasakis (SYRIZA), Nasos Iliopoulos (SYRIZA), Effie Achtsioglou (SYRIZA), Natasa Theodorakopoulou (SYRIZA&NPI), Kostadinka Kuneva (SYRIZA), Jason Schinas-Papadopoulos (YoS), Panos Lambrou (SYRIZA), Anna Vouyioukas (SYRIZA), Yiannis Bournous (SYRIZA), Dimitris Papadimoulis (SYRIZA), Elena Papadopoulou (SYRIZA), Theano Fotiou (SYRIZA), Euclid Tsakalotos (SYRIZA), Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA)
13	11th Annual Nicos Poulantzas Memorial Lecture. “Angela Davis: Abolition Feminism, Theories & Practices” – December 2017, Athens	–
14	12th Annual Nicos Poulantzas Memorial Lecture: “Rosa Luxemburg’s open-ended future: Socialism or Barbarism, Internationalism or Nationalism” – December 2018, Athens	–

* Representatives of any of the three parties or related political foundations, with the names of those from Bloco/CUL:TRA and/or Podemos/25MI in bold

Nevertheless, the SYRIZA members rated the role of political foundations at 2.3 for the pre-2009 period and 3 for the post-2009 period as well as 2.8 for the informal networking and cooperation, which does indicate an increase in their perceived significance during the crisis. On the other hand, in terms of the foundations’ wider impact, Kanellopoulos claimed, rather bluntly, that ‘for the European political arena, [they have] zero significance’.

CUL:TRA (Bloco)

Unlike SYRIZA, Bloco does not have an official political foundation. Nevertheless, the party has developed a tight relation with the Cultural Cooperative of Labour and Socialism (CUL:TRA), with several members of the latter being also party members, such as MP José Soeiro or Tatiana Moutinho. As the latter explains, CUL:TRA is ‘not the political foundation of Bloco, but engages many people from Bloco, because Bloco had several tendencies, so it’s the political foundation of one of those tendencies that includes the current leadership’. The strong link is also reflected in CUL:TRA being the only Portuguese political foundation affiliated to Transform.

According to the Transform (n.d.a) website,

‘CUL:TRA’s mission is to promote research, training and publications in the fields of history, political science, economy, sociology and cultural issues related to the working classes. It focuses on the state of society in Portugal and beyond, and, in collaboration with similar organizations in other countries, produces analyses of the new reality.’

However, CUL:TRA does not have a website, which hinders the collection of data regarding the institute’s activity. Google searches of its name in both Portuguese and English did not reveal, as of January 2019, much relevant information apart from CUL:TRA organising back in 2008 the largely academic Karl Marx International Congress, which nobody from SYN/SYRIZA/NPI or the future Podemos attended.

Facebook represents the main source of information about the institute’s activity. The ‘Events’ section of CUL:TRA’s (2019) Facebook page, which was created in January 2012, lists 29 events that the foundation has organised or co-organised ever since up until the end of 2018. However, only three of them seem to have had international speaking guests: the conference “Populism and crisis”, April 2012, with the participation of Walter Baier, the coordinator of Transform; “A slow impatience”: A day of homage to Daniel Bensaïd, December 2014, with Walter Baier again; and the session “Portugal-Spain: So far, so close – building bridges between the Portuguese left and the Spanish left”, November 2017, with two representatives of Bloco, Adriano Campos and Hugo Monteiro, and two representatives of IU rather than Podemos. The last event is the most relevant to the topic at hand. However, it is telling that it occurred almost eight years after the start of the crisis in Southern Europe. One would have expected that the left in the two neighbouring countries would have already built ‘bridges’ by then.

More importantly though, CUL:TRA did not organise any event attended by anyone from either SYRIZA/NPI or Podemos/25MI. That apparent lack of involvement with the other two parties and/or their respective foundations was also reflected in the answers of the Bloco interviewees. They rated the significance of political foundations for party networking and cooperation at 1.5 for the pre-2009 period (with two answering ‘Don’t know’), at 1.8 for the post-2009 period and at 2 for the informal networking and cooperation in particular. While this shows a certain increase in the perceived significance of foundations, they are still seen as less than ‘somewhat significant’ for the overall process of networking and cooperation. As Fazenda pointed out, while CUL:TRA does cooperate with NPI through Transform, that cooperation does not have an impact on the one between the parties. Indeed, according to him, ‘in Bloco they [CUL:TRA] are not so influential on the political guidance; they never were’.

Pureza, who attended several events organised by CUL:TRA, also acknowledges the limited role played by CUL:TRA in Bloco's transnational relations, which he contrasts with the case of other political foundations, such as Die Linke's Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS):

'CUL:TRA is different from NPI or Rosa, it's less attached to the party. ... We rely on the capacity of organising things of entities like RLS or Transform or GUE/NGL ... parties themselves don't have that much capacity. ... The capacity of Rosa is an important one, it's completely different from CUL:TRA, and it has been at the heart of improving the channels of dialogue and organising thematic meetings; I've been to one in Italy and another one in Spain.'

Such contrast may be explained not only by CUL:TRA not being the official foundation of Bloco, but also by the smaller size of Bloco compared to SYRIZA as well as the less generous public funding for political foundations in Portugal compared to Germany (see Sieker, 2016) – another instance of the North-South economic gap.

25MI (Podemos)

The political institute of Podemos, 25MI, was established shortly after the 2014 European elections, so not long after the creation of the party itself. The rather broad goal of the institute is to produce 'political and cultural analysis and formation' (*Instituto 25M Democracia*, 2018) and is part of the Podemos leadership's communication strategy to try and convey its messages to wider audiences (Cabanillas, 2017). For that purpose, 25MI's main activities include publishing the magazine *La Circular* [The Circular] and the book series *Argumenta* [Argues] as well as, more importantly, organising Podemos' summer and autumn schools.

While Podemos is not a member of the PEL (and, as shown in the following chapter, is unlikely to become one any time soon), the 25MI is an observer participant to its political foundation Transform. As the director of the institute, Federico Severino, said in a press interview, 'We are now collaborating with the Transform network, which is the network where many of the foundations of the traditional left-wing parties are involved, which is the space we have encountered in Europe through the GUE/NGL' (Riveiro, 2017). In terms of international links, Severino also mentions the 'municipalist axis' between some cities in Italy and cities in Spain where Podemos is in government, which represents 'a fundamental connection vector to know what is happening and to continue working to recover a democratic Europe of the peoples' (Riveiro, 2017).

More importantly though, a newspaper article from 2017 includes a quote from Severino that mentions the left-wing parliamentary majority in Portugal backing the PS

minority government as a potential model for the Spanish left (Cabanillas, 2017), a model that would indeed be replicated in June 2018, when PSOE became a minority government with the parliamentary support of the Podemos-IU coalition. This similarity would make it plausible for 25MI to engage in networking and cooperation with CUL:TRA or/and Bloco.

25MI has organised so far four summer/autumn schools, in July 2015, September 2016, July 2017 and October 2018 (*Instituto 25M Democracia*, n.d.). Overall, as shown in *Table 9* below, there have been eight sessions in these four schools where representatives of SYRIZA/NPI or Bloco/CUL:TRA took part in as speakers. Five of these sessions had speakers from Bloco, three from SYRIZA, but none from both. The stronger and more consistent presence of people from Bloco, who have participated in all the schools so far, reflects both the more similar political context mentioned above and – as developed in the following chapter – the evolution of Podemos’ relationship with SYRIZA in the aftermath of Tsipras’ U-turn. Indeed, no SYRIZA or NPI representative came to speak in the last two schools organised by 25MI. Instead, both these schools were attended, as speakers, by members of Mélenchon’s party-movement LFI – rather telling given that Mélenchon is arguably the most outspoken critic of SYRIZA among the leaders of the European left (see Soudais, 2018).

Table 9. Sessions from 25MI summer/autumn schools with speaking guests from SYRIZA/NPI or Bloco/CUL:TRA

2015 summer school	2016 autumn school	2017 summer school	2018 autumn school
‘The anatomy of debt and the ECB’ – Francisco Louçã (Bloco)	‘Female precarity and employment: The forgotten workers (houseworkers and carers)’ – Kostadinka Kuneva (SYRIZA)	‘To the Portuguese! Alternatives of government’ – Marisa Matias (Bloco)	‘South or not South. In the face of Europe of lobbies, democracy’ – Catarina Martins (Bloco)
‘Correlation of forces in Europe’ – Yiannis Bournous (SYRIZA)	‘The future of Europe’ – Jorge Costa (Bloco)	‘The Lepenisation of the spirits and the Macronisation of European politics’ – Marisa Matias (Bloco)	
‘The Greek experience’ – Marica Frangakis (NPI)			

Other than that, the Facebook page of the 25MI lists 63 events organised or co-organised by the institute since October 2017 up until the end of 2018 (excluding the 2018 Autumn School mentioned above). However, only one of these was attended by a representative of LPs from outside Spain. It was Francisco Louçã from Bloco, who was invited in May 2018 to speak in a conference entitled ‘Is another Europe possible?’, where he was also joined among others, by one of Podemos MEPs, Miguel Urbán. On the other hand, a

conference from the same month entitled ‘Greece in the air’ did not have any speaking guests from SYRIZA or NPI.

It is telling that only two of the six interviewees from Podemos explicitly mentioned 25MI when asked about the role of political foundations, with neither of them developing on its role. On the contrary, Albarracín mentioned RLS (Die Linke’s foundation) before 25MI. Only the Spanish journalist Hibai Arbide Aza – who rated the significance of political foundations at 1 for before 2009 and at 2 for after 2009 – made a point with respect to the role of 25MI: ‘25M Institute is a bit more important; they can have wider theoretical work, but they are too busy in their daily life’.

Thus, when asked about the importance of political foundations for their party’s informal transnational networking and cooperation with SYRIZA and Bloco, the six interviewees from Podemos rated it, on average, at 1.8, i.e. less than ‘somewhat significant’. They gave them a higher score though with regard to the wider process of networking and cooperation, at 2.3, i.e. ‘somewhat significant’, which indicates that links between political foundations and parties are perceived as rather formalised. Therefore, their rating of the importance of party foundations for the post-2009 networking and cooperation is almost halfway between that of SYRIZA (3) and that of Bloco (1.8).

Overall, the interviewees from the three parties rated party political foundations at 2.4 for the post-2009 period, compared to 2 for the pre-2009 period. This shows a slight increase in the perceived importance of party foundations for the transnational networking and cooperation among the parties, but not a substantial one, as they are still deemed as less than ‘quite significant’.

Transform

According to Article 2, point 4(d) of the Regulation No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, one of the key tasks of these foundations is to be ‘a framework for national political foundations, academics, and other relevant actors to work together at European level’. In other words, they are to play a role in the networking and cooperation of the national political foundations that compose it. These foundations are also supposed to be generators and vehicles of information, ideas and policies for their parties, which sometimes may lack the capacity to keep up with all the developments of European

integration (Bardi et al., 2014; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2011), which at least in the Eurozone has only accelerated in reaction to the crisis (Parker & Pye, 2017).

Established in June 2007, Transform became one year later the recognised political foundation of the PEL, comprising of the political foundations of constituent national parties of the Euro-party. However, Transform is not merely the sum of its parts but an entity of its own, with its own staff and activities; nor is it limited to these party foundations, but describes itself as a ‘cooperative project of independent non-profit organisations, institutes, foundations, and individuals’ that ‘intends to use its work in contributing to peaceful relations among peoples and a transformation of the present world’ (Transform, n.d.b).

As of March 2019, Transform has 19 full members from 13 European countries (not only EU member states), including NPI and CUL:TRA. It also has 14 observer members from 12 countries, including 25MI. Among its ‘friends’, Transform lists PEL, GUE/NGL, AlterSummit, ATTAC, Blockupy, the think tank Transnational Institute, the European Progressive Economists Network, and Networked Labour.

Transform has been only marginally discussed so far in the literature (see Calossi, 2016, pp. 185-188; Hudson, 2012, pp. 58-62), with no study specifically focusing on it. As expected, it generally follows the same political line as the PEL. Indeed, according to Giannopoulou, it does have an impact on that political line:

‘I think that Transform influenced and influences, in a way that maybe sometimes is not very obvious, the strategic guidelines of the PEL or the initiatives that the party thinks are important, or maybe issues that have to be analysed and the party does not have the tools and the methodology to do it – it’s the ideological reservoir of the PEL.’

Thus, just like the PEL but perhaps in a more homogenous manner, Transform asserts an equally firm and critical commitment to European integration (Calossi, 2016, p. 188). More exactly, Transform (n.d.b) believes ‘the noble and progressive idea of European unification cannot be asserted in the face of the ubiquitous and growing nationalisms and the far right by uncritically defending the status-quo of the existing European Union’, which is why it ‘aims at providing spaces for free and unprejudiced discussion of democratic alternatives to pave the way towards a democratically and peacefully united Europe’.

At the core of the network’s activity lies the coordination and cooperation among its members:

‘The members of the transform! network coordinate their scientific and educational work, cooperatively organise theoretical and educational events and discussions regarding key issues for the democratic left in Europe and the world, and work together on publications and

educational materials aimed at an intercontinental dialogue of the left and its scientific and educational institutions.’ (Transform, n.d.b)

Thus, a thorough examination of the events archive on the Transform (2019) website revealed that between 2009 and 2018 (including) there have been 138 events that were either organised or co-organised by Transform, either as stand-alone events or as part of larger events such as the WSF or the annual US-based Left Forum, where Transform organised its own seminars and workshops.

Representatives of NPI participated, as speakers or/and co-organisers, in 51 of these events (i.e. more than a third), with 2016 by far the busiest year (10 events). Moreover, as indicated in *Table 10*, a significant number of different NPI members took part in these events – 23. Indeed, apart from five of them, the others have attended more than one such event, although Haris Golemis, in his double role for NPI and Transform, is ahead of the others by a long distance.

Table 10. Members of NPI who attended Transform events as speakers since 2009, in descending order in terms of number of participations

	Name of NPI member	Events attended
1	Haris Golemis	21
2	Elena Papadopoulou	9
3	Sia Anagnostopoulou	6
4	Yannis Bournous	4
5	Yannis Dragasakis	4
6	Maria Karamessini	4
7	Aristides Baltas	3
8	Angelina Giannopoulou	3
9	Theodora Kotsaka	3
10	Loudovikos Kotsonopoulos	3
11	Michalis Spourdalakis	3
12	Dora Kalaitzidaki	2
13	Aimilia Koukouma	2
14	Stavros Panagiotidis	2
15	Panayotis Pantos	2
16	Gabriel Sakellaridis	2
17	Haris Triantafyllidou	2
18	Sissy Velissariou	2
19	Stelios Foteinopoulos	1
20	Maria Jaidopulu Vrijea	1
21	Andreas Karitzis	1
22	Vagia Lysikatou	1
23	Trigazis Panos	1

In addition to that, 55 different members – at the time – of SYN/SYRIZA who were not also members of NPI (although it was not possible to establish that with precise certainty in every single case) attended 37 Transform events, some of which organised together with NPI or the PEL (the annual summer schools in particular). As shown in *Table 11*, however, 41 of them

only attended one event, with 13 of them, for example, attending the same event, the 7th Summer University of the European Left and Transform organised in Greece in July 2012 (only one month after SYRIZA's electoral breakthrough).

Table 11. Members of SYN or/and SYRIZA (but not of NPI) who attended Transform events as speakers since 2009, in descending order in terms of number of participations

	Name of SYN/SYRIZA member	Events attended
1	Natassa Theodorakopoulou	9
2	Alexis Tsipras	7
3	Nassos Iliopoulos	5
4	Euclid Tsakalotos	5
5	Olga Athaniti	4
6	Theano Fotiou	3
7	Eftychia Achtsioglou	2
8	Giorgos Chondros	2
9	Rena Dourou	2
10	Costas Douzinas	2
11	Giorgos Katrougalos	2
12	Yiannis Milios	2
13	Gabriel Sakellaridis	2
14	Giorgos Stathakis	2
15	Yiannis Albanis	1
16	Nektarios Bougdanis	1
17	Alexis Charitsis	1
18	Vassilios Chatzilambrou	1
19	Nikolaos Chountis	1
20	Tasia Christodouloupoulou	1
21	Elias Chronopoulos	1
22	Thodoris Dritsas	1
23	Nicos Filis	1
24	Marika Frangakis	1
25	Maria Gassouka	1
26	Manolis Glezos	1
27	Vangelis Goulas	1
28	Costas Isychos	1
29	Alekos Kalyvis	1
30	Ioanna Kanavou	1
31	Dimitris Karamanis	1
32	Olga Katimertzi	1
33	Vassiliki Katrivanou	1
34	Danae Koltsida	1
35	Haris Konstantatos	1
36	Zoe Konstantopoulou	1
37	Tassos Koronakis	1
38	Costas Lapavitsas	1
39	Giorgos Mitralias	1
40	Maniou Panayota	1
41	Dimitris Papadimoulis	1
42	Theofanis Papageorgiou	1
43	Katerina Papatheodorou	1
44	Theodoros Paraskevopoulos	1
45	Marina Prentoulis	1
46	Nikos Pappas	1
47	Stelios Pappas	1
48	Panos Rigas	1

49	Despoina Saggana	1
50	Konstantinos Tsoukalas	1
51	Xatzilamprou Vasilis	1
52	Christoforos Vernadakis	1
53	Angeliky Visviki	1
54	Sissi Vouvou	1
55	Ilias Ziogas	1

Interestingly, among those who attended one event only there were also prominent actors in the party's international affairs, such as MEP and Vice-President of the EP Dimitris Papadimoulis and MEP Nikolaos Chountis (a member of Popular Unity as of 2015), which suggests that MEPs might be focused rather on formal networking and cooperation via the GUE/NGL and, more broadly, the EP. In any case, overall, an impressive number of 78 people from SYRIZA or/and NPI have attended a total of 65 of the 138 events organised or co-organised by Transform since 2009 (see *Table 13*).

By contrast, only 26 representatives of CUL:TRA and Bloco attended 31 Transform events in the same period of time (see *Table 12*) – a third of the representatives of SYRIZA and NPI and less than a half of the events attended by the latter.

Table 12. Members of Bloco or/and CUL:TRA who attended Transform events as speakers since 2009, in descending order of number of participations

	Name of Bloco/CUL:TRA member	Events attended
1	Marisa Matias	12
2	Tatiana Moutinho	4
3	José Soeiro	4
4	Irina Castro	3
5	José Gusmão	3
6	Francisco Louçã	3
7	Renato Soeiro	3
8	Alda Sousa	3
9	Carla Luis	2
10	Mariana Mortagua	2
11	Miguel Portas	2
12	Maria Manuel Rola	2
13	Fernando Rosas	2
14	Christina Andrade	1
15	Adriano Campos	1
16	Luís Fazenda	1
17	Carmen Hilario	1
18	Catarina Martins	1
19	Hugo Monteiro	1
20	Joana Mortagua	1
21	Gonçalo Pessa	1
22	José Manuel Pureza	1
23	Sofia Roque	1
24	Cristina Semblano	1
25	João Semedo	1
26	Pedro Soares	1

This contrast may primarily be explained by CUL:TRA not being Bloco's official foundation but also by both CUL:TRA and Bloco being smaller than NPI and SYRIZA respectively; for example, the only time when Bloco had more MPs than SYRIZA was between 2009 and 2012 and even in that period the Greeks attended double the number of Transform events as the Portuguese. Another factor in their different degrees of participation might be related to SYRIZA/NPI's greater need of and thus emphasis on transnational networking and cooperation before and after coming into government, with their highest level of participation occurring in the two years following winning elections.

Of the 26 Bloco/CUL:TRA participants to Transform events, Marisa Matias (an MEP since 2009 and Bloco's only MEP after the 2014 elections) has been by far the most prolific, with 12 events (i.e. more than a third of all events attended by Bloco/CUL:TRA representatives), which contrasts with the very limited participation of SYRIZA MEPs in Transform events. Also, half of those 26 participants attended only one event, a lower proportion than in the case of SYRIZA and NPI taken together.

In the Spanish case, the numbers are much lower, as both the party and its foundation were founded in 2014 and as 25MI is only an observer member of Transform. Nevertheless, Podemos sent representatives to Transform early on: one of the four workshops organised by Transform as part of the ATTAC European Summer University for Social Movements in August 2014. Overall though, only 7 Podemos representatives have attended 8 Transform events, with Federico Severino, the director of 25MI, being the only one who has attended more than one event. Interestingly enough, none of the others is any of the party's five MEPs – a lack of involvement in Transform-mediated networking and cooperation similar to the case of SYRIZA.

Despite the gap between the number of events attended by SYRIZA/NPI and that of the other two parties/foundations, *Table 13* below reveals a relatively constant participation in Transform of all three parties/foundations, with no significant hiatus. The only striking development occurred in 2018, when representatives of SYRIZA/NPI attended only three events, in contrast with the number of events attended over the previous years (particularly 2016 and 2017, their most active in this respect of the whole period), while the numbers for the other two did not decrease, but on the contrary in the case of Bloco/CUL:TRA. It is hard to say at this point, though, whether the sharp decrease in the participation of SYRIZA/NPI representatives is due to the overall decrease in Transform events catered for the interests of the Greeks, the increased pressures of government, or their stronger emphasis on networking and

cooperation with forces outside of Transform and, more generally, outside of this political family.

Table 13. Transform events with participation from SYRIZA/NPI, Bloco/CUL:TRA or/and Podemos/25MI between 2009 and 2018 included.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
Number of Transform events	7	8	10	11	11	15	16	21	21	18	138
Attended by any of the three parties or/and their foundations	3	4	4	7	6	9	9	15	10	4	71
Attended by SYRIZA/NPI	2	3	4	7	6	9	7	14	10	3	65
Attended by Bloco/CUL:TRA	2	3	–	3	5	5	4	2	3	4	31
Attended by Podemos/25MI	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	2	2	2	8
Attended by SYRIZA/NPI and Bloco/CUL:TRA	1	2	–	3	5	5	2	2	3	3	26
Attended by SYRIZA/NPI and Podemos/25MI	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	2	2	7
Attended by Bloco/CUL:TRA and Podemos/25MI	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	5
Attended by all three parties or/and their foundations	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	5

More importantly, out of the 138 events organised or co-organised by Transform, more than half were attended by someone from at least one of the three parties or their respective foundations. Out of these 71 events, 26 – i.e. more than a third – were attended by representatives of both SYRIZA/NPI and Bloco/CUL:TRA. When considering the post-2014 period, after the creation of Podemos, Transform organised or co-organised 91 events, of which more than a half were attended by representatives of any of the three parties and their foundations. However, of these 47 events, members of Podemos or/and 25MI participated in only 8, of which 7 were also attended by members of either of the other two parties or/and their

foundations. Thus, overall, of the total of 91 Transform events since 2014, only 5 included representatives of all three parties or respective foundations.

Hence, it would appear that Transform plays a much stronger role in the networking between SYRIZA/NPI and Bloco/CUL:TRA than in the one between any of these two parties and Podemos/25MI, which was to be expected given that, with Podemos not being a member of the PEL, its foundation is only an observer member of Transform. This contrast is to some extent confirmed by the interviewees. On the one hand, for Pureza from Bloco, Transform has a ‘very clear importance in this process of bringing together perspectives, bringing people to debates, trying to mobilise networking for different topics’. Also, Moutinho, who works for Transform via CUL:TRA, said she ‘met them [people from SYRIZA and Podemos] through Transform’.

Walter Baier, the coordinator of Transform, acknowledges the role this network in the relations between SYRIZA and Bloco and their respective foundations: ‘Particularly in the Transform frame they organise discussions and exchanges of opinions, so structurally and personally they are connected. ... The political foundation to which both parties refer is Transform’. With regards to informal networking and cooperation in particular, Baier believes – understandably given his position – Transform plays a key role, as ‘it’s an informal frame, meaning you can discuss the issues here without necessarily having to come to conclusions, which allows people to change opinions or to forward ideas in an experimental way’.

Furthermore, the publications of Transform – be it its website or its yearbook, which was launched in 2015 to succeed its biannual journal – are also mentioned as playing a role in the parties’ networking. When asked whether there are any magazines that play a role in informal party cooperation, Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA said that such a magazine ‘almost doesn’t exist, with the exception of certain Transform publications’ (although the latter can hardly qualify as magazines), while Gusmão from Bloco mentioned the Transform website. On the other hand, Pedrosa was more sceptical regarding their influence: ‘We do write stuff for Transform, and the Greeks did that too, but it’s not significant, because Bloco doesn’t share or promote it.’

At the other end, only two of the six Podemos interviewees had anything to say about Transform. Maestu stated that ‘many of us have been participating in Transform meeting for years’, although – according to the examination of the online archive – only one future member of Podemos attended as a speaker a Transform event before the creation of Podemos. Martinez Lobo, while admitting that ‘we have informal connections with Transform’, then pointed out

that ‘they are more related to IU than to Podemos’. Moreover, in her opinion, Transform is ‘limited to the academic world, with no communication with the social basis’.

These different views regarding the role played by Transform are also reflected in the interviewees’ assessment of its significance. While all those from Podemos rated the importance of Transform for their party’s transnational networking and cooperation at 2, interviewees from Bloco rated it at 2.6 and those from SYRIZA at 3. Overall, the significance of Transform scored 2.5 and 2.8 when leaving out the answers from Podemos, i.e. less than ‘quite significant’ in both cases. Thus, as Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA summed it up, Transform ‘is not that important’. Moreover, while Transform had been active only one year before the crisis started, the SYRIZA and Bloco interviewees rated its pre-2009 role at 2.9, which indicates a very slight decrease in the perceived importance of this organisation, which can be called at best a stagnation.

Interviewees from outside the parties but with a good knowledge of Transform reiterated the same assessment of the network: present in the process of transnational networking and cooperation but not particularly influential. As Arbide Aza put it, ‘they [the parties] do look to Transform more often than before, but it’s not something that determines their relationship’. Wainwright, who attended several Transform events and contributed with texts to its publications, elaborated on this point, making the link between the role of Transform and that of the national party foundations:

‘I think probably Transform [is the most important for the cooperation among these]; it also draws in GUE/NGL. I think Transform is the most activist. But it doesn’t have resources and it’s quite weak in each country, maybe reflecting the political weaknesses of Eurocommunism, I don’t know. ... I think it’s limited by the limits of its own national bodies – they’re not very influential, so it’s limited by that. They are good people and they do their best, but I wouldn’t call them influential.’

Indeed, even Baier proved to be aware of the limits of the role played by the network he coordinates, despite still rating it at 4 for both pre- and post-2009 periods: ‘relatively speaking, I would say 4, but measured by the urgency of the situation or if you ask me if I am satisfied by the level of coordination, then I would be more critical’. More importantly, Baier believes that regional cooperation, particularly in Southern Europe, has to increase and that Transform is trying to contribute to that. According to him, ‘we have intensified our work regarding the European South after the crisis ... we have a particular agenda on this, we work on this, and I think we are proceeding, but the pace in which we are doing this is far from being sufficient.’

Out of the 138 Transform events since 2009, 5 of them had an explicit focus on Southern Europe, four of which have been attended by representatives of any of the three parties or/and their respective foundations, as detailed in *Table 14* below. The last one, “Is Southern Europe the Weak Link of European Integration? Tracing Possible Areas of Cooperation among Movements and Parties”, co-organised in October 2018 in Lisbon with the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Liaison Office in Madrid, was attended by the author with the purpose of non-participatory observation research.

The international conference was organised as part of Transform’s new project “Cooperation, strategies for Southern Europe”, coordinated by Moutinho. In the opening statement of the event, she said that the aim of the conference was to share ‘experiences, tackle concrete alternatives and, importantly, address future prospects and perspectives that may cooperatively be used by the left, not only in Southern countries but also Europe-wide.’

Table 14. Transform events with an explicit focus on Southern Europe

	Event	Participants from the three parties/foundations
1	“What future for the PIGS? The Case of Greece, the Response of the EU and Alternative Solutions” – April 2010, Brussels	Nicos Chountis (SYRIZA), Haris Golemis (NPI & SYRIZA)
2	“A Mediterranean Alternative for a Renewed Europe” – co-organised with Transform Italy – February 2014, Rome	–
3	“Syriza, Podemos – How the Left Addresses the Issue of Power in Greece and in Spain” – panel organised as part of the Left Forum, May 2015, New York	Stelios Foteinopoulos (NPI)
4	“Bloco – Podemos – SYRIZA – IU – Linke: Unite! Towards a progressive European strategy” – co-organised with NPI and RLS, March 2016, Vienna	Nasos Iliopoulos (SYRIZA), Maria Manuel Rola (Bloco), Francisco Orozco (Podemos)
5	“Is Southern Europe the Weak Link of European Integration? Tracing Possible Areas of Cooperation among Movements and Parties” – October 2018, Lisbon	Haris Golemis (NPI), Angelina Giannopoulou (NPI), Nasos Iliopoulos (SYRIZA), Eftychia Achtsioglou (SYRIZA), Tatiana Moutinho (CUL:TRA & Bloco), José Soeiro (Bloco), José Gusmão (Bloco) [Federico Severino (25MI & Podemos) was invited to speak but could not make it for personal reasons.]

Speaking after Moutinho, Golemis also stressed the similarities among countries in Southern Europe, which despite the U-turn of the SYRIZA government in 2015, ‘still remains a region where radical transformation of societies could be feasible’. At the same time, he emphasised that the conference was not merely academic in character. Echoing the view of Martinez Lobo quoted above, Golemis argued that

‘As we said at the beginning, we don’t consider this to be an academic seminar. ... Just saying what the German government should do... OK, we’ve made this kind of wishful thoughts thousands of times and what is the result of it? Nothing happens. What we need is that the German comrades, whom we have represented here, really push forward these demands to the German parties first and governments second, and that especially those who are the worst affected, the Southerners, do that with their own governments. The idea is that we don’t leave this place with one more workshop, we’ve had enough.’

Instead, the aim of the event and Transform’s wider project was to bring together ‘progressive political and social actors of Southern Europe’, and beyond, and enable cooperation among them at various levels. As Moutinho also put it, ‘we may have very good theory, but if the people working on the field are not aware of it, then it has no practical value’. Thus, Golemis indicated several ways in which that cooperation could take place or enhance:

‘by creating networks for the exchange of information regarding social and political developments in their countries, including best practices but also glorious or dishonourable defeats in various fields; by assisting the networking of trade unions at various levels (company, sectoral, national levels), of social movements (especially in the field of supporting immigrants and refugees), and of rebel cities; by promoting cultural activities in order to show that the South is an indispensable part of the European cultural identity and that there is a need to fight against the racist stereotypes which have reached their climax with the zoomorphic metaphor PIGS.’

These words from someone with a rich experience and comprehension of left networking and cooperation in Europe suggest that Transform has not done enough in terms of enabling the cooperation among left forces in Southern Europe. More than that, they also suggest that this cooperation is rather lagging behind if some of the proposals he makes, such as having a constant exchange of information or assisting the networking of social movements, have not yet been put in place almost a decade after the start of the crisis.

Other think tanks and networks

Apart from the parties’ political foundations and Transform, other think tanks and intellectual or expertise networks have been mentioned by some of the interviewees as playing a significant role in the wider networking and cooperation among left forces in Europe. Although their limited number of mentions indicates that they are not overall perceived as particularly significant for that process among the three parties themselves, it is worth touching upon them for the sake of a more comprehensive map of the key actors in the wider process of transnational networking and cooperation of the European left today.

Firstly, Die Linke's political foundation, RLS, has already been mentioned for the events it has co-organised with Transform as well as in José Manuel Pureza's quote comparing its role to the limited capacity of CUL:TRA. Overall, RLS was mentioned by six of the twenty-three interviewees, with Giannopoulou and Martinez Lobo rating its significance for the wider party networking and cooperation at 4, i.e. 'very significant', although none of them developed on its role. Indeed, RLS is by far the largest political foundation not only in Transform but also on the left in general, with offices in 16 other countries on all continents (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, n.d.). While this is a particularity of German party foundations, which receive generous state funding based on the election results of their affiliated political parties (Sieker, 2016), it is arguably also an expression of the economic pre-eminence of the North over the South, manifested as well within the transnational left.

Secondly, two interviewees, Baier and Wainwright, although not members of any of the three parties, mentioned European Economists for an Alternative Economic Policy in Europe, also known as the EuroMemo Group, as influential for transnational party networking and cooperation today. Established in 1995, the EuroMemo Group (n.d.) 'is a network of European economists committed to promoting full employment with good work, social justice with an eradication of poverty and social exclusion, ecological sustainability, and international solidarity'.

One of its key activities is an annual conference, which is promoted by Transform and has been attended by people linked to the three parties, such as Maria Karamessini from NPI (Transform, 2017). Indeed, a 2012 newspaper article about the architects of SYRIZA's economic policy claimed the EuroMemo Group 'affects to some extent the economic positions of SYRIZA leadership' ("Who is hiding", 2012). Also, Baier rated its significance for party networking and cooperation as 'quite significant', declaring that the EuroMemo Group 'always played an important role in discussions among the leftists' and that 'it's becoming more and more important'. Wainwright went further than that and stated that this network 'is maybe as important as Transform, because it's producing a real thing that has a real impact'. However, it is not too clear yet what that real impact is.

Thirdly, and finally, the Transnational Institute was mentioned by two interviewees as well, Martinez Lobo, who rated it at 4 but without developing on its role, and Wainwright, one of its fellows, who simply described it as 'an important resource'. With a history of over four decades, the Transnational Institute (n.d.) presents itself as 'an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable world', which serves 'as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers'. It

has links, among others, with Transform, which lists it among its ‘friends’ and with which it co-organised in Brussels, in May 2014, a two-day event entitled the “People’s Tribunal on EU Economic Governance and the Troika”. However, there are no visible links between this institute and any of the three parties concerned here or their respective political foundations.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the informal dimensions of the transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos before and after 2009. It started by discussing their links via social movements, which all three parties have engaged with from their very beginnings. Indeed, Bloco and SYRIZA emerged in the context of the GJM, with both parties participating in the summits of WSF and ESF as well as one-off events like the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in 2001. This provided some of the first opportunities for their members to meet each other, without necessarily fostering any actual relation of cooperation though.

After 2009, new social movements emerged in opposition to the austerity measures but proved to be less transnational in character than the GJM, as noted in the literature. The findings confirm the decline of transnational social movements, at least from the parties’ point of view, by revealing a perceived decline in importance for the WSF and relatively low significance of the AlterSummit, the prime candidate to have tried to replace the ESF after 2010, as well as of ATTAC. Indeed, while the transnational cooperation of social movements is overall rated at 2.2, i.e. ‘somewhat significant’, for the cooperation among the three LPs concerned here, at a closer look, it seems to have played a very limited role in that actual process.

According to some interviewees, the wider decline of social movements in general and transnational movements in particular is due to parties having taken the lead from them on fighting austerity, which partly addresses one of the existing gaps in the current literature on the relation between social movements and political parties. Also, while not touched upon by the interviewees, one plausible reason for the decline of social movements’ transnationality is the material impact of the economic crisis itself. It would be worth investigating to what extent the downfall in living standards and economic emigration in countries like Greece or Spain, particularly among the youth, might have undermined the capacity of social movements to

operate transnationally. No mobilisation as sizeable as the anti-G8 demo in Genoa in 2001 took place in Europe during the crisis, perhaps apart from the Blockupy demos. Indeed, perhaps the more direct and material effects of austerity might have compelled people opposing it to focus on the more immediate sources of power they deemed responsible – that is, national governments and mainstream political parties.

Despite the relatively high number of academics prominently involved in the three parties, their role in the transnational party networking and cooperation was also rated, overall, as merely ‘somewhat significant’ (2.1), albeit higher than for the pre-2009 period (1.3). Indeed, the networking between these academics themselves seems rather limited, if any at all. It was revealed that many of SYRIZA’s academics have been linked to universities in the UK, which seems to have become the main country of destination for the Greek intelligentsia in search for better opportunities. Given the lack of connections between academics from any of the three parties and any of the other two countries, the academic environment in a country like the UK could have served as a locus for any networking among them. However, that proved to not be the case, as academics from both Bloco and Podemos are rather linked to institutions in their own countries.

The lack of any visible links between academics from the three parties might be due to a potential decreased mobility of academics in the region most affected by the Eurozone crisis but also to deeper factors related to the marketisation of academia. Furthermore, initiatives specifically aimed at addressing this gap and facilitating political networking and cooperation among academics, such as ENA and the Akademia Network, have failed to galvanise much interaction among the academics affiliated to the three parties and, as it seems, to galvanise any significant transnational activity in general.

Much of the informal networking among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos takes place via their political foundations and the Transform network, which all the three foundations are affiliated to. The discussion has revealed that, despite their orientation towards transnational cooperation in Southern Europe, especially in the case of the NPI and 25MI, each foundation has organised a limited number of events with participation of representatives from the other two foundations or respective parties. That is reflected in the overall score assigned to the role these foundations in the process of party cooperation (2.4), which despite being higher than for the pre-2009 period (2), is still closer to merely ‘somewhat significant’ than ‘quite significant’.

The situation is only partly different when it comes to events organised or co-organised by Transform. On the one hand, NPI/SYRIZA and Bloco/CUL:TRA have had a relatively high rate of participation in the Transform events after 2009, particularly the former. That indicates a

prominent role played by this network in bringing people from these two parties/foundations together, at least relative to the role of the party foundations' own events. That was reflected in the score of 2.8, i.e. nearly 'quite significant', assigned to it by the interviewees from the two parties. On the other hand, Podemos has engaged much less with Transform, perhaps due to 25MI being only an observer member of network, which explains the Podemos interviewees rating its role at merely 2, 'somewhat significant'.

Even the interviewees working for Transform acknowledged those limitations and that the network has to do more, in the given political context, when it comes to left cooperation in Southern Europe. The main step in that direction has been the launch in October 2018 of the project "Cooperation, strategies for Southern Europe", coordinated by one of the interviewees. However, the fact that such a project was born almost a decade after the start of the Eurozone crisis would rather confirm the idea that the role of Transform and of the parties' foundations in the transnational networking and cooperation of LPs, at least in Southern Europe, is lagging behind the demands of the objective situation. Nevertheless, the overall rating of Transform was 2.5, which makes it more significant than the other two main channels for the post-2009 informal networking and cooperation, social movements (2.2) and academics/academic networks (2.1), although not particularly significant for the broader party cooperation.

When aggregating the scores for the three channels discussed in this chapter, it emerges that informal networking and cooperation has become more significant in the wider process of networking and cooperation among these three parties during the crisis: 2.1 for the pre-2009 period vs 2.3 for the post-2009 period. This is a very slight increase though, akin to a stagnation. Hence, if any substantial enhancement in the party cooperation did occur during the crisis, then it most likely occurred via the formal channels discussed in the following chapter. That contrasts, to say the least, with the initial expectation that LPs would particularly seek to enhance their informal transnational cooperation in order to oppose austerity, given their limited access to the formal channels that shape the policy- and decision-making processes in the EU.

Finally, an important gap in this chapter is the lack of data on the informal networking that happens on the periphery of the kind of events discussed here but also on the periphery of formal cooperation in frameworks like the EP, during coffee breaks or evening socials for example. This dimension could not be explored during the interviews due to the pressures of time and would probably be best pursued via non-participatory observation research. While this dimension is marginally touched upon in the next chapter when discussing individual connections among the three parties, it arguably represents a promising avenue for future

research on transnational party cooperation. More generally, relative to its acknowledged importance in the process of European integration, informality remains strikingly under-researched, particularly with regards to transnational party cooperation.

Chapter 4

Formal transnational networking and cooperation

This chapter deals with the formal dimensions of the transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. That designates the interaction taking place via formalised structures or frameworks, such as party-to-party channels, the EP group (GUE/NGL), the European political party (PEL), and any other international party-based initiatives. While this side of LPs' transnational cooperation has received more attention than the informal one (see Nikolakakis, 2016; Dunphy & March, 2013; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2012; Hudson, 2012 Calossi 2011, 2016; Sozzi, 2011), it still represents an under-researched topic in the literature, particularly when it comes to the relations between the three parties concerned here. Thus, the chapter has two aims: firstly, to map the formal transnational networking and cooperation among the three of the most successful LPs at the present time; secondly, to establish whether and how it enhanced on the background of the Eurozone crisis.

The chapter is divided in four sections. The first discusses bilateral relations between the parties: SYRIZA-Bloco, SYRIZA-Podemos and Bloco-Podemos. This discussion also touches upon the relations between factions as well as individuals within the parties; for, despite individual connections rather qualifying as informal networking and cooperation, they have been instrumental in laying the basis for the more formal party relations and, to a significant extent, are still at the core of those relations. The second section deals with GUE/NGL, the left's group in the EP – the only international structure that all three parties belong to at the moment of writing in March 2019. The third section tackles the PEL, which only SYRIZA and Bloco are members of, while the fourth section discusses the 'Plan B for Europe' and 'Now the People!' initiatives, which only Bloco and Podemos are members of. The chapter ends with a conclusion summing up the key findings from these four sections.

Bilateral relations

Neither the document analysis nor the interviews have revealed the existence of any specifically trilateral relations among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. Instead, each party has its own bilateral relations with each of the other two. As Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA put it in the interview,

‘there is not a triangle between SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos; there are relationships with Bloco and relationships with Podemos ... we don’t know the level of relationship between Bloco and Podemos; of course there is, but we’re not interfering with that, they have their own channels of communication. It doesn’t work as a triangle, we don’t meet as a triangle.’

Overall, the importance of bilateral channels for the parties’ networking and cooperation was rated at 3.3 for the pre-2009 period and at 3.6 for the post-2009 period when including just the interviewees from SYRIZA and Bloco (for the sake of a comparison with the pre-2009 rating) and at 3.2 when including the interviewees from all the three parties. Either way, therefore, bilateral relations were rated as more than ‘quite significant’. Building on further data provided by the subjects, the section first explores the relationship between SYRIZA and Bloco, the oldest two parties of the three, and then deals in turn with their relationship with Podemos.

SYRIZA-Bloco

The relationship between SYRIZA and Bloco is the only one that precedes the crisis. As pointed out in the previous chapter, some of the first contacts between the forerunner of SYRIZA, SYN, and Bloco were established via the GJM and, in particular, their participation in the ESF. Giannopoulou emphasised that by saying that ‘The comrades from Bloco are traditional comrades – we went together in all the European demonstrations, the European campaigns’. In addition to that, Karatsioubanis from SYRIZA also mentioned two party-based initiatives from the 2000s that do not exist any longer but served as spaces that fostered ‘the beginning, more or less, of the relationship’ between SYN/SYRIZA and Bloco.

First, it was the New European Left Forum – a series of annual international meetings of a wide range of European LPs that would form the basis for the foundation of the PEL (Hudson, 2012) and would thus disappear as a result of that. While not mentioning the New European Left Forum, Fazenda from Bloco alluded to it when saying that members of Bloco

and SYN also met ‘in international meetings and in the beginning of the process that led to the foundation of the PEL as a common platform in Europe’.

The second initiative was the European Anti-Capitalist Left – a network of LPs that also met once a year (last time in 2012) and which, according to Karatsioubanis, was ‘a bit more radical, a bit more Trotskyist than the other’ (see also Calossi, 2016, p. 137). However, Baier believes that this framework declined in importance once the PEL was established: ‘it was obvious that focus shifted to the PEL, so since 2003-2004 its importance decreased.’ Indeed, Calossi (2016, p. 189) is right when he says that ‘it is difficult to identify autonomous EACL activities since 2011-2012’.

Nevertheless, the journalist Sverkos also emphasised the role played by the Trotskyist connections in SYRIZA and Bloco establishing links with each other:

‘SYRIZA used to have tendencies from different ideological spaces of the left, from the renewal current of the left of the KKE, also some tendencies from the Trotskyist current, and also some others that were in general anti-capitalist or even Maoist. SYRIZA kind of looked like Bloco. The similarities of the ideological level were really helpful. These two parties also built some connections between the tendencies: the Trotskyist tendency of SYRIZA had connections with the Trotskyist tendency of Bloco.’

Fazenda mentioned also the Maoist connections in this respect: ‘we had a good channel of communication with KOE [ex-Maoists] and when SYRIZA was formed as a coalition, we transferred our comradeship from SYN and KOE to SYRIZA – it was a natural process’. This illustrates how long-standing ideological affinity still plays a role in the relations between parties even when those parties go through various organisational transformations.

Others from Bloco also confirmed the pre-existing links with what would later become SYRIZA. Gusmão said that ‘before SYRIZA, our main connection in Greece was SYN’, while Pureza remembered that ‘there were contacts and close connections with some elements of some parties that gathered in SYRIZA’. In terms of bilateral interactions, Fazenda also pointed out that ‘10-15 years ago we visited each other’s summer camps. We have MPs now who were familiar with SYRIZA’s summer camps’. Furthermore, he also said that ‘they used to come to our electoral campaigns and we went to theirs.’ Summer camps were also mentioned by Sverkos, who said that ‘the youth of SYN and SYRIZA used to have summer camps and Portuguese people were invited and participated.’ Indeed, the youth organisations of Bloco and SYN had a bilateral meeting in Athens in early 2009 to share experiences and ‘look at the possibilities for joint struggles at the European level’ (Esquerda.net, 2009). However, none of

the interviewees ascribed any role to the youth organisations in the post-2009 party networking and cooperation.

Given that Bloco would create an international department only in 2014, the pre-2009 bilateral relationship – apart from GUE/NGL and the PEL, dealt with in the following two sections – largely rested on individual connections. Overall, the interviewees from the two parties rated individual connections for their pre-2009 networking and cooperation at 3.4, i.e. more than ‘quite significant’, with SYRIZA interviewees rating it at 3.3 and those from Bloco at 3.5. Thus, as Kanellopoulos put it, ‘there are connections mostly at individual level’, with Nuno Pedrosa confirming that ‘the bilateral channels that exist always come from individual connections’ (which is why they are discussed here rather than in the previous chapter). In that regard, for the period before 2009, Gusmão mentioned Miguel Portas (Bloco’s first MEP in 2004), Marisa Matias, and Francisco Louçã, while a semi-outsider like O’Donnell, who works on the staff GUE/NGL, mentioned the connection between Marisa Matias and Tsipras.

At the other end, Sverkos, who as a journalist has been covering SYRIZA since 2006, pointed out that

‘some of the executives of SYN’s foreign department travelled a lot. They used to have many meetings with Bloco in Lisbon. SYN and Bloco were the most dynamic parties at that time. ... Yannis Bournous – he is the one that has the best connections with the Portuguese people.’

Why these early bilateral contacts though? Interviewees from both Bloco and SYRIZA indicated the early similarity between their organisations. Thus, according to Pedrosa, ‘SYRIZA was considered a brother-party, not only because we shared the Southern [European] aspects but also in term of views’, with Kanellopoulos going further to say that ‘Bloco is a kind of SYRIZA in Portugal – it’s the same party’. Fazenda expanded a bit on this:

‘we established a natural relationship – left, non-dogmatic parties, worried about capitalist exploitation but also sexist oppression, environment and different fields of political concern. It was a natural process.’

Furthermore, he also mentioned the orthodox CPs in the two countries as a factor in bringing SYRIZA and Bloco closer: ‘they had KKE, and the KKE put pressure on the PCP to not recognise them and they didn’t’; one can reasonably assume that the converse was also true, with the PCP not wanting the KKE to recognise Bloco. Thus, the sectarianism of the CPs in their countries facilitated even more the ‘natural’ relationship between SYRIZA and Bloco.

With the start of the crisis, the similarities between the two parties became more articulate. According to Giannopoulou, in the context of ‘the memorandum agreements and the

bailout programmes’, SYRIZA and Bloco ‘were called to deal with the same difficulties, same dangers for the people, same political juncture’. Dimitris Rapis, who works for SYRIZA’s Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, also pointed out, more generally, that LPs in Southern Europe ‘are closer because they have similar problems and similar challenges to face’ – a key incentive for closer cooperation, as developed in the following chapter.

The enhanced closeness of the two parties following the start of the crisis was also confirmed by the Bloco interviewees. Thus, Gusmão said that

‘SYRIZA, at one point, was our main partner in Europe, especially because we were in very similar positions regarding the European problems, the crisis and so on. ... Our relationship with them became more and more intense from the financial crisis onward. ... At one point, our relation with SYRIZA was very strong, to the point that the media would describe SYRIZA in Portugal as the Greek Bloc.’

The decisive moment, however, in bringing the parties closer to one another was not the actual outbreak of the crisis and not even of austerity, but SYRIZA’s electoral breakthrough in 2012 – that is, in Giannopoulou’s words, ‘when SYRIZA started rising as a more hegemonic party in the Greek politics’. Karatsioubanis made the same point, claiming that ‘Greece was on the agenda for a long time in the European left village up till 2015’. Even semi-outsiders like Sverkos pointed out that after those elections, ‘all the European lights turned to SYRIZA’, whose international relations ‘intensified very, very much.’ Another journalist, Arbide Aza, pointed out that that, after coming a close second in the 2012 elections, SYRIZA became much more aware of the need for transnational cooperation:

‘In 2012 there was the second memorandum, and both social and party activists realised that the memorandum was unstoppable at the national level – it was a very pragmatical decision, not theoretical: “We cannot stop the memorandum by ourselves, we need to break the European power relations”.’

Bloco interviewees acknowledged too the impact that SYRIZA’s increased electoral profile had on their relationship, with Gusmão claiming that it reached its peak ‘in the years before their [2015] election and up to that point [of SYRIZA’s U-turn]’. Fazenda also admitted that between 2012 and 2015, SYRIZA ‘were the only chance of the LPs in Europe to change the European course, so they were the focus of all the attention. ... We weren’t near to getting the power; they were.’ Thus, as he recalled, ‘we invited Tsipras to come to Portugal and we were several times to Athens, in electoral campaigns – the ones they lost, the ones they won’.

Pedrosa also developed on how the rise of SYRIZA was seen in Portugal:

‘Nobody knew SYRIZA and who Alexis [Tsipras] was; if he came to Portugal it was irrelevant. ... After 2009, especially after 2012, when you had the elections in Greece, Alexis becomes more famous, so then you intensify the networks because you use the success of others. ... Even in 2012, when SYRIZA lost the elections, the interest and the possibility to have a left government in Greece was huge, so you wanted to know more about it, to appear as allied with them: “We are with SYRIZA, SYRIZA is with us”.’

Thus, the intensification of contacts seems to have come not only out of an increased awareness of the need for transnational unity in the face of similar transnational challenges (i.e. crisis, austerity, Troika etc.) but also as a tactical choice to ‘use the success of others’ in one’s domestic political arena.

Individual connections played an even more significant role, compared to the pre-2009 period, in facilitating the relationship between the two parties, with the overall rating from SYRIZA and Bloco at 3.9, i.e. just short of ‘very significant’. Indeed, apart from one Bloco interviewee, Pureza (who, of all the five Bloco interviewees is, by his own admission, the least involved in the party’s international affairs), all the other eight who were able to answer the question rated individual connections at 4.

Of those who rated individual connections at 4, Kanellopoulos pointed out that

‘there were very close contacts through the summer of 2015: Marisa Matias came here and people from all leftist parties visited us and they participated in manifestations and gatherings. But, since then, contacts have been mostly at the personal level ... people with institutional capabilities: they are responsible for international relations and they talk to each other, they meet at occasions around Europe.’

His colleague Rapidis answered along the same lines:

‘Is there a 5 [for rating the significance of individual connections]? They played a very, very important role, especially when Tsipras was elected president [sic, *Spitzenkandidat* for the 2014 EP elections] of the PEL – he himself played a very important role on an individual basis.’

The role played by Tsipras was also pointed out by Sverkos, who then mentioned several names from Bloco:

‘Tsipras had very good connections with many... Actually, Tsipras was the one who boosted this [cooperation], because he was young and most executives of Bloco were also young, so he has very good relations with Marisa Matias. But they also had very good connections with one of the first leaders of Bloco, I think Renato Soeiro. Tsipras also met recently with Catarina Martins in Portugal and they had really good talks, some months ago.’

Marisa Matias is mentioned again by three of Bloco’s interviewees, with Pureza also naming Francisco Louçã, Luís Fazenda, Jorge Costa, and Catarina Martins in this respect.

As Moutinho sums it up, the individual connections are mostly between ‘MEPs, the leaders of the parties and possibly, of course, the international departments.’ Thus, it appears that most individual connections are limited to the top levels of the two parties, which may indicate a largely elite-level process of cooperation. As confirmed by Sverkos, ‘I would say [transnational cooperation] was mostly around the leaders and the medium level, not the basis. In general, the elements of transnational cooperation are difficult for the bases and the simple members.’

However, Giannopoulou made a longer, interesting point about the role played by those from the lower echelons of the parties:

‘There are [connections also between the rank-and-file]. For example, people from the executive board of the PEL, who are from the second level in the hierarchy, have also personal connections with the comrades throughout Europe. And these connections play a significant role in many things that the European left organises. If you want to have a conference that would like to answer strategic questions for the left, these are the people who do all this job, it’s not the presidents of the parties or the MEPs. These are the people that know our comrades in Spain, in Ireland, in Germany, that know who is responsible for what, who is a key player in his or her field. These are the people that always try to keep balances. ... All these things are things that these people from the second, the third and the bottom levels of the parties run; it’s difficult, it’s hard, it’s the dirty job.’

Nevertheless, people on the executive board of the PEL can hardly be seen as rank-and-file, while the number of those who can be deemed as such and, at the same time, are involved in the organisation of the international events such as those mentioned by Giannopoulou is inherently limited. Hence, the point about the rather elitist character of the individual connections-mediated process of cooperation between the SYRIZA and Bloco still stands; and it clearly contrasts with both parties’ self-professed emphasis on the role of ordinary members and of social mobilisation in general, an issue also discussed in the final chapter.

As indicated already, the intensification of the post-2009 cooperation between SYRIZA and Bloco culminated around the former’s electoral victory in January 2015. According to Kanellopoulos, ‘probably 2015 was the high point’, while Fazenda confirmed that with SYRIZA cooperation intensified very much till the referendum. Indeed, Gusmão talked about how his party and himself personally were ‘very much involved in the solidarity movement here in Portugal to Greece. I actually created a blog in Portuguese – with people from Bloco, the PCP and the PS – of solidarity with Greece.’ However, the two parties never went as far as signing any kind of formal bilateral agreement.

Their relationship changed dramatically after the SYRIZA government's U-turn from July 2015, something that the Bloco interviewees were particularly aware of. Thus, Moutinho admitted that, 'with what happened in the Greek case in 2015, there was a clear distancing between Bloco and SYRIZA.' Moreover, as developed in the final section of this chapter, SYRIZA's U-turn also led Bloco to substantially reframe its stance on the EU, in a more Eurosceptic and confrontational direction. Other Bloco interviewees talked at some length about their critical view of SYRIZA and the degradation of the relationship between the two parties. Gusmão explicitly said, also hinting at the diverging positions on the EU, that

'After the ultimatum on Greece, our relationship with them cooled down significantly. ... It's not as if we're looking down at the choices they made, but right now we are in perfectly opposing paths, so I think – and some people in Bloco would disagree with me – that we should keep open communication and connections, and we do, but there isn't much room for more than that with the current political positions.'

Pureza developed his answer along similar lines – partly diplomatic, partly imputative:

'We really respect the autonomy and the capacity of SYRIZA to analyse the concrete conditions... We do realise, of course, that there are desperate conditions, but the fact is that most of us expected, in that moment after the referendum, with those concrete results, that a confrontation between the Greek government and the Troika was assumed as the next step, and that did not occur at all. ... The fact is that austerity policies have been upgraded after that, so it's obviously a nightmare for the Greeks, it's obviously a nightmare for SYRIZA, and I'm sure it's seen like that. In the contacts that I have from time to time with Greek politicians from SYRIZA I realise that it's something not easy for them to assume, but the fact is that we really have a critical perspective on that situation.'

Also, Pedrosa claimed that 'it is disappointing to see how this SYRIZA is going. ... It's not that we will attack SYRIZA, we need to be prudent, but we publicly assume that it was a failure, a disappointment'. Hence, he does not believe that cooperation with SYRIZA should be more intense than it is, because 'cooperating more with them would be approving of their politics'. However, Pedrosa acknowledged that 'there is a difference between this government and what is the general basis of SYRIZA – I know many people from SYRIZA that are often not happy with the way the government is going'. Indeed, he admitted that 'if I was in Greece and you'd ask me which party I would vote for, I would still vote SYRIZA, because I don't know what the alternative is'.

Of all Bloco interviewees, Fazenda, as the head of the party's international department, was the most unreservedly critical of SYRIZA. According to him, 'we had a rupture in our relations' because of the Tsipras government's U-turn, which he described as 'a very bad deal,

something not comprehensive to our minds, because it's the opposite of the programme of SYRIZA. ... It's quite difficult for us to encourage that line of action'. Thus, describing the current state of Bloco's relationship with SYRIZA, Fazenda said that 'it's more formal now: good morning and good night' and that 'we are not close to SYRIZA'. Indeed, he explicitly said that the two parties have 'no bilateral relationship anymore after the referendum' and that 'we have no cooperation with SYRIZA, period'. Instead, according to him, Bloco has developed relations with other forces of the Greek left, particularly those that have split from SYRIZA: 'now we have relationships with the party of Zoe Konstantopoulou [Course of Freedom] and Popular Unity as well'.

Those who established Popular Unity included the Trotskyist and Maoist currents that Bloco had had relations with before the creation of SYRIZA, which shows that ideological affinity must have played a role in Bloco transferring, at least partly, its loyalty to the new organisations emerged from SYRIZA. This was corroborated by Sverkos:

'In the summer of 2015, there was a split in SYRIZA and the biggest portion of the tendencies that were Trotskyist or Maoist left the party, so this also had some impact on the internal talks in parties like Bloco. What will they say about SYRIZA now that their comrades, their ideological twins have left SYRIZA?'

At the same time, just like the intensification of the parties' relationship that preceded it, this distancing can also be seen through the lens of the pressures faced by Bloco in its domestic political arena. Gusmão, in particular, developed on this factor:

'SYRIZA was a party similar to the Bloco and, in some sense, when Greek politics was discussed in Portugal, and it was a lot after the Greek elections when SYRIZA took power, criticism towards SYRIZA was made equivalent to the criticism of Bloco – same organisation with different national branches. And of course, to this day, it can happen in a political debate for Bloco to be attacked and for the Greek tragedy to be presented as an example of what could happen to our country if Bloco ever came to have any responsibility. For example, when the PS government was formed, the fact that the radical left parties were supporting the government was one of the items of propaganda from the right-wing, that we were going in the same direction as the Greeks.'

More concisely, Pedrosa made exactly the same point: 'in Portugal now, the right, if they want to attack Bloco, they bring up SYRIZA. ... We tried to sell SYRIZA as what we could do in the future in Portugal'. Fazenda too maintained that 'we said in the last elections here, when we were very, very pressured by the action of SYRIZA, that we wouldn't do what SYRIZA did; we said it publicly in the TV debates and elsewhere'.

However, it is interesting that such a clear decline in the relationship between SYRIZA and Bloco was not echoed almost at all in the interviews with people from SYRIZA. Perhaps, such an admission would bring the discussion to the delicate topic of the Tsipras government's U-turn, which most SYRIZA interviewees tended to avoid in their answers. Only Kanellopoulos alluded somehow in that direction, saying that 'today, of course, we are in very different positions, but there is a certain understanding', but it is unlikely that they are not aware of Bloco's distancing from their party. Indeed, the Secretary of SYRIZA's Central Committee, Panos Skourletis (2018), acknowledged in front of his colleagues from the PEL that 'in this path of conflict and compromise, we lost quite many good friends in our European political family'.

Of the interviewees close to SYRIZA, Sverkos made a broader critical comment about the dynamics between SYRIZA and the other European LPs:

'In the summer of 2015, when the new austerity programme was agreed between the Eurozone and the Tsipras government, in general, the European left parties were absent from these struggles. OK, there were some demonstrations organised around Europe in support of the Greek government, but they didn't help in the end. And SYRIZA was left alone. ... We can say that on the institutional level and on the political level, these years of cooperation were fruitless.'

Thus, while Bloco might be disappointed of SYRIZA's U-turn after six months in government, people from SYRIZA might feel the same with regards to the level or effectiveness of the political support received from the rest of the European left, including Bloco, over those troubled months of intense negotiations with the Troika, despite claims to the contrary from some European leftists (see Sheehan, 2016, p. 147).

The relatively 'fruitless' cooperation with like-minded parties may help explain why ever since 2015 SYRIZA has tried to find transnational allies among European social democrats, as described in Chapter 2. When it comes to Portugal, the SYRIZA government – although not necessarily SYRIZA as a party – seems more interested in cooperating with the centre-left minority government of the PS than with Bloco. According to Arbide Aza, 'The cooperation between the Portuguese government and the Greek government is really strong. ... When there's a Eurogroup [meeting], at the end, Tsipras has a friend there, they trust each other, but the relationship is not with Bloco, it's with Costa'. Indeed, it was Costa, the Portuguese Prime-Minister, who invited Tsipras to attend the PES meeting in Lisbon in December 2017. However, there is no formal bilateral agreement between the two governments. Hence, it is yet to be determined whether the SYRIZA government might be

closer to the social democratic PS government than to its ‘natural’ partner out of necessity or rather because SYRIZA itself has become more social democratic.

SYRIZA-Podemos

SYRIZA and Podemos have been the subject of a few comparative studies, which focus on either their populist features (Kiouпкиolis & Katsambekis, 2018; Ferraresi, 2016; Segatti & Capuzzi, 2016) or their views on the EU (Porta, Kouki & Fernández, 2017). However, there is no study dealing with the actual relationship between the two parties, despite them arguably being, apart from LFI, the two most prominent parties to the left of the official social democracy in the EU today.

That relationship started immediately after the 2014 European elections, when Podemos gained five seats in the EP only a few months after its own creation as a party. Thus, much of Podemos’ transnational party cooperation has taken place via GUE/NGL, as discussed in the following section, but the party also developed bilateral relations with other LPs, SYRIZA in particular. That happened largely via individual connections, especially as Podemos was a very young organisation with no properly developed structures. As Martínez Lobo put it, Podemos was for a while ‘a European delegation with no party’. Thus, the role played by individual connections in the party’s transnational networking and cooperation were rated at 3, i.e. ‘quite significant’, by the six Podemos interviewees.

By far, the most significant individual connection developed between the two leaders, Tsipras and Iglesias. Asked who in Podemos does SYRIZA have personal contacts with, Rapidis replied that ‘with Iglesias, of course’. From the other side, Lilith Verstryngue, an assistant to MEP Estefanía Torres Martínez, said that ‘Iglesias is always in contact with Tsipras’, while Albarracín claimed that ‘they’re friends’. Arbide Aza also said that ‘the relationship between Iglesias and Tsipras is very close’ and O’Donnell that ‘the individual connections between Tsipras and Iglesias were important’. Indeed, in his 2014 book *Politics in a time of crisis*, Iglesias (2015a, pp. 168-169) writes of how his relationship with Tsipras started, immediately after the results of the EP elections that year were announced:

‘I wanted to talk to Alexis Tsipras before talking to anyone else. SYRIZA had just won the European elections in Greece. ... here was a man not drunk on euphoria or optimism, one who plainly saw that the real difficulties only kick in when you have won the election. After we’d talked that night ... we met up in Brussels, and he later invited us to visit him in Athens. I went with Pablo Bustinduy and Íñigo Errejón, and we threw ourselves into long, intense discussions with Tsipras and other SYRIZA members... We talked a lot about ... the work that awaited us

in Brussels and Strasbourg. We talked politics with all the sobriety that came with the realisation that the playing field we were on had not been chosen by us, and would not work in our favour.’

This excerpt shows rather clearly how important it was for Podemos’ leadership and Iglesias in particular to establish links with SYRIZA’s leadership, while at the same time it somewhat anticipates the retreat that the Tsipras-led government would make one year later in front of the Troika.

Obviously, the individual connections were not limited to Iglesias and Tsipras, with Pablo Bustinduy being mentioned not only in the excerpt above but also by several interviewees. Bustinduy has been responsible of the party’s international affairs from the beginning and will head the list for 2019 European elections (infoLibre, 2018). Of him, Martinez Lobo even said, half-jokingly, that he ‘is the guru for the international relations’, with Albarracín also stating that ‘Pablo Bustinduy has direct relations with SYRIZA’. Another name frequently mentioned was that of MEP Miguel Urbán, who will occupy the second place on Podemos’ list for the 2019 European elections and is considered to be the party’s key ‘spokesperson in Europe’ (infoLibre, 2018). Verstryngge said ‘Miguel did a lot, because he has good relations with SYRIZA’.

Moreover, Urbán is one of the leaders of Podemos’ more radical current Anticapitalistas, who are actually ‘in charge of the European Secretariat in Podemos’, as put by Merlo, himself a prominent member of that current and one of Urbán’s assistants in the EP. According to Merlo, the Anticapitalistas, known as the Anti-capitalist Left before the creation of Podemos (Damiani, 2016), sought to establish links mainly with some of the Trotskyist elements within SYRIZA, ascertaining once again the continuous relevance of older ideological affiliation in transnational party networking and cooperation. He said:

‘There’s an observer group in USFI, DEA... During the first Tsipras government, we started to build very close links with them – me, Miguel and Daniel Albarracín. We’ve been many times to Greece – six or seven trips during the first Tsipras government. They had a similar position to ours: a revolutionary group within a new party. Then they left SYRIZA and co-founded Popular Unity.’

Martinez Lobo, also a member of Anticapitalistas, made the point that ‘Anticapitalistas is much, much older than Podemos, so the international networking was already there’. Thus, even a very new party like Podemos, which even claimed to be overcoming the classical left-right cleavage, inherited older patterns of transnational cooperation on the radical left.

At the other end, for some of the SYRIZA interviewees such as Karatsioubanis the cooperation with Podemos soon became even stronger than with Bloco, ‘as Podemos was more visible, also in Greece’. For Rapidis too, because of

‘the fact that Podemos was also trying to win the Spanish election, to be more antagonistic, more competitive, on the national scene in Spain, we could say that we might have had for a certain period of time closer relations because we were also trying to push them to win. It wasn’t the case for Bloco, because they weren’t on that stage, they were not that competitive.’

Kanellopoulos was a bit more nuanced on this: while claiming that ‘with Bloco the cooperation in daily matters is closer’, and despite the fact that ‘Podemos keeps a certain distance from the European LPs’, he also admitted that ‘Podemos is a bit more important, because it’s a Spanish party and a larger party’.

It is interesting to note, therefore, how in the process of party cooperation the size and success of a party may compete with, if not outweigh, other factors such as ideological proximity or how far back the connections go. Nevertheless, one still has to balance between all these factors, as pointed out by Kanellopoulos:

‘Our sister party in Spain are IU and the PCE, and we need to respect that. Of course, with Podemos relations are fully friendly, no problem with that. But people are mindful of keeping a certain balance. When somebody meets a guy from Podemos, the same day or the next day they should also meet with a guy from IU. There has to be a balance between Garzón and Iglesias.’

Of course, SYRIZA has had perhaps an easier task in balancing between the IU and Podemos once the two Spanish left forces formed a coalition in 2015 that was still in force at the time of writing in March 2019.

The idea that SYRIZA had something to gain by forging a close relationship with this new successful LP from a big member state was also entertained by one of the Podemos interviewees. Merlo claimed that, at some point, the cooperation with SYRIZA was much more intense as ‘Podemos was very popular among SYRIZA supporters, because it meant they had a big brother somewhere’, who was ‘also trying to get into power’. Indeed, Podemos was perceived as a promise of success across the European left, with Sheehan (2016, p. 162) claiming that ‘Podemos was next, after SYRIZA, in the hierarchy of hopes’.

However, such pragmatic reasoning worked both ways, as illustrated by the earlier quote from Iglesias and also pointed out by Arbide Aza:

‘They [Podemos] thought that Tsipras and SYRIZA is the left that can win in Europe so they started to work more often and more strongly with SYRIZA than with the other European

parties. ... It wasn't that much that they used the same language, the same practices or the same approaches, but it was the possibility of ruling.'

Indeed, a proof that Podemos 'needed' SYRIZA too, and not just the other way around, was Tsipras being one of the three European left leaders to give a speech at the mass rally held by Podemos in Madrid at the end of its first congress in November 2014 (Seguín & Faber, 2015).

As suggested above already, the peak of Podemos' cooperation with SYRIZA was reached, just like in the case of the SYRIZA-Bloco relationship, in the first months of the newly elected Tsipras government, although the two parties never signed a formal bilateral agreement either. The most obvious and often-quoted instance of cooperation between the two parties was Iglesias joining Tsipras on stage, in central Athens, to celebrate SYRIZA's first electoral victory. As Karatsioubanis recalled it,

'in the last central rally we had in Athens in January 2015, we had Tsipras and Iglesias. OK, we had others, but the strong [presence] was Iglesias. And then we had people chanting "SYRIZA, Podemos, venceremos!" [SYRIZA, Podemos, we shall win!]. With Bloco we don't have that; OK, we have very good relations, but not this extra [camaraderie].'

The same episode was also recollected by Arbide Aza, who covered those events in Athens for TeleSUR:

'There is a very symbolical moment, when Iglesias was an MEP and his party weren't even in the Spanish parliament, and he was invited by Tsipras to close the meeting at the end of the elections. ... It is significant because all the European left leaders were present in the first row of the meeting, but they weren't invited to go up on the stage, only Iglesias was invited ... this new boy that nobody knew. ... Until then the relations between them were very formal, very protocolary (sic).'

The point made earlier about the importance of associating with a new successful LP in a big country like Spain, a party that at the time was scoring 25% in polls, may explain why it was Iglesias, 'this new boy that nobody knew', who was invited by Tsipras on stage rather than any of the other leaders of the European left who were present in Athens that night. On the other hand, Tremlett (2015) somewhat downplays the importance that SYRIZA, or at least Tsipras, was assigning to Podemos:

'Iglesias was energised by his Athens visit, but Tsipras had been less effusive the night before, when, at a party on the terrace of a nightclub with spectacular views of the Parthenon, I asked him whether a future Podemos victory was key to Syriza. Not really, he answered. "Their elections are not for a while," said the man who, three days later, became Europe's lone austerity rebel. "I think we will open roads for them."'

In any case, the point remains that, as Martínez Lobo put it, in those days ‘the relation was very, very close – we supported SYRIZA’, with Maestu even saying that ‘in 2015 the relation with SYRIZA was stronger’ than ever before or since. Thus, Podemos also sent representatives to Athens during the referendum week, albeit in a way that reflected the internal composition of Podemos, as pointed out by Arbide Aza:

‘During the referendum, the three internal families of Podemos came here and had their contacts here. The Anticapitalistas side had their own relationship with the people from one of the families of SYRIZA. Pablo and his people had their relations with the Central Committee of SYRIZA, while the people of Errejón, especially Pablo Bustinduy, had very good relationship with people that were working in the European Parliament.’

Moreover, the support given by Podemos to SYRIZA during those months was also manifested in third countries such as the UK, where both parties have at least one branch, with the SYRIZA branch in London organising a victory rally following the January elections (Quinn, 2015). Thus, in February 2015, the Podemos circle in London took part, together with several British left-wing organisations and trade unions, in a demonstration of ‘solidarity with the Greek people’ (Podemos Londres, 2015), which was at the same time an expression of solidarity with the SYRIZA government. Later on, in June, a representative of the Podemos circle in London, Sirio Canos, attended in Edinburgh an event organised by SYRIZA Scotland and entitled ‘Europe is changing: The challenge for the radical left’, where she shared a panel with three SYRIZA representatives (Podemos Londres, 2015*b*). Interestingly, one of those three SYRIZA speakers was Myrto Tsakatika, a political scientist from the University of Glasgow (referenced with three works in this thesis), which illustrates again the role that party academics can play in transnational networking and cooperation, albeit via the structures of their parties rather than their independent intellectual networks (just like Douzinas launched the petition mentioned in the previous chapter at the suggestion of the party rather than on his own initiative).

However, as in the case of the SYRIZA-Bloco relationship, the U-turn of the Tsipras government from July 2015 significantly affected the relationship between SYRIZA and Podemos, at least from the perspective of the latter. According to Conesa de Lara, the cooperation with SYRIZA decreased after 2015, adding that ‘I wouldn’t see ourselves going now to Greece as we went in 2014’. Also, Verstryngge claimed that ‘we are less supportive of them ... now it’s different: we work on reports, we work on subjects together, but it’s not like Podemos is supporting SYRIZA’. At the same time, she seemed rather sympathetic towards the

Greek party, saying that Tsipras ‘was in a hard position’ and that ‘we have always understood SYRIZA’s situation.’

The interviewees belonging to Anticapitalistas were, as expected, much more critical of SYRIZA’s U-turn, which is significant given their influence over Podemos’ international relations (reflected also in four of the six Podemos interviewees belonging to this current). According to Martinez Lobo, ‘after the Memorandum, the relationship is not the same’, although she admits that ‘it also depends on the MEPs from Podemos and SYRIZA, because Podemos is a very plural organisation so we have different points of views’. In her point of view,

‘the problem wasn’t in July, but in January when they won the elections, when they didn’t take the proper measures, like the National Bank, capital control. ... They didn’t prepare ... they were quite naïve and thought they could change somehow the policies sent by the Troika.’

But she too found attenuating circumstances to SYRIZA’s defeat:

‘We have to take into account that Greece was alone and even if the path was prepared from January... it would’ve been very hard for citizens. ... It’s going to be very hard to have two currencies. ... We have no alliances, who are your allies? China, Venezuela?! So the international situation was also complicated.’

More sharply critical, Albarracín said that ‘I disagree with Syriza, who failed on its Thessaloniki Programme – all factions in Podemos agree that we need to avoid the mistakes of Syriza’. Indeed, he admitted that ‘Anticapitalistas supports now Popular Unity in Greece; we have links with DEA and other smaller groups who are outside of SYRIZA now.’ Even harsher were the comments made by Merlo, who described SYRIZA’s deal with the Troika as follows:

‘an outright disaster for the livelihood of Greeks, and the social rights, and the public goods, and the sovereignty of Greece. It’s even a treason, because they did the opposite of their mandate, but going to that kind of moral terms is not useful, so publicly I would call it a “defeat” rather than a capitulation.’

Hence, according to Merlo, Podemos should ‘draw a big separation from their strategy and their tactics, and really isolate them internationally because I think their strategy takes the left to defeat and discredit all around Europe. ... Whatever they do, we should have nothing to do with it’. Indeed, he confirmed Albarracín in saying that ‘we Anticapitalistas supported Popular Unity in the September elections’, which was illustrated by Jesús Romero, a member of the radical current and also of the Andalusian regional parliament for Podemos, giving a speech at a Popular Unity electoral rally (Sheehan, 2016, p. 154; Gil, 2015).

Similar to the case of Bloco, the distancing from SYRIZA was also linked to the dynamics of domestic politics. As Merlo put it, ‘The defeat of SYRIZA made it much more difficult for us in the elections, because we had no successful story [to reference] and we had to say that it would be very different in Spain [than in Greece]’. Another member of Anticapitalistas, Josep Maria Antentas, made a point along the same lines in an interview given to *Jacobin*: ‘Podemos made a big mistake in offering its support to Tsipras, and so it found itself without arguments when political adversaries pointed at the SYRIZA example and said “See? It is not possible to rule in a different way.” The Greek situation was not easy for Podemos.’ (Souvlis, 2016)

At the same time, echoing the comment by Sverkos regarding the failure of the left’s transnational cooperation, Antentas also acknowledged the limits in Podemos’ own approach to the events in Greece:

‘First, the lack of a practical and concrete internationalism in the everyday practice of the main organizations of the Spanish left, whose leaderships are not projected towards what’s going on in other European countries. Second, the focus on domestic tasks hampers their ability to address non-immediate issues. The intensity of the Spanish political crisis and the concatenation of elections ensures that the urgent always prevails over the necessary.’ (Souvlis, 2016)

Indeed, the pressures of domestic politics which Antentas hints at are discussed in the final chapter as one of the key factors in the dynamics of transnational party cooperation.

Despite the comments above, criticisms of SYRIZA were rather limited in public, with the exception of a couple of interviews given by members of Anticapitalistas such as the one mentioned above or that given by Miguel Urbán to Garcia (2016) for the Spanish magazine *Contexto*, where he stated that ‘Tsipras disappointed me’ and that, indeed, ‘there are people from SYRIZA in the European Parliament to whom I don’t speak anymore’. By contrast, the leadership of Podemos, Iglesias in particular, defended the deal signed by the Tsipras government with the Troika, which he dubbed as ‘realistic’ (Economakis, 2015). Moreover, he even attended the final rally of SYRIZA’s campaign for the post-referendum elections in September (Sheehan, 2016, p. 153; Foster, 2015).

Nevertheless, Iglesias (2015c) was keen to point out that Spain is different from Greece and that, thereby, Podemos would be faced with better circumstances than SYRIZA:

‘Our strategy would be different, because it would start from the acknowledgement that Spain constitutes 13 per cent of the Eurozone’s GDP, whereas Greece makes up between 3 and 4 per

cent. We would take as our point of departure the fact that our margin for action would be bigger.’

Overall, the intensity of the relations between SYRIZA and Podemos declined after July 2015, as argued by Merlo: ‘even if Iglesias defended what Tsipras did, the cooperation decreased between the two parties.’ However, it might not have decreased as drastically as in the case of SYRIZA and Bloco, given that, according to Albarracín, ‘we need to work with them.’

At the other end, Kanellopoulos claimed that after July 2015

‘the cooperation became more institutionalised. ... Whenever there is a chance – a meeting, a congress – we participate and we talk to them. There have been established some institutional channels of cooperation and phone calls, and it works like that. The situation is not that urgent after the summer of 2015.’

One such ‘chance’ for interaction was SYRIZA’s own congress in the autumn of 2016, where Podemos sent a few representatives, including Pablo Bustinduy. However, one of the interviewees, who did not want to be named in this case, recalled a rather awkward moment from that event, which somewhat sums up the inconsistent relationship between the two parties after July 2015:

‘Podemos was invited on the stage to show that this relationship remained strong, and the people from Podemos refused to speak to the crowd. ... All left forces that are allies of SYRIZA were there but [with them] it wasn’t the same level friendship that they wanted to show [to their members], and Podemos refused. ... They didn’t really know what to say, they didn’t know what their stance on the agreement with the Troika was. ... Officially, they would say, 100% of the times, “we support the difficult choice of our friend Tsipras and we understand he didn’t want to”, but if you speak to them without a microphone, they say “we don’t understand shit, we don’t know why he did that and [what he did] after that we understand even less”.’

Such a reaction on behalf of Podemos members is due to the party genuinely not having a coherent position on SYRIZA’s capitulation (Sheehan, 2016, p. 135; Souvlis, 2016) but also due to, once again, the ever present demands of domestic politics, as pointed out by the same anonymous source: ‘[that episode] was before the Spanish elections, and that was important for why they didn’t want to go on stage’. Moreover, that was not the case only with the Spanish or Portuguese left but also in other European countries such as Ireland, where, according to Sheehan (2016, p. 205), ‘after July, SYRIZA was an embarrassment for the left here and elsewhere’. At the same time, domestic politics might push Podemos closer to SYRIZA once again in case it ends up participating in government following the general elections in Spain in 2019.

Bloco-Podemos

When Podemos emerged, Bloco already had – just like SYRIZA – links to a Spanish LP, the IU/PCE. Nevertheless, that did not prevent them from quickly establishing a relationship with the new party from across the border. As Pedrosa put it, ‘With Greece, OK, we share a lot of stuff, but in terms of culture, Portugal and Spain are much closer’. Thus, according to him, ‘from the very early beginning of Podemos, the relation between Bloco and Podemos was very close’. For Podemos, Bloco was the natural partner on the Portuguese left, as pointed out by Fazenda: ‘Podemos had immediately relationships with us and not so easily with the PCP. ... The PCP think they are too social democratic.’

As a matter of fact, the connections between Bloco and Podemos predate the creation of the latter and revolve around the affiliation to the Trotskyist international USFI of both the Anticapitalistas and of one of the founding organisations of Bloco (which has since dissolved inside Bloco). Merlo pointed out this link, while also mentioning some of the individual connections between the two parties:

‘Anticapitalistas has long-standing international relations via the USFI with the latter’s sections in Greece and Portugal. ... In Portugal they’re in the leadership of Bloco, although they don’t exist as a structured organisation. People like Francisco Louçã and Jorge Costa are close comrades and friends of ours and we’ve been collaborating with them for many years.’

Indeed, Merlo rated the USFI at 4 for the relationship with Bloco, although he clearly did so as a member of Anticapitalistas rather than as a member of Podemos, which reflects the strategy of entryism that Trotskyist organisations have traditionally employed, although Anticapitalistas has significant toned down any Trotskyist or Marxist propaganda in recent years, at least when looking at their website (<https://www.anticapitalistas.org>).

Albarracín also emphasised the importance of the Trotskyist links in their relationship with Bloco: ‘We have excellent relations with Bloco, we work together in the USFI, where Bloco is represented by the current led by Francisco Louçã.’ Indeed, due to those links, Albarracín maintained that ‘we have stronger relations to Bloco, especially us, Anticapitalistas’. Even Luís Fazenda from Bloco, despite coming from a Maoist background, said that ‘we are closer to the Anticapitalistas’ than to the other currents within Podemos, while adding that they also have links to ‘some people in the Iglesias tendency’ but ‘no friends in the Errejón tendency’, as ‘Errejón wants a full alliance with the Socialists’ (although Errejón has since left Podemos).

Largely because of this ideological connection, Miguel Urbán is mentioned by several interviewees as one of the Podemos people close to Bloco. Verstrynge said ‘Miguel did a lot, because he has good relations ... with Bloco as well’ and Conesa de Lara recalled that ‘it was Miguel Urbán who went to a Bloco meeting, so this must play a role’. Apart from that, Maestu claimed that ‘Iglesias and Marisa Matias are very good friends and they share common positions, sometimes’, while Verstrynge said that ‘Iglesias is always in contact with ... Catarina Martins’, the coordinator of Bloco. Other individual connections have been established through the common work in the EP, which is dealt with in the following section. Therefore, like in the previous two cases, the individual connections seem rather limited to the top layers of the parties.

According to most interviewees from Bloco and Podemos, their relationship enhanced over the years. As Albarracín put it, ‘Podemos has a permanent relation with Bloco, as we’re paying a lot of attention to what happens in Portugal.’ Martínez Lobo also was of the opinion that the relationship with Bloco has ‘intensified somewhat ... also because of the new situation in Portugal – they’re not in government but they’re supporting the social democratic government.’ The same point was made by Enrique Maestu: ‘We always study the Portuguese case now, when they have a Socialist [Party] government; it’s a really interesting experiment, so now we can say it’s stronger’. In hindsight, it is rather obvious why Podemos was so interested in Bloco’s collaboration with the social democratic government in Portugal, as Podemos has been playing the same role in Spain, lending parliamentary support to the minority government of PSOE since June 2018. Once again, it is the importance of and similarity in national contexts that seems to be a key factor in the dynamics of transnational relations between parties.

However, that has not necessarily entailed a particularly intense or systematic cooperation between Bloco and Podemos, which have no formal bilateral agreement. According to Gusmão, their ‘cooperation doesn’t happen on a daily basis; it happens on specific instances or movements’. Such a specific instance has been, according to Pureza, ‘the issue of the nuclear power plant on the border, Almaraz’, touched upon in the section on social movements and which brought about ‘intense contacts between Bloco and Podemos’. Another instance of cooperation was the closing rally of Podemos’ first congress, which was also addressed, besides Tsipras and Mélenchon, by Marisa Matias, who said in front of over 100,000 people that ‘we have a message for the marionettes and the faceless powers: if you threaten our lives, we will take the power’ (Seguín & Faber, 2015).

Most of the Bloco and Podemos interviewees believe that now they have a closer relationship with each other than either of them has with SYRIZA. As Gusmão put it, ‘we are closer to Podemos now’, but ‘not in the same way’ as they used to be to SYRIZA, with which, generally, they are more similar from an ideological point of view. Indeed, in his view, ‘Now we don’t have one political party with which we have very good relationships’. Also, Fazenda claimed that, unlike with SYRIZA, ‘with Podemos we have bilateral relations’, but that there is a ‘lower scale cooperation with them than we used to have with SYRIZA’. This state of affairs is also indicated from the Podemos’ side, with Merlo saying that ‘now we’re closer to Bloco’, although the relation with Bloco ‘has stayed the same’. However, as shown in the following section, this perception may differ when it comes to the cooperation in the EP, where people’s particular roles determine more than anything with people from which party they work more closely with.

Overall, it seems that Bloco and Podemos are now closer to each other not as much due to the intensification in their relationship as to the decrease in both of their relationships with SYRIZA. Indeed, several Bloco interviewees made several comments that help explain why the relationship between them and Podemos has not taken off as much as one might have expected, particularly given their geographical proximity and the similarity in their national political contexts. Thus, according to Pedrosa, the bitter experience of associating itself so closely with SYRIZA has left Bloco rather wary of repeating that with another LP any time soon:

‘If you have a very bad love experience, you don’t want to repeat it; you are more conscious with the relations with other parties. Like with Podemos: let’s calm down, see what they will do, because we don’t want to repeat the same mistake that we did with SYRIZA, to share the party as our own and then answer for that. ... It changed a lot how you look at transnational cooperation because it’s like you can trust no-one.’

Furthermore, while he praised Podemos for ‘the way they communicate’, Pedrosa was quite critical of the Spanish party, albeit in a rather vague manner: ‘Podemos is still trying to find what they are, they are still a mess ... and they make a lot of mistakes.’ Fazenda made a more specific criticism of Podemos: ‘They reproduce some self-centring that Spanish have always had about the Portuguese or other oppressed minorities.’ It is interesting, therefore, that historical power relations between countries that are also reflected within the left are not merely confined along the classic North-South axis.

One of the Bloco interviewees made much sharper criticisms of Podemos, in particular of its programme and ideology, but declined to be quoted on them:

‘Podemos has no position on NATO, on monarchy or republic, they want to democratise the EU, they don’t even say how. You can read hundreds of pages of programmes of Podemos, they don’t develop their position. They don’t want public sector in the economy. They want to make public things that are already public. They don’t want to interfere in private banking, in private industry. They don’t even have a radical tax programme against rich people, the capital. So when Pablo [Iglesias] said “we are social democrats”, a lot of people were surprised, even the bourgeois people, who say that “they are the radicals!”; but “the radicals” have the most moderate programme I have ever seen in radical [LPs] ... not even Keynes!’

Furthermore, the same interviewee also criticised Podemos’ organisational culture:

‘They are very authoritarian inside the party ... big personalisation of the internal life of the party... lots of obstacles in the real internal debate. ... Even if you vote on the Internet, you vote what? Who put the cards on the table? ... Any possibility of discussing that? No. ... [they] can change the decisions that are taken at the congress. So what is the congress for?’

What such sharp criticisms – which are not reciprocated at all by Podemos’ interviewees though – indicate is that, at least from the point of view of Bloco, the relationship between the two parties has been motivated rather by pragmatic and circumstantial considerations than by a genuine ideological/programmatic affinity, apart of course from the aforementioned Trotskyist connection. Nevertheless, as discussed in the final chapter, it is not necessarily the ideological/programmatic divergence that primarily impedes the transnational cooperation between these parties.

The EP political groups: GUE/NGL

While the bilateral relations discussed in the previous section have never been properly formalised, they have been feeding into the formalised cooperation among the three parties. The most extensive and important form of such cooperation is via the EP and the political group of the left there, GUE/NGL, which this section deals with. GUE/NGL is the only transnational organisational framework that all three parties belong to as full members. Also, given the role of the EP, it is the most politically influential transnational organisation of the European left today (Calossi, 2016, p. 25; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 334). It is no surprise then that, of all pan-European organisations included in the questionnaire, GUE/NGL received, overall, the highest score for both the pre-2009 and post-2009 transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos – 3.5 and 3.4 respectively, i.e. halfway between ‘quite significant’ and ‘very significant’ for both timeframes. Thus, the section starts

by outlining the history of GUE/NGL and then proceeds to discussing its role in the networking and cooperation among the parties, as perceived by the interviewees, before and after the start of the Eurozone crisis.

A brief history of GUE/NGL

Given their initial opposition to European integration, radical left parties were not allowed by their national legislatures to have representatives in the EP up until 1969, when the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was allocated seven MEPs following its Eurocommunist turn (Murray, 2004, p. 112). As other parties adopted a similar strategy of engagement, the PCF in particular, the radical left managed to form its first group in the EP in 1973, the Communist and Allies Group (CAG). However, divisions between the PCI-led Eurocommunist wing of the group and the PCF-led orthodox one, which intensified throughout the 1980s and revolved around the questions of the USSR, European integration and transnational cooperation itself, led to the break-up of CAG in 1989. Rather ironically, the two groups resulted from the split were called the European United Left (Eurocommunist) and Left Unity (orthodox).

With the blow suffered by the European radical left following the collapse of Soviet-style socialist regimes, both groups terminated in the early 1990s. The European United Left disbanded in 1993 after the majority in the PCI converted into a social democratic party and affiliated to that respective group in the EP, whereas Left Unity ceased to exist following the 1994 European elections, when the PCF, KKE and PCP together fell six seats short of the eighteen needed in order to maintain their group in the new legislature. But their lack of representation in a post-Maastricht EP with greater powers quickly triggered a process of rapprochement among these strands of the left, who now also shared an opposition to the neoliberal provisions of the Maastricht Treaty (Hudson, 2000, p. 70). There were also, of course, institutional incentives entailed by the EP's internal rules, which allocated very few funds or significant positions to *non-inscripts* MEPs (Calossi, 2016, p. 156).

Hence, in 1994, the Confederal Group of the European United Left was established as the new group of the radical left in the EP, comprising of the IU, SYN, PCP, KKE and PCF. With the EU's 1995 enlargement, the Finnish Left Alliance and the Swedish Left Party also joined this group, which was thus renamed the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). That rather long and uninspiring name change was meant to convey the relative distinctiveness of the new Northern European contingent, which was both more Eurosceptic than the likes of SYN and IU and significantly more critical of the

Soviet legacy than the likes of KKE and PCP, but which also added a stronger environmental dimension to the group (Calossi, 2016, p. 157).

Over the years, GUE/NGL has expanded to include new LPs, such as Bloco and Die Linke, or LPs from new member states, such as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Czech Republic) or AKEL (Cyprus), as well as left-wing MEPs who did not feel represented by any of the other groups. Thus, the group has clearly widened, and it had an all-time high of 52 MEPs from 14 member states during 2014-2019, out of which 5 MEPs are from Podemos (second only to Die Linke, which has 7), 3 MEPs are from SYRIZA and 1 from Bloco.

However, GUE/NGL has not significantly *deepened*, remaining a rather loose and eclectic confederation (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016; Raunio, 2011; Dunphy, 2004), whose executive body, the Bureau, has no binding power on the constituent parties (Calossi, 2016, p. 193). While this allows its members to ‘enjoy their own legitimacy and freedom within the group’ (Calossi, 2016, p. 193), it also means that GUE/NGL has failed to achieve a common political programme going beyond broad and rather moderate progressive commonplaces such as ‘better jobs’, ‘social solidarity’ and ‘sustainable development’ (GUE/NGL, n.d.).

The key ideological reason for GUE/NGL’s lack of cohesion has been the long-standing cleavage between the so-called ‘sovereignists’ and ‘Europeanists’ (Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 523; see also Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016), despite the claim that ‘What unites us is the vision of a socially equitable, peaceful and sustainable European integration process based on international solidarity’ (GUE/NGL, n.d.). That cleavage even led the staunchly sovereignist KKE to leave the group following the 2014 elections, accusing the Europeanist elements, SYRIZA and Die Linke in particular, of hijacking GUE/NGL in support of their pro-EU agenda (KKE, 2014). That departure rendered the integrationist majority stronger than before, currently controlling almost 70% of the positions, according to Calossi (2016, pp. 172-173). However, as developed in the final chapter, the divisions over the question of the EU have visibly enhanced after SYRIZA’s 2015 U-turn, with further splits from GUE/NGL following the 2019 European elections not seeming unlikely at all.

Networking and cooperation via GUE/NGL

SYN and Bloco only had one MEP each before 2009, Dimitris Papadimoulis and Miguel Portas respectively. Nevertheless, interviewees from both SYRIZA and Bloco rated the importance of GUE/NGL for their networking and cooperation at 3.5, i.e. halfway between ‘quite significant’ and ‘very significant’. That is indicative of the importance they assign to

having representation in the EP. Indeed, according to Pureza, the EP was ‘the formal platform for dialogue’.

Pedrosa also credits Miguel Portas, ‘one of the three founders of Bloco ... a big personality in Bloco and in GUE/NGL’, as someone who ‘helped increase the relations between Bloco and GUE/NGL’. Thus, while individual connections were discussed in the previous section, they obviously play a role in every framework or channel of party cooperation, even in such an institutionalised one like the EP group.

With the 2009 European elections taking place before the crisis started, SYN/SYRIZA did not increase their number of MEPs, with Nikolaos Chountis (now in Popular Unity) replacing Papadimoulis. In 2014 though, SYRIZA won the European elections in Greece and gained six seats in the EP (out of which only three are still members of SYRIZA), while Bloco got only one. But interviewees from both SYRIZA and Bloco rated the importance of GUE/NGL slightly higher than for the pre-2009 period – 3.8 and 3.6 respectively. The Podemos interviewees gave on average a lower score to GUE/NGL, 3, despite their party gaining five seats in the EP only a few months after being established and despite all the interviewees working for Podemos in the EP.

Thus, in Kanellopoulos’ view, GUE/NGL was significant ‘before 2009 but much more significant now’. Indeed, according to him, because ‘We work together in the European Parliament’, it means that ‘there is no need for extra institutions for cooperation’. Katsardis, who is the press officer for the SYRIZA MEPs, said he sees the links between them and the MEPs from the other two parties ‘every day at the GUE/NGL level – I see that there is a good relationship, as they are very close’. In his view, GUE/NGL is ‘where the MEPs meet and also where there is a European approach to an extent’.

Katsardis also gave a concrete example of cooperation with an MEP from the other two parties, namely Pablo Echenique from Podemos: ‘In the elections of January 2015, we made a visit together in Greece. He doesn’t speak Greek himself, but I taught him how to pronounce every word and he gave a message in Greek to the Greek people about how to vote.’ While this illustrates once again the intensification of cooperation around the election of the first SYRIZA government, Katsardis claimed this happens regularly:

‘It’s part of my work, calling an MEP – “Would you like to give a message for SYRIZA?”; and they did, for the elections or the referendum in 2015. ... And very often there would be very good relations. An MEP would not say “Oh, I’m going to tell you this”; they would be like, “What did the others tell you so I don’t tell you the same, so it’s good for the media?”. They are more and more media aware, and Podemos, as you know, is very good at these things.’

Indeed, in the run-up to those elections, 21 MEPs from GUE/NGL, including Matias from Bloco and Iglesias from Podemos, encouraged the Greek voters to vote for SYRIZA in a video compiled by the Greek party's delegation to the EP and posted on YouTube (SYRIZA European Parliament, 2015). However, the less than three thousand views that the video managed to gather are a testimony to the limited impact of such actions but perhaps also of the low profile of MEPs in general, particularly when it comes to national elections. GUE/NGL would officially back SYRIZA also after its government's U-turn, with the group's chair, Gabi Zimmer from Die Linke, attending the party's final rally ahead of the elections in September 2015 (Sheehan, 2016, p. 153).

The answers of Bloco interviewees also confirmed the importance of GUE/NGL for their party's cooperation with the other two. Gusmão said that 'we don't really have permanent structures to coordinate our intervention, for instance, in European institutions, aside from GUE/NGL'. Also, Pureza said that, 'despite all the differences between different parties, starting with the differences between the PCP and Bloco, [GUE/NGL] is a platform in which the dynamics of exchange and of networking has become very important'. Moreover, for him it is 'the most important' channel for networking and cooperation, because after the start of the crisis 'the enemy were mainly the EU institutions, so it's understandable that the EP, being another institution, was the basic framework of this kind of networking'. Finally, Pedrosa too claimed that GUE/NGL is 'much more important than the PEL'.

From Podemos' perspective, GUE/NGL was the first international framework where the new party engaged with other LPs. As Merlo put it, 'Podemos started its international relations once it got in the EP', where it 'integrated in GUE/NGL immediately'. Thus, it was 'mainly through this parliamentarian platform that we got in contact with other parties'. Furthermore, Martinez Lobo pointed out that Podemos had a presence in the EP before its party structure had properly developed:

'The first representatives were the 5 MEPs here, so we started to build both formal and informal relationships without [having] a party in Spain, because we had no party yet, but we had a delegation here in the EP. ... We were a European delegation with no party.'

According to Arbide Aza, Podemos and SYRIZA 'were speaking before but the strong relationship was developed in the EP', while O'Donnell, who works for GUE/NGL, believes the group has been a 'very important introductory point for Podemos to the others'. Indeed, Conesa de Lara claimed that 'if tomorrow Podemos stops being in the EP, I don't think we would keep having a collaboration with any of the parties with which we're collaborating right

now'. This again reinforces the perceived importance of the EP, especially for parties like Bloco and Podemos that do not have governmental power.

Verstrynge developed a bit more on how cooperation works in the EP:

'If we have some event and we need an MEP and we don't have anybody, we can call Marisa [Matias] or we can call somebody from SYRIZA, because it's easier for them to say yes. We know it would be more complicated to get someone from Die Linke if we want because we don't work as much with them, but it would be very easy to have Marisa, to have someone from SYRIZA. ... In this office, we work much more with Bloco than with SYRIZA. ... Estefanía [Torres Martínez] is friends with Marisa Matias because they work together. ... Miguel [Urbán] works with Marisa as well. I don't know if they are friends too, but they have direct contact and they can say to each other "I won't help you here because I don't agree with you", and it's not a problem.'

This points again to the importance of certain individuals for party cooperation, who act as nodes of that process, especially when the other party has only one MEP. Merlo too supported this idea by stating that Pablo Bustinduy, in particular, 'worked on this integration' of Podemos in GUE/NGL. Unlike with the bilateral relations though, the individual connections are not limited to the main actors – in this case the MEPs – but also take place among staff members in the group and assistants to MEPs. According to Merlo, 'in GUE/NGL, the cooperation among staff is not the same as the one between parties: people [here] have established informal links'. Conesa de Lara also said their delegation has 'relations with assistants and staff members of certain MEPs'. Arbide Aza illustrated how these links may sometimes develop:

'They make very often common trips to the Greek islands, about the refugees, to Kurdistan etc. They strengthen very, very much the personal relationships between them. They are four days together [there], sleeping in the same hotel, drinking beers in the evening – they are really important. ... I've seen it, I've been with them, we've been to Kurdistan together. ... The relationships are very tight, very strong.'

Those relationships, at least between SYRIZA and some people from Podemos, were affected though by the U-turn of the former in July 2015. Thus, in a press interview Miguel Urbán declared that 'there are people from SYRIZA in the European Parliament to whom I don't speak anymore' (García, 2016). However, that is not merely related to SYRIZA's domestic policies but also to its strategic reorientation towards forging alliances, particularly in the EP, with progressive elements of other political families such as the social democrats and the Greens, particularly in the perspective of the new, 2019-2024 legislature (see Michalopoulos, 2018a; Papadimoulis, 2017).

Apart from Tsipras' participation in conferences of and meetings with key European social democratic parties, such as the German SPD (Michalopoulos, 2018*b*), the most concrete articulation of this strategic reorientation has been the Progressive Caucus, which 'aims at analysing differences and building bridges between progressive allies in the European Parliament and across Europe', allies who 'are convinced that it's time to change the neoliberal, unsustainable and unfair Europe' (Progressive Caucus, n.d.). At an event organised in 2018 in Athens by the Progressive Caucus (important enough to close with a keynote speech by Tsipras), the SYRIZA MEP Dimitris Papadimoulis, who is on the Caucus' Steering Committee, posed the question of such an alliance emerging in the EP: 'Why not proceed to a large, leftist progressive group in the European Parliament that will be itself, and not the far right, the rival against neoliberalism?' (Progressive Caucus, 2018).

However, the only other members of GUE/NGL who seem to be involved in the Progressive Caucus are from Die Linke (Progressive Caucus, 2018), with no participation therefore from either Bloco or Podemos MEPs. Indeed, in reference to SYRIZA's new approach to transnational cooperation, Merlo said 'that's not the kind of international relations that we intend to build', although the interview took place before his party would lend parliamentary support to the social democratic minority government of PSOE. In any case, the divergence of approaches to transnational cooperation in the EP and beyond is quite visible and raises doubts over whether the three parties concerned here will still be part of the same political group after May 2019.

Despite these criticisms of SYRIZA, the level of cooperation with the Greek party via GUE/NGL is still relatively high. In the view of Martinez Lobo, herself a member of Anticapitalistas like Merlo, 'even though I am very critical of SYRIZA, I think I work more with SYRIZA than with Bloco, also because SYRIZA have more MEPs, [while] Bloco has one MEP'. That perception was also shared by Conesa de Lara:

'There would be more collaboration and closer contact with Popular Unity if we were militants on the street in Spain, but given that here we are in the framework of GUE/NGL, there is contact [with the Popular Unity MEPs], but there is much more contact with the Tsipras side of SYRIZA. ... In my case, there is a lot of networking with SYRIZA, not so much with other delegations.'

Thus, in comparing the levels of cooperation with the other two parties, Conesa de Lara pointed out that 'there's no Bloco members in the trade committee ... we had two members in that committee and SYRIZA had members there as well, so we were working with them'. Thus, it seems that, at least in some cases, requirements of day-to-day work but perhaps also the

limited resources available to these parties may prevail over ideological affinity, at least when it comes to cooperation in the EP.

Beyond the particular differences between parties that might hamper their cooperation in GUE/NGL, some interviewees also indicated more generic issues with the group, if not the EP in general. For example, echoing the self-critical points made by Haris Golemis at the Transform event discussed at the end of the previous chapter, Albarracín, despite working for GUE/NGL, stated that ‘the influence of the debate happening here is very low, it doesn’t go outside, and the quality is low too. It gives a space to create opinions and policies, but it doesn’t do anything else.’ Katsardis also seems sceptical of the effectiveness of some of the activities organised by GUE/NGL:

‘It’s like everybody has their own opinion; it’s a bit like a party conference: when somebody speaks, nobody listens. Only if 20 or 30 different people mention the same thing, then this might become an issue. ... In the end, there are things that are happening just because they have to happen – do things just to do them. This is a little bit boring, so I’m bored of these things. And, again, it’s not about the left, Podemos, SYRIZA or Bloco. In the world where we make one-minute videos for Facebook and we feel that it’s too long, a three and half-hour discussion, where it’s not a discussion but mainly monologues, is something of the previous century.’

Pablo Garcia, a journalist who covers EU affairs in Brussels for *El Diario*, but who is also on the left and votes for Podemos, talked of the group’s lack of cohesion:

‘GUE/NGL is doing well but the cooperation is not super-high. ... When I talk to people working in the EP, they always tell me they are trying to coordinate what Podemos does with what SYRIZA does etc. and they complained, off the record, about the anarchy in the parliamentary group. ... They act by themselves because they believe they are the best because they have a very good score ... but I don’t think it is an exception.’

Finally, even someone who has been working for GUE/NGL for many years, like Jim O’Donnell, made a point about the limits of the group’s activity (despite still rating its importance for the post-2009 networking and cooperation as ‘very significant’):

‘GUE/NGL doesn’t do much: the personalities get to meet each other, but there’s not much of party-based cooperation, also because GUE/NGL has other strands, the Nordic parties, then the communist parties etc. It has basically concentrated on the small number of things they could do in order to get a consensus. Now the governing rule of the GUE/NGL is that everything has to be decided by consensus and some of them, including the Portuguese, think that’s how Europe should be run.’

This confirms the prevailing view in the literature regarding the group's lack of cohesion and effectiveness (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016; Dunphy & March, 2013; Raunio, 2011; Dunphy, 2004), which might only increase if not lead to an outright split following the upcoming European elections. As will also be discussed in the following two sections, the long-standing cleavage over the question of European integration might prove again decisive in fragmenting the left forces in the EP and beyond.

The Euro-party: PEL

The Party of the European Left (PEL), also called the European Left Party or simply the European Left, is the only Euro-party of the left that is recognised and funded by the EU. While both SYRIZA and Bloco are (still) part of it, Podemos is not, not even as an observer, unlike its foundation 25MI is in relation to PEL's foundation Transform. This is reflected in the contrasting ratings given to it by interviewees from SYRIZA and those from Podemos but also, intriguingly, those from Bloco, who for reasons explored below give the PEL substantially lower scores than SYRIZA. Overall, the PEL is rated at 3.5 for pre-2009 networking and cooperation and 2.9 for the post-2009 period, which indicates a decrease in its significance for party networking and cooperation during the Eurozone crisis, a period when its role should have arguably enhanced.

This section starts by introducing the PEL, which of all frameworks for transnational networking and cooperation of LPs today has received the largest share of attention in the current literature (see Nikolakakis, 2016; Dunphy & March, 2013; Hudson, 2012, pp. 46-65; Calossi, 2011; Sozzi, 2011). The section then discusses, from the point of view of the interviewees, the PEL's role in the networking and cooperation among the three parties concerned, both before and after the start of the Eurozone crisis.

A brief history of the PEL

The Treaty on European Union signed in Maastricht in 1992 not only provided extra incentives for transnational party cooperation with its acceleration of European integration, but also the legal framework in that regard. Article 138a of that treaty stated that Euro-parties are 'to contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union'. Thus, the pre-existing party federations soon turned into Euro-parties, in

a complete or almost complete overlap with the corresponding political groups in the EP, namely the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES) and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE).

On the background of its post-1989 relative weakness, and given the cleavages mentioned in the previous section as well as a certain 'Comintern-aversion' (Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 523) that hindered trust and cooperation among its strands, the left only established its Euro-party in 2004. What finally enabled the creation of the PEL was the increasing awareness on the behalf of LPs like the forerunner of Die Linke, the German Party of Democratic Socialism, the PRC, PCE, SYN and PCF that they had to strengthen their cooperation at a transnational level in order to better counter the neoliberal structures and policies of the EU (Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 523). Apart from that, of course, the anticipated introduction of funding for European political parties in 2004 was also an incentive for establishing the PEL that particular year, which was also a year of European elections.

The PEL was launched in January 2004 in Berlin, with the second meeting taking place in Athens a few months later. Its eleven founding members included SYN and Bloco. Today, the PEL has 26 full member and 6 observer parties from a total of 23 countries. Thus, as Dunphy and March (2013, p. 521) put it, 'given the long-term fragmentation of the radical left, the ELP [European Left Party] appears to have consolidated remarkably and has brought RLP [radical left party] co-operation at EU level to a historical high'. Moreover, in 2016 the PEL launched a network of its constituent parties' youth organisation, called the Young European Left network, which the auxiliary organisations of both SYRIZA and Bloco are part of (Youth of SYRIZA, 2016), although the network does not seem particularly active.

There is high variety among PEL's members, which include, for example, the democratic socialist Finnish Left Alliance but also the rather oligarchic and authoritarian Party of Communists of Republic of Moldova (March, 2011, pp. 81-83), the electorally strong SYRIZA and Die Linke but also the virtually irrelevant Romanian Socialist Party and the Bulgarian Left, which seem to have been added for the sake of a wider geographical reach. This eclectic character of the PEL has hindered its potential for coherent and coordinated action (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 338; Dunphy & March, 2013, p. 522).

Despite that, at least in comparison to the GUE/NGL, the PEL has a more cohesive stance on the key question of the EU, which allowed them in 2009 to produce the first common manifesto of the non-social democratic left in any European elections. Its stance towards the EU has become more critical with the start of the crisis (Nikolakakis, 2016), which was described as 'as an opportunity for the neoliberals to push their reforms all the way with

appalling violence and speed' (PEL, 2013, p. 4). Nevertheless, the PEL has maintained a fundamental endorsement of European integration (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 340). Thus, ahead of the 2014 European elections, it opposed the idea of an exit from the EU and even from the Eurozone (PEL, 2013, p. 13), advocating instead for the reformation of the European project.

At the same time, its broad critical support for the EU is what has prevented the PEL from attracting within its ranks more Eurosceptic but yet significant LPs, such as the Swedish Left Party or the Dutch Socialist Party, not to mention the resolutely anti-Europeanist KKE and PCP. This has also meant that, unlike the social democrats for example, the PEL and GUE/NGL are far from overlapping (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 335), with only 23 out of GUE/NGL's 52 MEPs coming from parties that are members of the PEL. Indeed, the statute of the PEL (2018) makes no mention of GUE/NGL; by contrast, the statutes of the PES (2015) assert that 'the Group of the Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament is the parliamentary expression of the PES in the European Parliament'.

Following the defeat of the SYRIZA government, whose election in January 2015 it had clamorously celebrated (Nikolakakis, 2015), PEL does not seem to have fundamentally reassessed its critical support to the EU. However, that commitment appears rather ambiguous in the manifesto for the 2019 European elections (PEL, 2019). On the one hand, it puts forward proposals for reforming the EU, such as holding the ECB democratically accountable and tasking it with 'employment goals', abolishing the Fiscal Compact, or imposing a financial transaction tax (PEL, 2019, p. 3). On the other hand, there is a call to 'confront and change the European treaties' (PEL, 2019, p. 1) and to build 'Europe on a new basis of solidarity where the sovereignty of the people must be respected' (PEL, 2019, p. 2). Indeed, while there is no implicit support for an exit, there is no explicit rejection of it either, unlike in previous years.

What is striking is the absence of any clear indication of how the left would fight for its proposals and, indeed, to 'confront and change' the European treaties – a rather blatant shortcoming that for long has characterised the left's calls for reforming the EU (Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 345). Thus, in terms of strategy, the PEL has limited itself to reasserting the need to increase transnational cooperation as a necessary condition for left governments to break with austerity (Laurent, 2016). Such cooperation would have to go beyond LPs and aim to draw in broader progressive forces, thus echoing SYRIZA's recent international strategy.

The most concrete step in that direction taken by the PEL has been the launch of an annual European Forum, which has taken place twice so far, in Marseille in 2017 and in Bilbao in 2018. According to the final declaration of the Bilbao summit, the European Forum aims to

‘promote cooperation between leftist, green and progressive forces everywhere, as well as in the Parliament of the European Union’ (European Forum, 2018). However, the event was only attended by party representatives and a few trade unionists, with no participants from social movements, NGOs or grassroots activist groups (Bieler, 2018). This indicates a certain top-down approach, also reflected by the fact that, despite the crisis and its substantial social impact in several member states, the PEL did not organise any significant mass campaign or protest in these turbulent years.

Another impact of SYRIZA’s U-turn on the PEL though has been the increase in dissenting voices regarding the commitment to the EU. Prominent figures from Bloco (De Jongh, 2017) and PCE (Byrne, 2016) have talked plainly of the possibility to break with the eurozone if not the EU as a whole. Indeed, in early 2018, the Mélenchon-led *Parti de Gauche* [Left Party] issued an official statement demanding the exclusion of SYRIZA from the PEL, for ‘it has become impossible to be associated in the same movement with Alexis Tsipras’ SYRIZA’, accused of enforcing ‘the logic of austerity to the point of restricting the right to strike, thus responding in an increasingly submissive way to the orders of the European Commission’ (Ekathimerini, 2018). The leadership of the PEL, however, defended its only member currently in government, which led the French party to disaffiliate from the PEL a few months later (Soudais, 2018). That was not simply an indictment of ‘Alexis Tsipras’ SYRIZA’, though, but also of a wider Europeanist approach on the left, still prevailing in the PEL, that seems to be willing to sacrifice its own policies (and credibility) for the sake of staying inside the Eurozone and the EU.

Pre-2009 networking and cooperation

All SYRIZA interviewees rated the importance of the PEL for the pre-crisis transnational networking and cooperation at 4, i.e. ‘very significant’. However, they did not have much to say about its role over that period of time (2004-2009), with only Rapidis and Karatsioubanis making some brief comments in that regard. Rapidis pointed out that ‘Bloco and SYRIZA were two of the founding parties, so it goes without saying that they had close ties [via the PEL]’, while Karatsioubanis claimed that the cooperation with Bloco was stronger in the PEL than GUE/NGL, ‘because at that time both Bloco and SYN had one MEP’.

The Bloco interviewees, while giving the PEL a lower score, still rated it at 3, i.e. ‘quite significant’. However, they too had little to say about it, with only Nuno Pedrosa saying that ‘We are not very old parties, we joined the PEL in 2004, both of us’, so ‘being in the PEL ... it

helped.’ The scarcity of comments regarding the PEL’s role before 2009 might reflect a relatively limited activity of PEL at the time. Sverkos had more to say than any other interviewee about how the two parties related to the PEL during those years:

‘As far as I remember, the [cooperation via] PEL actually played an instrumental role in radicalising the leaderships of the two parties but also the actions of the European left. Just imagine that the European left at that point consisted of SYN, Bloco and other really dynamic parties; but, at the same time, Die Linke or the PCF were participating, which are more traditional – they have a different kind of making politics, not in an activist way. SYN and Bloco at that point were really activist. ... Around the European left, these two parties made some initiatives and they were having some joint declarations on things in order for the PEL to adopt them. ... SYN/SYRIZA and Bloco were pushing things for making the PEL more homogenous and more radical.’

However, he did not give any examples of such declarations or of any other instances of cooperation in that period. Unfortunately, the recently refurbished PEL website is not helpful in that regard either, with little to no information regarding the organisation’s activity prior to 2009 and much of the previously available material now obliterated.

Post-2009 networking and cooperation

The scores assigned to the PEL by the interviewees from the two parties diverge even more with regards to the period following the start of the crisis. On the one hand, the SYRIZA interviewees rated it at 4 again. For instance, Kanellopoulos argued that the PEL’s role in facilitating his party’s networking and cooperation with Bloco and the wider European left is ‘much more significant now’. Also, for Giannopoulou, the PEL is

‘the only structure that the parties of the left in Europe have. It is a very institutionalised space of dialogue and cooperation. The PEL gives the ability to each national party to take an initiative to do something. It is the way that we can network, we can make new contacts.’

Thus, when SYRIZA won the January 2015 elections, the PEL sent a delegation to Athens, including its President and two Vice Presidents, one of which was, at the time, Marisa Matias from Bloco. As Nikolakakis (2015) puts it, that was ‘a clear indication of the importance that the Greek elections had for the wider European left’. Moreover, in May that year, PEL together with its foundation Transform organised in Paris the European Forum for Alternatives, as an anticipation of the European Forum launched in Marseille two years later. The closing plenary of the event, which was attended by representatives of both SYRIZA and Bloco among other parties (albeit not Podemos), was suggestively entitled “After the victory of Syriza, an alliance

to win the European showdown?”. However, in terms of more concrete mobilisation in support of the SYRIZA government that was fighting the Troika at the time, PEL largely failed to deliver.

On the other hand, despite their party’s 2013 resolution calling for ‘a more dense [sic] collaboration with our allies of the European Left Party’ (Bloco, 2013), the Bloco interviewees only rated the importance of the PEL for the post-2009 party networking and cooperation at merely 2.6, i.e. halfway between ‘somewhat significant’ and ‘quite significant’ and lower than the score for the pre-2009 period. Fazenda claimed that PEL is, apart from GUE/NGL, the only remaining channel of cooperation with SYRIZA these days: ‘no bilateral relationship anymore after the referendum and we meet in the PEL. We are displeased with that but it’s a fact. ... It’s purely formal.’ Indeed, from what Fazenda said, sharing the same Euro-party with SYRIZA in the PEL appears to be almost a burden for Bloco:

‘We had an incident here, because we had to invite SYRIZA to our last congress, because we have to invite all the parties of the PEL – it’s a rule, not an option. And they were whistled in the congress; it was embarrassing, even for us. ... They invited us as well to their congress; it was a very strange congress, because Tsipras made a long speech, criticising the left [for not understanding] his policies. ... He only attacked the left. New Democracy is on top but he only attacked the left.’

Furthermore, the divergence is not only with SYRIZA but also with other members of the PEL, particularly over the question of the EU:

‘Now in the PEL you have two tendencies: the majority, for the reform of the EU, and the minority, [for] confrontation and changing [it] and, if not, exit. ... We voted against [Gregor] Gysi [from Die Linke] in the last PEL congress in Berlin, because he is passionate for the EU. ... I spoke in the last congress of the PEL, in December [2016], and I said to the comrades of Die Linke and the PCF and some others that “Ten years ago we were proposing what you are proposing now”, so we lost the time and the opportunity. If I go to Portugal now saying that I am again proposing the same thing that I was proposing ten years ago about the public debt and about public expenditure in the budget, they say “What the hell are they talking about? It’s old news!”.’

This confirms that the key division within the wider European left and even the PEL, despite the latter’s ongoing Europeanist orientation, is over the question of the EU.

Pedrosa rated the PEL at merely 2, even saying that he ‘gave it 2 only because Marisa Matias was vice-president of the PEL... now not anymore, so it’s half a point, not even 1’. While not directly linked to the question of their cooperation with SYRIZA via the PEL, he also pointed out to the aforementioned eclectic composition of the latter:

‘Parties like Bloco, Podemos, SYRIZA always focus on national politics first. ... In the PEL you have a bunch of parties, like the Communist Party of Austria, a bunch of small parties that, because they don’t have big structures in their countries, they focus on Europe. ... Where we are now, we are focused on our national politics.’

While this confirms once again the prevalence of national over European politics, in this case it is also due, according to Pedrosa, to the ‘lack of a movement or structure, and the PEL is not that. ... Maybe we are in this position because there is no European project [of the left].’

Even Moutinho, who rated PEL at 4, admitted that ‘there are tensions inside’ the organisation, with ‘Bloco looking not really to break but not agreeing with all the things that are going on inside’. Thus, the Bloco interviewees’ rather cynical view of the PEL was summed up by one of them (who did not want to be quoted on this) saying that ‘Bloco doesn’t care about the PEL’. This, of course, begs the question of why Bloco is still part of it and if whether it will continue to be so for much longer. Indeed, as showed in the following section, Bloco has been more invested in the Plan B initiative.

Given the lower perceived importance of the PEL on behalf of Bloco, what probably explains the high score awarded by the SYRIZA interviewees – the highest possible – is the influence and support that their party seems to enjoy in the PEL, at least at the level of its leadership. That is also reflected in the strategy of orientation towards broader progressive forces that both organisations share. In the case of the PEL, this strategy is best illustrated by the launch of the European Forum, which ‘is a very important project’, according to Giannopoulou, as it ‘would not be only a space for political parties but also provide a space for individual activists, for people from the movement, from trade unions or from workers organisation in general.’ However, as pointed out earlier, the participation of non-party actors was very limited at the last European Forum in Bilbao.

Also, it is worth mentioning that Tsipras was the PEL’s Spitzenkandidat for the 2014 elections. Karatsioubanis was heavily involved in that campaign:

‘One of my tasks was, in the last period when I was working for the PEL, the candidacy of Tsipras for the European Commission. So from September 2013 to the European elections, it was the team from Athens and me from here coordinating the PEL for the Tsipras campaign. The idea was to have a team in Greece and a responsible in each country. It didn’t work, so in the end it was team in Athens and me coordinating the PEL.’

This, however, does not only reflect the status enjoyed by SYRIZA within the PEL, but also the limited coordination of the PEL’s member parties for an electoral campaign that was supposed to represent all of them and not merely SYRIZA, substantiating the argument made by Ladrech

(2007, p. 41) more than ten years ago that ‘the relationship between party members and Euro-parties is extremely weak’.

As regards to Podemos, given that it is not a member of the PEL, it is not surprising that the Spanish interviewees rated it at merely 2, i.e. ‘somewhat significant’. Podemos’ refusal to join the PEL seems to be linked to its refusal to be deemed as part of the traditional left. Thus, as Merlo puts it, Podemos ‘didn’t want to be perceived as close to the traditional communist parties and that is basically the composition of the PEL’. Conesa de Lara too made this point about not being associated with the left:

‘We don’t want to reform the left, we want to break the playing board, and the European Left [PEL] parties are part of that playing board. ... The left uses the same words and it forces itself to be marginalised. We didn’t want to be a new Izquierda Unida. Already being part of GUE/NGL does raise contradictions, but it’s not too radical, so we can be part of it, but not of the PEL.’

Of course, that approach is not entirely consistent. On the domestic level, Podemos has been in a coalition with IU for the last three years, while at the international level they have been involved in other left-wing initiatives apart from GUE/NGL, such as Plan B and the ‘Now the People!’ movement. Indeed, as pointed out by Karatsioubanis, within a few months after being established, Podemos ‘supported the candidacy of Tsipras for the European Commission even if that was part of the PEL.’

However, if back in 2014 Podemos supported the candidacy of the SYRIZA leader despite it being in the name of the PEL, after SYRIZA’s U-turn and subsequent austerity measures, it is precisely the influence of the Greek party within the PEL that further motivates Podemos to stay away from this Euro-party. According to Merlo, ‘because SYRIZA is a member of that, it means that the PEL is influenced by the strategy of SYRIZA and we don’t want to have anything to do with that’. Hence, just like Bloco, Podemos has been involved in the Plan B project, which this chapter ends with.

Plan B

The aftermath of SYRIZA's 2015 U-turn saw a certain degree of realignment on the European left (Sheehan, 2016, p. 198), as more sections of it saw the need for a new strategy towards the EU and its institutions in the light of the Greek government's failure to obtain any significant concessions through mere negotiations. As part of that process of realignment, apart from the inter-party divisions mentioned in the previous sections, was the emergence of two new transnational initiatives specifically focused on the question of the EU: the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), led by the former SYRIZA finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, and the party-based Plan B for Europe (Plan B).

DiEM25's goal is 'to repair the EU' and transform it into 'a realm of shared prosperity, peace and solidarity for all Europeans'. For that, they favour an approach similar to that of SYRIZA and the PEL, to bring together 'diverse political traditions – Green, radical left, liberal' (DiEM25, n.d.). However, despite talks between the two sides (DiEM25, 2018), they failed to have a common list for the 2019 European elections, which triggered sharp criticisms from Varoufakis towards the PEL but also specifically against SYRIZA and Podemos (Schulz, 2019). Thus, none of the three parties is involved with DiEM25, which is reflected in the interviewees rating its role in their networking and cooperation as less than 'somewhat significant'.

By contrast, both Bloco and Podemos are prominently involved in Plan B, as shown by the interviewees from these two parties rating the role of this initiative in their transnational networking and cooperation at 3.7. Hence, the section focuses on this framework, by first succinctly presenting its position and rather limited activity so far (hardly covered at all in the current literature) and then its role in the transnational networking and cooperation between Bloco and Podemos, as perceived by the interviewees from the two parties.

A brief outline of Plan B

As Agustín (2017, p. 326) puts it in the only academic paper dealing with this initiative (for a more subjective account, see Sheehan, 2016, pp. 200-203), Plan B emerged 'as a consequence of the "failure" of SYRIZA in its negotiations with the EU and what is understood as the imposition of neoliberalism as the only economic model and the exclusion of progressive political projects'. The initiative was launched in August 2015 with a call for an international summit in Paris on the question of the EU, which was eventually held in Paris in January 2016.

The call was signed by leading members of several LPs: Bloco, Left Party (France), Die Linke, Red-Green Alliance (Denmark), PRC, IU, Popular Unity, Socialist Party (Ireland), Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Slovenia). That call described the deal signed by the SYRIZA government with the Troika as a ‘financial coup’ by which ‘the democratic, elected Greek government of Alexis Tsipras was brought to its knees by the European Union’ (Plan B, 2015). In such circumstances, it is not surprising that no member of SYRIZA was among the signatories.

The core argument of that statement, which would broadly define this new initiative, was that the left has to adopt a two-fold approach in relation to the EU: a ‘plan A’ that would attempt ‘a complete renegotiation of the European Treaties’ while pursuing ‘a campaign of Civil European disobedience toward arbitrary European practices and irrational “rules” until that renegotiation is achieved’ (Plan B, 2015) – although it is not clear what such disobedience would amount to; and a ‘plan B’ that, in the eventuality of such renegotiation failing, would entail the exit from the Eurozone and the creation of a new monetary system – although none of the aforementioned signatory parties were or are yet in government. Arguably, this two-folded approach, which calls for reform but prepares for exit, represents a new type of Euroscepticism that does not fit any of the conceptual frameworks currently used in the literature.

Four other Plan B summits took place in the following years, with the second one being organised by Podemos in Madrid in February 2016 (see Plan B, 2016a) and the last one by Bloco in Lisbon in November 2017 (see Plan B, 2017b). The other two summits were in Copenhagen in November 2016 (see Plan B, 2016b) and in Rome in March 2017 (see Plan B, 2017a). The statement that resulted from the Rome summit is the most substantial in shedding light on what Plan B seeks to change about the EU, which includes:

‘A deep reform of the European Central Bank to ensure full employment and to allow for funding public investments and ecologically sustainable economic activity as mandatory goals. ... The abolishment of the TSCG/Fiscal Compact and a full stop to the institutions’ interference with national budgets ... a European conference on debts with the aim to liberate the European peoples from unpayable debts ... The re-orientation of the mercantilist policy agenda dominating the EU and, in particular, the Eurozone toward domestic aggregate demand to balance the current accounts. ... The introduction of a principle of social non regression and social and ecological standards for the internal single market and for trade with non-EU partners ... the introduction of minimum effective corporate taxation. ... The adoption of a social protocol to protect social rights and collective bargaining against internal market freedoms ... The preparation and the inclusion in the Treaties of the conditions to grant

Member States wishing to do so an orderly exit from the Euro zone while stabilising exchange rates.’ (Plan B, 2017a)

At the same time, that statement recognises that this ‘plan A’ to revise the existing EU treaties ‘can be blocked by just one Member State and will be met with fierce opposition by the European institutions’. Hence, the left would need a ‘plan B’ as a ‘leverage in negotiations with the EU’, which would entail ‘an “amicable divorce” of the euro’ (Plan B, 2017a).

However, the economic issues likely to stem from that and from returning to a weak national currency are barely addressed. Also, while the declaration from the last summit advocates, in case of an exit, for ‘a new system of European cooperation based on the restoration of economic, fiscal and monetary sovereignty’ (Plan B, 2017b), perhaps Plan B should elaborate on its vision of a post-EU internationalism so it can distinguish itself more clearly from the sovereigntist fervour on the populist and far right. Last but not least, Plan B seem to lack any strategy of building the kind of popular support in favour of an exit from the Eurozone, especially given that, as of October 2018, the euro was enjoying the highest level of popular support across the member states since surveys began in 2002 (European Commission, 2018).

The initiative’s detachment from the social groups whose interests it aims to defend is rather paradigmatic for the move away from social mobilisation that some of its constituent parties, including Bloco and Podemos, have displayed in their national arenas. Furthermore, even at the elite level that it has been limited to Plan B has failed to develop in anything more than a series of party summits (the last of which took place at the end of 2017), despite the Lisbon declaration calling for building an actual political alternative for the 2019 European elections.

The only concrete step in that direction occurred in April 2018, when the leaders of Bloco, Podemos and LFI met again in Lisbon, where they announced the creation of a new pan-European political movement that aims to ‘break from the straitjacket of EU treaties that impose austerity and promote fiscal and social dumping’ and instead ‘build a new organisational project for Europe’ (LFI, 2018). The new movement was named, in a plainly populist spirit, *Maintenant, le peuple!* [‘Now, the people!’] (NPM) and was subsequently joined also by the Swedish Left Party, Danish Red-Green Alliance and Finnish Left Alliance at a meeting in Brussels in June 2018. However, NPM has not had any visible activity ever since and, in contrast to DiEM25, has failed to put forward a common, transnational list in the next European elections.

Networking and cooperation via Plan B

The prominent role played by Bloco in this transnational initiative has already been illustrated above by the party organising the last Plan B summit in November 2017. Indeed, all five interviewees from Bloco rated Plan B at 4, i.e. ‘very significant’! As Pureza put it, ‘the fact that the summit will occur in Portugal is proof of our commitment, of the importance we give to the emergence of this [initiative]’. Indeed, Pedrosa claimed that ‘in Bloco everyone is focused on Plan B’, although he admitted that ‘I don’t know where Plan B is going’. More balanced, Gusmão said that

‘we have GUE/NGL and that’s on a daily basis, that’s the most important connection, but Plan B encounters are helping us to form a network of organisations that share the core of our views towards Europe, which is one of our points of connection.’

However, Plan B has arguably become more important than PEL for Bloco. Confirming again their critical view of the PEL these days, Pureza argued that Plan B ‘is a form of overcoming certain fragilities that previous platforms had or have, namely the PEL’. Those ‘certain fragilities’ are related to the relentless Europeanist stance of the PEL. Fazenda also explained the involvement in Plan B in terms of his party’s divergence with the reformist position on the EU that most members of the PEL support:

‘We cannot agree with the undemocratic structure of the EU and we disagree with some left parties that the problem is in the software of the EU, and we say no, no, no, the problem is in the hardware of the EU; you can’t change it from within, you have to build another kind of structure’

Therefore, it is Bloco’s more critical view of the EU that accounts for its reorientation from the PEL to Plan B. Adopting such a view though is not merely explained by ideological considerations but also by pragmatic considerations linked to the dynamics of Portuguese politics, just as in the case of Bloco’s distancing from SYRIZA following its capitulation, considerations that are discussed in the final chapter.

The interviewees from Podemos also rated Plan B highly, at 3.5 on average, i.e. halfway between ‘quite significant’ and ‘very significant’. Indeed, Martínez Lobo went as far as saying that ‘we are Plan B ... the summit in Madrid ... we organised it’. However, despite the high score assigned to Plan B, Podemos interviewees were not particularly enthusiastic about it. Merlo made it clear that Plan B is ‘not a formal organisation... it’s not a mass thing’. Indeed, as Maestu pointed out, Podemos is ‘not quite involved, but Miguel Urbán ... is really involved. ... This does not mean that it should be the political line of the entire party’. Fazenda from Bloco

also remarked that not all currents of Podemos are equally committed to the Plan B project: ‘part of Podemos is neutral about Plan B – Errejón but even the tendency of Pablo Iglesias. They are friendly, but not very attached to Plan B.’ However, that might change with Errejón’s departure from Podemos, which might give greater influence to Anticapitalistas over the party’s policy.

Podemos’ rather inconsistent involvement in Plan B might partly explain why the initiative did not develop into a ‘mass thing’, as Merlo put it. Pedrosa from Bloco also admitted that ‘it’s not a movement, it’s to get together and discuss the future’, which nevertheless contrasts with Plan B’s combative and ambitious statements. Perhaps that is why the NPM was launched, largely by the same parties also involved in Plan B, above all Bloco and Podemos, who together with Mélenchon’s LFI were the initiators of this new project. As Moutinho confirmed, in the only interview conducted following the launch of this movement, ‘it’s the same thing; NPM started as Plan B’. Indeed, according to her, ‘Bloco is more focused on this now.’

However, NPM has not yet developed significantly either, at least not enough to put forward its own list of candidates in the upcoming EP elections. The NPM even lacks its own website or Facebook page and has received extremely limited attention in the mass-media and even less so in the academic literature. Most importantly, there is no clear sign of activity on behalf of this ‘movement’, particularly in terms of mass campaigning, arguably the key attribute of a political movement. Apart from the broader obstacles to transnational cooperation of LPs, which are dealt with in the following chapter, there also seem to be certain specific reasons for Plan B’s/NPM’s lack of traction. Thus, according to Martinez Lobo from Podemos, ‘in Plan B there’s an ongoing debate ... the debate about the currency is the hardest one and we have the most conflictual debates on this’, which might explain the relative lack of proposal around the currency in Plan B’s statements. Therefore, the key issue of European integration is proving quite divisive even in a relatively staunch Eurosceptic initiative like Plan B.

Furthermore, as Moutinho confessed, there are differences with regard to the strategy towards other political families, social democracy in particular:

‘There’s a clear approach shared by Bloco, Podemos and Mélenchon, but not all the way through. There are some differences: they came last week with this proposal to defend an approach to social democrats; this was said by Mélenchon and Iglesias together, and Catarina Martins was not there. Bloco wouldn’t want to form some sort of alliance with the social democrats.’

Thus, despite the high ratings given by the interviewees from Bloco and Podemos, it is not clear whether and how Plan B strengthened the relationship between the two parties, although the sheer participation in this initiative has inevitably enhanced, at least, their networking. In many ways, their involvement in Plan B says less about the relationship between them than about how their relationship with SYRIZA has deteriorated after 2015. As vague and unspecified as it is, Plan B's call for disobedience with EU treaties and, if necessary, the break from them represents an implicit condemnation of SYRIZA's strategy from its first months in government, of negotiating with the Troika while dutifully complying with the treaties and not preparing the backup solution of an exit. As Fazenda put it, 'Plan B was born because of the capitulation of SYRIZA'. Last but not least, it is quite telling that both Bloco and Podemos are happy to cooperate with parties like Popular Unity, the left split from SYRIZA, or Mélenchon, whose *Parti de Gauche* left the PEL because of SYRIZA. Indeed, according to Fazenda, Bloco now has 'very close relation with *Parti de Gauche*, with *La France Insoumise*.'

As a reflection of the above, the SYRIZA interviewees only rated Plan B at 1.4. That is not simply due to SYRIZA not being involved in this initiative, but to a certain hostility on behalf of the latter towards the Greek party, as argued by Giannopoulou: 'I don't know what exactly the Plan B does with Podemos and Bloco, but Plan B does not want to have a relationship with SYRIZA.' Also, Kanellopoulos pointed out that 'certain people, Zoe Konstantopoulou for example, participate in that and we do not have very good relations with them'. Moreover, according to him, Plan B's relevance is generally rather limited: 'We don't think it's very important now in Europe. I think it's relatively marginal.'

As suggested already, both Plan B and NPM have remained indeed rather marginal, with the latter failing to provide an alternative candidature in the upcoming European elections. That means that we cannot yet fully speak of a transition from cooperation to competition between these two parties and SYRIZA, particularly as long as all the three of them still belong to the same political group in the EP. However, that might change soon, depending on whether the parties around Plan B/NPM will be able to meet the threshold of minimum 25 MEPs required for the formation of a political group in the EP, which seems rather unlikely though two months before the elections.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the formal networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos. In the absence of any trilateral relations, the discussion started with the parties' bilateral relations, which have never been properly formalised in any explicit agreements but have nevertheless fed into the parties' formalised cooperation from the EP or, in the case of Bloco and SYRIZA, within the PEL.

Thus, found at the crossroads of informal and formal networking and cooperation, these bilateral relations were built via personal connections, previous ideological affinities between internal currents of a Trotskyist or Maoist extraction, although some of Podemos' first contacts with the other two parties were established straight via GUE/NGL. However, these relations are mainly limited to the top levels of the parties, despite the parties' official emphasis on the importance of the rank-and-file and bottom-up activism.

What motivated the creation of these relations in the first place were mainly the broad ideological similarities among these parties, as described in Chapter 1 and further developed in the following chapter. Their relations intensified after the start of the crisis, although that did not happen straight away, on the basis of understanding that the left faces similar challenges, but mostly after SYRIZA's electoral breakthrough in 2012. Bloco and, later on, Podemos used that success story of a like-minded party to increase their own profile and legitimacy at home, which shows the importance of national politics when engaging in transnational cooperation even for avowedly internationalist parties like these ones.

The peak of the cooperation among these parties was reached in the run up and aftermath of SYRIZA's electoral victory in January 2015, with various expressions of solidarity from the other two LPs with the new left Greek government, including via its branches in the UK in the case of Podemos. In this period, the relationship between SYRIZA and Podemos tended to take precedence, given Spain's importance within the EU (at least when compared to Portugal) and Podemos' better odds of coming into government. This was best illustrated by Iglesias being the only European left leader invited to address the crowd at SYRIZA's celebratory electoral rally.

However, SYRIZA's U-turn in July 2015, when it agreed to a deal contradicting its anti-austerity commitments, significantly affected its relationships with the other two parties, Bloco in particular. The latter seems to have no bilateral relations with SYRIZA any longer, at least according to the head of its international department. Instead, it has developed new

relations with other forces of the Greek left, mainly Popular Unity, the party formed around the left split from SYRIZA, including those of a Trotskyist or Maoist extractions, which proves the continuous importance of old radical left affinities. In the case of Podemos, things are a bit more nuanced: whereas Iglesias has been defending SYRIZA's 'difficult choice', the party's more radical current, Anticapitalistas, quite influential over Podemos' international affairs, have been openly critical of SYRIZA and, therefore, have also built relations with Popular Unity.

This decline in the relations between SYRIZA, on the one hand, and Bloco and Podemos, on the other, is best reflected by the involvement of the two Iberian parties in the staunchly Eurosceptic Plan B initiative, which is willing to consider an exit from the Eurozone, if not the EU, in defence of the left-wing policies that its members stand for. That is an implicit criticism of SYRIZA, which abandoned most of those policies in favour of remaining in the Eurozone. Moreover, SYRIZA has since sought to build broader alliances at the European level, as reflected by its involvement in the Progressive Caucus together with social democratic and Green MEPs, with the purpose to alter the balance of forces in favour of a progressive reformation of the EU – an initiative which neither Bloco nor Podemos MEPs are involved with. This approach contrasts with the more belligerent character of Plan B and its offshoot NPM; however, all these initiatives have failed so far to develop in anything more than a series of summits of and vague declarations by top party officials.

While the distancing between the two Iberian parties from SYRIZA is rooted in their disapproval of SYRIZA's U-turn, that is once again fuelled also by pragmatic considerations linked to domestic politics. Both Bloco and Podemos had to argue against domestic adversaries and critics ahead of general elections in their countries that they would not follow the same path as the SYRIZA government. Indeed, the instrumentalization of SYRIZA's bitter experience in government went beyond Spain and Portugal, with even Sinn Féin having to maintain, during the 2016 electoral campaign in Ireland, that 'we are not SYRIZA' (cf. Sheehan, 2016, p. 204). Thus, the ups and downs of transnational cooperation seem to be determined, to a significant extent, by the demands that parties face in their national political arenas, which feeds into the widely held view in the literature that national politics overrides European politics – a key question that prominently figures in the following chapter.

Hence, the cooperation is today largely limited to GUE/NGL, which is the only transnational organisation that all three parties still belong to. Here, the relations are less ideologically driven and more pragmatic, with interviewees working in the EP stating to be closer to colleagues from one party or the other on the basis of the roles and tasks they have in

the EP rather than how their own party perceives the other two. Thus, despite some of weaknesses pointed out by the current literature and by several interviewees, the relative lack of cohesion in particular, GUE/NGL is the most significant vehicle for the post-2009 cooperation among the three LPs. This was reflected in the interviewees rating its role as more significant than that of any other channel for formal cooperation: 3.4, compared to 3.2 for bilateral channels, 2.9 for the PEL and 3 for Plan B. This confirms the widely held view in the current literature that political groups in the EP generally are the most politically relevant transnational party-based organisations today.

While Bloco and SYRIZA are still colleagues in the PEL as well, their cooperation in this structure has been increasingly limited due to their divergent views over the EU. Indeed, given that the PEL's leadership tends to reflect SYRIZA's aim to reform the EU by forging a broad alliance of progressive European forces (although such an alliance has not taken any concrete shape ahead of the 2019 European elections), Bloco interviewees seemed rather critical of and alienated from the PEL as a whole, which raises the question of whether the Portuguese LP will still remain a member in the future.

Overall, when aggregating the scores given by the interviewees to all the four channels discussed here, the role of formal channels in the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties stands at 3.1, i.e. 'quite significant', more than the 2.3 rating scored by the informal networking and cooperation. However, when compared to the pre-2009 period, the formal networking and cooperation between SYRIZA and Bloco has virtually stagnated since the start of the crisis: 3.5 for the post-2009 period vs 3.4 for the pre-2009 period. This stagnation though is explained though by the significant increase in the parties' relations in the run-up to and aftermath of SYRIZA's electoral victory having been neutralised by a sharp decrease following SYRIZA's U-turn.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the formal cooperation among these three parties is the absence of any trilateral relations, even during the aforementioned peak. For they would have arguably opposed the Troika and its austerity policies more effectively as a transnational united front – something acknowledged, indeed, by the parties themselves. Moreover, such trilateral cooperation would have particularly made sense in 2015, when all three parties faced general elections, with each hoping that the other two would do well in order to improve their own leverage against national establishments and the Troika alike. If trilateral cooperation was not established then, despite the rather propitious circumstances, it is even less likely for that to happen in 2019, when all three LPs are facing again general elections in the same year but find themselves in significantly cooler relations than four years ago.

Chapter 5

Incentives, obstacles and recommendations

The previous two chapters mapped the informal and formal transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos and its evolution since the start of the Eurozone crisis. While that discussion has already revealed some of its key motives, this chapter analyses more systematically the incentives for and obstacles to that process. It will also bring in a normative perspective by outlining the recommendations made by the interviewees for its improvement. In doing that, the discussion will also attempt to sketch out, where possible, the short- and medium-term prospects for the transnational cooperation among the three parties' and within the European left in general. Overall, this chapter is the most analytical part of the thesis.

The chapter is structured in three sections. The first section answers this thesis' primary research question, i.e. whether the process of networking and cooperation among the three parties intensified during the Eurozone crisis, focusing on the factors that might have facilitated such an intensification. The second section deals with the limits of that process, focusing on the factors that might have hindered it during the crisis. The last section discusses the ways in which the interviewees believe the cooperation of their parties, and of the European left in general, could and should improve. The conclusion sums up the chapter's key arguments and insights.

Incentives: Why cooperation increased (temporarily)

The interviewees from the three parties were asked whether they thought the transnational networking and cooperation between their parties increased since 2009 and were given five options to pick from: 'intensified very much', 'intensified somewhat', 'remained the

same', 'decreased somewhat', and 'decreased sharply' (see Annex 2). All ten interviewees from SYRIZA and Bloco answered that the three parties' transnational networking and cooperation 'intensified very much' after the start of the crisis, despite the decline perceived by most Bloco interviewees in their party's relationship with SYRIZA after July 2015.

The six Podemos interviewees were asked the same question but obviously only for the period since their party was formed, i.e. since January 2014. Two of them, Merlo and Albarracín, said the relations with SYRIZA and Bloco 'intensified very much', with the former qualifying his answer by saying that with SYRIZA it 'decreased sharply' after July 2015. Other two, Conesa de Lara and Maestu, said the relations with both parties 'intensified somewhat'. Finally, Martinez Lobo and Verstryngge gave more nuanced answers: the former said that the relationship with SYRIZA 'intensified very much' and the one with Bloco 'intensified somewhat', while the latter that it 'intensified somewhat' with SYRIZA and 'remained the same' with Bloco.

Overall, despite the differences in the answers of the interviewees from SYRIZA and Bloco, on the one hand, and those from Podemos, on the other, it is clear that the transnational networking and cooperation among these three parties has increased during the Eurozone crisis. In total, of the sixteen interviewees from these parties, twelve believe the transnational networking and cooperation 'intensified very much', at least for a period of time during the crisis.

While some of the key broad reasons behind that intensification have already been revealed, the interviewees were also specifically asked to identify, rate and discuss the incentives for that process. They were presented with a list of fifteen demand- and supply-side factors, i.e. both reasons for which the parties might have sought to enhance their cooperation (e.g. need for publicity and legitimacy, strategic coordination) and factors that might have compelled or facilitated that enhancement respectively (e.g. reaction of the EU to the crisis, similar economic contexts). The interviewees had to rate them on the usual scale from 1 to 4, where 1 meant 'insignificant', 2 – 'somewhat significant', 3 – 'quite significant' and 4 – 'very significant'. They were also given the option to add other factors that were not included on the list but which they thought to have some degree of significance. The results are shown in *Table 15* below, which lists the factors in descending order, depending on the degree of significance attributed to them by the interviewees.

It is interesting all fifteen factors but one were given some degree of significance, which indicates that there was a relatively wide range of incentives for transnational networking and cooperation among these parties to increase during the crisis. Four interviewees also used the

option of adding another factor not included on the list: two of them, from Bloco and Podemos, mentioned the electoral dynamics in other countries, such as SYRIZA coming into government, and rated it as ‘quite significant’; another one from Podemos mentioned the refugee crisis and rated it also as ‘quite significant’; and the other one, from Podemos, mentioned these parties representing in their own countries ‘the only cry for a different future’ as a factor for cooperation, which he rated as ‘very significant’.

Table 15. Incentives for post-2009 transnational party cooperation in order of significance

	INCENTIVE	SYRIZA	Bloco	Podemos	OVERALL
1	Opposition to neoliberalism	4	3.4	4	3.8
2	Reaction of the EU to the crisis	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.7
3	Similar economic contexts	3.6	2.8	3.7	3.4
4	Similar views on the EU and the crisis	3.4	3.2	3	3.2
5	Europeanisation of politics	3.4	2.8	2.8	3
6	Need for publicity and legitimacy	3.2	2.8	3.2	3
7	Strategic coordination	3.6	2.8	2.7	3
8	Transnationalisation of capitalism	3.2	2.2	3.3	2.9
9	Diffusion of ideas, policies, and practice	3.5	2.4	2.8	2.9
10	Transnational cooperation of social movements	3	1.6	3.5	2.8
11	Similar political contexts	3.2	2.2	2.7	2.7
12	Isolation in national politics	3.8	2.4	1.6	2.5
13	Ideology	2.2	2	3.2	2.4
14	The resurgence of the populist and far right across Europe	2	3	1.8	2.1
15	Transnational cooperation of trade unions	1.5	1.2	1.3	1.3

At the other end, the one factor that was rated, overall, as less than ‘somewhat significant’ was the transnational cooperation among trade unions. This low rating might be surprising given the traditional links between trade unions and LPs. However, the interviewees gave two key reasons for the low significance of this factor. Firstly, as pointed out in Chapter 1, these three particular LPs have rather weak links to trade unions. Rapidis from SYRIZA admitted that ‘there is the ETUC in Brussels but bilaterally we don’t have strong connections’ and that ‘the strongest relations are between the trade unions and the KKE.’ Pedrosa from

Bloco said the same about his party: ‘Bloco has no links to European trade unions, except for specific one-off collaboration, but you don’t keep that collaboration’. Also, according to Karatsioubanis, ‘the cooperation of trade unionists of SYRIZA and Bloco was minimal, in some sectors, not all of them’, while ‘in Podemos, zero, they didn’t manage to get organised in this sector’. Thus, despite the relative electoral success of these parties, they still exert a limited influence over unions in their countries.

Secondly, the transnational cooperation of trade unions is itself rather weak (Bieler, Hilary & Lindberg, 2014). According to Albarracín, ‘transnational cooperation of unions is very low – just an exchange of views, with no influence outside’. That is related to a broader and deeper decline in the role and strength of unions in European societies caused by the de-industrialisation process and a certain incapacity of union leaders to adapt to that process and draw in the new layers of precarious workers (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Upchurch, Taylor & Mathers, 2009). This latter point was also made by Giannopoulou, who said that

‘after 2009 especially, during the financial crisis, we are talking about ... people that may work but under precarious conditions, so they don’t belong to trade unions; and all these people are a very big factor in the Greek society, the Spanish society, the Portuguese [society], the European society in general – and they have no position in the trade unions.’

In any case, it is quite telling for the state of the wider transnational cooperation of the left that the traditional organisations of the main social group that LPs claim to represent are so weak today that their transnational cooperation is perceived as the least significant out of fifteen factors for the transnational cooperation among these three LPs.

Also interesting is the low degree of significance attributed to the Europe-wide resurgence of the populist and far right in galvanising the transnational cooperation of LPs. That is particularly intriguing given that this political family has rivalled the left in trying to capitalise on the anti-establishment mood caused by the crisis and it seems to be doing a better job in that respect, with the Europe of Nations and Freedom group set to gain 12 more seats than GUE/NGL in the next European elections (European Parliament, 2019). The main reason this factor being underrated by the interviewees was that, as Karatsioubanis put it, ‘in Portugal and Spain you don’t have a parliamentary extreme right’, with Merlo also pointing out that ‘only Greece has a significant far right force’.

However, one would expect the left to mobilise transnationally against the rise of the far right regardless of its different degrees from country to country. In any case, those differences have decreased since the interviews were conducted in 2017, as a far-right party called Vox has

also rose to prominence in Spain and is now even slightly ahead of Podemos in some polls for the upcoming snap elections (*Poll of polls*, 2019). Perhaps it is again the demands of domestic politics that might push LPs into cooperating over this rather pressing matter, as urged by Albarracín, the only interviewee to emphasise the need for the European left to come up with ‘a new project of a united front against the far right’. The key question is whether such a front should be pursued together with those forces whose neoliberal policies have arguably laid the ground for the rise of the populist and far right.

In what follows, the section discusses the most significant factors as identified by the interviewees, namely the factors that were given, overall, at least a rating of 3, i.e. ‘quite significant’, although other factors, with lower scores, will also be touched upon when relevant. These most significant factors include: opposition to neoliberalism; reaction of the EU to the crisis; similar economic contexts; similar views on the EU and the crisis; Europeanisation of politics; need for publicity and legitimacy; strategic coordination. As some of them are closely related, they are discussed together.

Opposition to neoliberalism & similar views of the EU and the crisis

Rated as the most significant factor in enhancing the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties since 2009, opposition to neoliberalism was seen as ‘very significant’ by all SYRIZA and Podemos interviewees. As Giannopoulou put it, ‘it is the most obvious’ factor bringing the three parties together, while Pedrosa said that ‘it’s always present ... we gather together to try and fight European neoliberalism’, with Albarracín also stating that ‘there’s a coincidence on opposing austerity and neoliberalism’. However, a shared opposition to neoliberalism does not say much, for ‘very few on the left are not opposed to neoliberalism’, as O’Donnell put it. Indeed, this is identified by much of the current literature as the key feature or the lowest common denominator of the current non-social democratic left in Europe today (e.g. Keith & March, 2016; March, 2011).

With the start of the crisis though, that opposition to neoliberalism became more concrete and found an articulation in a shared understanding of this crisis and of the role played by the EU in both its outbreak and management. As shown in Chapter 2, all three parties interpreted the Eurozone crisis and the austerity policies as a manifestation and, indeed, reinforcement of the neoliberal character of the EU (see Iglesias, 2015a; Tsipras, 2014; Bloco, 2010). Thus, according to Karatsioubanis from SYRIZA, the three parties’ views of the crisis and the EU converged the most ‘from 2011 to 2015’. As Maestu from Podemos also put it, that

convergence consisted of an ‘opposition to the measures that the Commission is proposing’ as well as ‘the will to create another Europe’.

However, as already pointed out and reiterated by several interviewees, their parties’ views of the EU have diverged after 2015. Karatsioubanis believes that now ‘a part of Bloco would have ... a different analysis on the EU’, which was confirmed by Fazenda, Pedrosa and Pureza from Bloco, with the latter saying that ‘since the aftermath of the Greek referendum and the position adopted then by SYRIZA’s government ... the view and the discourse about the EU has been more different between SYRIZA and the other two parties than it was before’. Indeed, as discussed in the following section, this divergence has been one of the main obstacles to the parties’ cooperation.

Beyond the relative convergence of views on the EU and the crisis and the wider opposition to neoliberalism, as well as the Trotskyist connections mentioned in the previous chapter, ideology does not seem to be a prominent reason for their transnational cooperation. Rated at merely 2.4, i.e. halfway between ‘somewhat significant’ and ‘quite significant’, ideology is the third least significant incentive on the list. That may be primarily explained by Podemos’ explicit attempts to avoid any standard ideological identification, although there are also differences between SYRIZA and Bloco. Karatsioubanis developed on this aspect:

‘We are in the same bloc, but in terms of origins, theoreticians and so on, we are different. From SYN and SYRIZA till today, we have been influenced by the Western critics of Marxism in the ‘70s: Althusser, Poulantzas etc. ... Podemos is more Laclau, more Latin America. Bloco is a mix of Trotskyist organisations, Maoists and so and so.’

Fazenda made a more critical point in terms of his party’s differences with SYRIZA: ‘it’s difficult to tell what the ideology of SYRIZA is. SYN had some formula, all the other small parties were in general ex-Maoist, ex-Trotskyist, or still Trotskyist ... but now SYRIZA is a salad, it’s not clear what they [stand for]’. Moreover, despite rating ‘opposition to neoliberalism’ as ‘quite significant’, Fazenda is sceptical of whether SYRIZA is still displaying that kind of opposition:

‘I read almost everything that Tsipras says and in general he stresses the idea of an anti-neoliberal front in Europe. OK, he wants a front. What is the contribution of his party to that front? What is his idea? We don’t know anymore? Is it democratic socialism? We don’t know. It’s an anomaly because they’re making anomalous policies.’

One could argue that perhaps ideology would be a more significant incentive to their cooperation if they would share more than mere opposition to austerity and neoliberalism; perhaps this is an illustration of Bobbio’s (1988) idea that the left has always been clearer about

what it opposes rather than what it proposes. However, the ideological differences among these parties are not seen as one of the key obstacles to their cooperation. As shown in *Table 16* further down below, out of thirteen factors, ideology is the second least significant in hindering the cooperation among the three parties. As Albarracín aptly summed it up, ‘ideology is less important than material conditions’. This confirms the widely held view in the current literature that, at least when compared to more traditional radical left parties, new LPs are more pragmatic and less ideologically purist (Keith & March, 2016; Hudson, 2012; Bale & Dunphy, 2011; March, 2011; Keith, 2010).

Europeanisation of politics & reaction of the EU to the crisis

The relatively coordinated way in which the EU reacted to the Eurozone crisis, with unprecedented bailouts given to several member states and strict conditionalities attached to them, not only shaped the economic and social policies of the governments in those states but also led to substantial reshufflings of their party systems. Thus, the reaction of the EU to the crisis can be seen not only as an expression of the EU’s embedded neoliberalism, as pointed out above, but also as both a manifestation and acceleration of the Europeanisation of politics. Hence, these two factors are discussed together, both having been rated as at least ‘quite significant’ for the increase in the transnational cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos.

Confirming the point made above about ideology, Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA said that the increase in party cooperation after the start of the crisis

‘was not ideological, it came as a necessity: we have to cooperate because alone we are very weak, all three countries, both at domestic level and also at the European level, because these countries are very vulnerable to the financial crisis, to the attacks by the stronger countries in the EU.’

As Pedrosa from Bloco also said, ‘the EU issues were much more present in our politics than ever before, so before the crisis’. What this indicates is that it was the sheer pressure of the changes in the economic and political situations, rather than any programmatic commitment to the transformation of the EU, that pushed these parties into being more interested in the ‘EU issues’. Maestu from Podemos went further than that, explicitly linking the success of his party and of SYRIZA to the reaction of the EU to the crisis, without which ‘probably Podemos and SYRIZA wouldn’t have these results’. Indeed, it is hard to conceive that Podemos and

particularly SYRIZA would have achieved their levels of electoral success without the anti-establishment mood that the austerity measures demanded by the Troika generated.

At the same time, according to Karatsioubanis, there was a delay in the left outside of Greece, particularly in Spain and Portugal, reacting to the Europeanisation of politics entailed by the crisis: ‘It took one or two years – not Podemos, but Bloco and IU and other parties in the PEL – to understand that it was not just a national Greek problem but something bigger.’ Such a belated realisation on behalf of the European left, particularly of those LPs with roots in the anti-globalisation movement, that the Eurozone crisis did not concern Greece alone is rather intriguing. Karatsioubanis shed some light on why that was the case: ‘They were not in the same conditions as Greece at the time; it was before the PIGS and everything. ... In Spain and Portugal all this wave of austerity came later.’ This suggests that LPs came to see the crisis as important to them mainly when it hit their own countries, which reflects again the primacy of national politics, despite the self-professed internationalism of the left.

At the same time, a couple of the interviewees questioned how European was in fact the Europeanisation entailed by the management of the crisis. Kanellopoulos believes that ‘there has been Europeanisation but also reinforcement of German hegemony’. Indeed, according to him, the Europeanisation was manifested mostly in how the left has reacted to the German-led management of the crisis: ‘There has been a Europeanisation of the opposition against the German hegemony.’

However, even the left’s reaction has not been fully European either according to Fazenda, who perceives the German president of the PEL, Gregor Gysi, as being ‘for Germanising everything’. While Fazenda did not develop this point very clearly, such a perception indicates that the North-South cleavage that has defined the Eurozone crisis and its management might also be present within a European left that should arguably be more united than ever and challenge that cleavage more than any other political family. The idea that the crisis might have actually divided rather than united the left was implied also by Merlo from Podemos, who said that the dynamics of the crisis has meant

‘a fragmentation of politics, which is paradoxical, because at the same time there is a bigger presence of European issues, but these issues are very conflictive and they make it more difficult to have a European dynamics ... the need is much greater but for some reason it’s more difficult’.

Indeed, in a recent text for a Transform dossier on the upcoming European elections, the current director of NPI, Danai Koltsida (2019), claims that following the official end of the third bailout in August 2018, ‘the EU is now less central to the internal political debate in

Greece'. Also, Tatiana Moutinho (2019) from Bloco wrote in the same dossier that 'it is expected that voters will tend to focus ... more on the perspective of the impacts that EU policies and treaties have in Portugal, rather than on discussion about the European Union project itself.' A similar trend was identified in the case of Spain, where the European elections 'is not a question of the current political agenda' (Moreno, 2019). What this indicates is that the Europeanisation of politics accelerated by the crisis might be now in reflux, although this process could reignite in Southern Europe in the eventuality of a new clash between a national government and the EU institutions or, indeed, a new economic crisis.

Similar economic contexts

Perceived as the third most significant factor in enhancing the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties during the crisis, the similarities in the economic contexts of Greece, Spain and Portugal can also be seen as linked to the previous factor of the EU's reaction to the crisis. For the three parties have accounted for the worsening of the economic conditions in their countries mainly by blaming the austerity-led management of the crisis imposed by the EU institutions in collaboration with national establishments. The emphasis on economic conditions is, of course, also an echo of the Marxist influence that might still inform the theoretical and ideological outlook of these parties stemming from former openly Marxist organisations.

However, from the perspective of some SYRIZA interviewees, the results have not been the same in all three countries, highlighting some of the differences among Mediterranean countries that are commonly grouped together. According to Kanellopoulos, 'in Greece there are much worse conditions than in Spain and also Portugal. Portugal did not face that kind of debt crisis and budget crisis.' Karatsioubanis made the same point: 'we all suffered but [with] different levels of austerity. It helped us in putting us closer, but the conditions were different'.

The differences between Greece and Portugal were also mentioned by interviewees from Bloco, but rather in relation to how the economies in the two countries are structured than the more particular economic conditions developed during the crisis. Thus, on the one hand, Fazenda acknowledged that during the crisis 'we were in the same boat, sinking ... we had been close for many, many years, but [the crisis] made us even closer because we were facing exactly the same problems, the bankruptcy of our countries'. On the other hand, he pointed out that

‘we don’t have similar economic contexts, we have a stronger economy than them. ... The EU destroyed a lot of the industrial sector in Portugal, but we have some different industries, factories, and that’s not the case of Greece. ... They [also] have poor agriculture, ours is more developed. They have the shipping and the tourism and the geopolitical situation and not much more [than that].’

Pureza too, while conceding that these countries ‘shared and share the same kind of features in what concerns the relation between core and periphery’, also believes that ‘too many singularities have been forgotten’ and that ‘the acronym PIGS was a kind of a strategy to put together things that in fact were different’. The differences within this group of countries have been signalled in the literature (see Lapavitsas et al, 2012, pp. 13-41, pp. 79-98), but were arguably obscured with the help of crude acronyms precisely in order to enhance the perceived legitimacy of one-size-fits-all solution of austerity (Petry, 2013). Nevertheless, these national differences are not seen as a major obstacle to the current transnational party cooperation, as shown below in *Table 16*, although they might become so in the future given the different degrees of economic recovery that these countries have experienced so far as well as the likely prospects for a new crisis in the Eurozone.

Need for publicity and legitimacy & isolation in national politics

Parties seeking to gain legitimacy and publicity by cooperating with political forces from other countries is often seen as one of the key incentives for transnational party cooperation (see Kaiser & Starie, 2005), as proven also by its rating as ‘quite significant’ for the increase in post-2009 cooperation. This incentive should be all the more prominent in the case of LPs, which usually tend to find themselves isolated in their national arenas, often under the attack of mainstream parties and media alike – hence the inclusion of ‘isolation in national politics’ in the questionnaire as an incentive, rated at 2.5, i.e. halfway between ‘somewhat significant’ and ‘quite significant’.

Giannopoulou pointed out that ‘you feel more powerful if you know you have allies and partners throughout Europe and you’re not just a party that fights only in a national context.’ Also, Pureza said that ‘we wanted, and the Greeks wanted, and the Spanish wanted to show that we were not alone, that this was an international struggle’, while for Verstryngge from Podemos admitted that ‘we needed to work together, because we wanted to show that we ... were not so “communist”, that there were other similar parties in the rest of countries’. Fazenda was blunter about the pragmatic reasoning behind associating oneself with like-minded parties from other countries:

‘We need foreign allies in order to say to our people, to the working class in Portugal, “Look, we have a lot of allies in many, many countries, it’s not something that was born here”. ... It’s a surplus of popularity for us, because the right-wing parties and the PS are always saying “we are in Europe, we have strong allies in Europe”. We must fight back and say “We have important allies in Europe as well: look, this party is the second party in Greece, and now the first party in Greece.”’

Thus, forging relations with other parties is a political tool used to both reassure the party’s members and supporters of the feasibility of its politics and match the political rivals already benefitting from having ‘strong allies in Europe’. Of course, at the same time, when the like-minded party fails, then the relationship may become a burden, as illustrated in the previous chapter.

Kanellopoulos from SYRIZA draws some limits to the importance of being seen as close to like-minded parties from other member states:

‘cooperation with Podemos and Bloco, especially with Podemos, was very important especially regarding our voters and our party members and the people of the left, the left electorate. ... But in the media and the general public opinion it is not that important. People do not really care about what Bloco is and who Pablo Iglesias is. ... If Tsipras meets with Merkel or Macron, that is important, yes. A meeting with a leftist leader from Portugal or Spain seems more like an intra-party issue.’

That is part of the reason why SYRIZA has been trying more recently to forge relations with more prominent political forces, beyond its traditional political family, as pointed out by Rapidis: ‘we still have this feeling [of isolation] and ... this is why we also want to make alliances with the social democrats, because it’s not enough with the left-wing parties.’

Given that the most prominent social democratic forces in the EU today include those from Spain and Portugal, currently in government, this strategy has already been criticised by people from Podemos and Bloco, albeit not very openly. However, such criticisms may intensify, or not, depending on the election outcomes in the three countries in 2019, particularly in the eventuality that SYRIZA stays in government while in Portugal and/or Spain the social democratic parties manage to form governments without having to collaborate any longer with Bloco and Podemos respectively.

Strategic coordination

This is also one of the standard reasons for which parties engage in transnational cooperation, especially in a relatively highly integrated polity such as the EU, where the

stronger the inter-party coordination the better the chances for parties to have a say in the policy- and decision-making processes. While most interviewees seemed aware of the importance for their parties to coordinate their strategies at the European level, the previous chapter revealed rather limited attempts in that respect since the start of the crisis. The one notable exception has been the Plan B–NPM initiative, through which Bloco and Podemos have been trying to coordinate their strategy towards the EU institutions together with other like-minded LPs, albeit with the shortcomings previously mentioned.

Thus, some interviewees commented on the lack of coordination among their parties and within the European left more generally, with Pedrosa stating that ‘we try but we fail to [coordinate]’. Indeed, according to Fazenda, ‘we never had strategic coordination’, but only ‘a tacit convergence’, as reflected in the absence of any formal bilateral agreements among these parties. Also, as Maestu from Podemos put it, ‘the other side is coordinating their strategy’ better than the left (where ‘the other side’ would broadly refer to the European political right). Indeed, Kanellopoulos claimed that the right-wing parties and media alike cooperate transnationally to try and undermine these LPs:

‘The same arguments in Portugal, the same arguments in Spain. We are beginning to have a suspicion that it is more organised than we think, it’s not just a coincidence. We begin to have the suspicion that these people have met and they have cooperated, trying to find the same arguments. ... For example, especially relating to Venezuela, it came to our knowledge that the opposition against Maduro cooperates with Rajoy and the Spanish conservatives to try and find arguments to hit at Podemos. There are people travelling, even from Greece, journalists for example, making contacts with conservative journalists from Spain, maybe exchanging materials.’

This awareness of facing forces that work together against these LPs makes their lack of strategic coordination all the more puzzling. The reasons for that and for other shortcomings in their wider cooperation are explored in the following section.

Obstacles: Why cooperation remains limited

While there is a strong consensus among the interviewees that the transnational networking and cooperation of their parties increased during the crisis, a majority of them also believe that the current level of cooperation should improve. Asked the question ‘Do you think that the current level of transnational cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos is

adequate?', eleven out of the sixteen interviewees from the three parties gave a negative answer – three from SYRIZA (out of five), three from Bloco (out of five) and five from Podemos (out of six).

To give a few examples, Giannopoulou and Karatsioubanis believe there 'should be more' cooperation, while Pureza said that 'we should be able to find more adequate platforms and more adequate processes for improving this level of commonness between our parties'. Also, Merlo argued that 'the others, the bourgeoisie, cooperate internationally much better', while Martinez Lobo conceded that the cooperation among LPs 'could be better, and more formal'. Agreeing with the latter, Conesa de Lara was more specific and complained that 'if we would want to do a campaign on, for example, access to medicine with Bloco, we wouldn't know who to talk to'.

Some of the key reasons for why most interviewees find the current state of their parties' cooperation rather wanting have already surfaced when discussing the post-2015 decline in the relationship of both Bloco and Podemos with SYRIZA. Indeed, for some Bloco interviewees, such as Pedrosa, 'with SYRIZA [there] is not much cooperation and it's not the moment to increase the cooperation'. The interviewees were nevertheless asked explicitly to rate, on the usual scale from 1 to 4, the most significant obstacles to their parties' cooperation from a pre-given list of thirteen factors, while also having the option to add any other factors that they might deem as hindering that process of cooperation.

As shown in *Table 16* below, seven out of the given factors were awarded some degree of significance. The most significant of them, rated at 3, is the 'primacy of national politics', as anticipated by the discussion from previous chapters. Four other factors scored over 2.5, which means that they are closer to being seen as 'quite significant' than merely 'somewhat significant': different views on the EU; lack of a transnational social basis; lack of resources; and limited influence over EU policy. All these five obstacles are discussed in turn in this section. Before that though, a few words about the other factors mentioned by some interviewees that were not included on the pre-given list.

Two interviewees, Pedrosa from Bloco and Maestu from Podemos, mentioned language, which they rated as a 'very significant' and 'quite significant' obstacle respectively; other two, Kanellopoulos and Karatsioubanis from SYRIZA, mentioned factional/intra-party rivalries as a 'quite significant' obstacle; another interviewee, Merlo from Podemos, believes the lack of a common strategy is a 'very significant' obstacle to party cooperation, while Verstrynge, also from Podemos, believes the 'marginality of the left' is 'quite significant' in that regard.

Of all these factors, the problem of language was mentioned by other interviewees as well, although in relation to other questions. Thus, despite having conducted all interviews in English, which indicates a relatively good knowledge of today's *lingua franca* in European politics, linguistic barriers are still an issue in transnational party cooperation. As Pedrosa put it, 'there's always the language problem, because the Greeks may have some useful information and sometimes we receive stuff and it's not translated; same with Portugal – most of the stuff we produce is in Portuguese and nobody translates it.' Also, Maestu from Podemos pointed out that 'not many people speak Greek' but also that 'English is not commonly spoken by the Spanish or Portuguese. Most Spanish speak Spanish and Basque/Catalan/Galician'.

Table 16. Obstacles to post-2009 transnational party cooperation in order of significance

	OBSTACLE	SYRIZA	Bloco	Podemos	OVERALL
1	Primacy of national politics	2.2	3.2	3.5	3
2	Different views on the EU	3	2.8	2.7	2.8
3	Lack of resources	3.6	2.5	2	2.7
4	Lack of a transnational social basis	3	2.6	2.5	2.7
5	Limited influence over EU policy	2.6	2.8	2.3	2.6
6	Different strategies to oppose austerity	2	3.2	2.2	2.4
7	Differences in national contexts	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
8	Popular disillusionment with the left	2.4	2.2	1.8	2.1
9	Different views on transnational cooperation	2.2	1.5	1.8	1.9
10	Inadequate transnational cooperation among trade unions	2	2.8	1	1.9
11	Lack of or poor leadership	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.7
12	Wider ideological differences	1.4	1.8	1.7	1.6
13	Personal rivalries	1.4	1	1.3	1.3

However, according to Maestu, this is also a generational issue, as 'younger people speak English'. This point was also made by Katsardis, for whom 'the new generation of people in Spain, in Portugal, in Greece speak better English, so that they can communicate, and [that] they are confident and fluent in English', whereas 'previous generations cannot really talk to each other to an extent, or they speak English but they can speak about the weather,

that's it.' Hence, as Pedrosa stressed, language is not among the key obstacles to current party cooperation: 'if the leaderships of Bloco, Podemos and SYRIZA want to communicate, they do it because they all have language skills so it's relevant in some ways but it's not hindering transnational cooperation if we're talking about the upper level'. This suggests though that language might be more of an obstacle when it comes to the networking and cooperation among the parties' activists – an obstacle that is rarely picked up by the political science research on transnational cooperation.

Primacy of national politics & limited influence over EU policy

The only factor to be given at least a 3, the primacy of national over European politics is a constant feature in the wider literature on party cooperation (Bressanelli, 2014; Crouch, 2013; Seiler, 2011; Bardi, Bressanelli, Calossi, Gagatsek, Mair, & Pizzimenti, 2010, 2014; Ladrech, 2007; Poguntke et al., 2007), the aforementioned Europeanisation of politics notwithstanding. As Crouch (2013, p. 232) puts it in reference to the period since the start of the crisis, 'parties and political systems remain doggedly national; they are defined by the nation-state and are dedicated to pursuing the interests of that nation-state'.

According to Ladrech (2003, pp. 124-125), this structural feature is mainly due to parties still deriving much of their resources, power and legitimacy from the domestic political arena. This argument was reinforced particularly by the interviewees from Bloco, with Pedrosa saying that 'National politics are always before everything, especially in countries where you can have some real representation', while Fazenda stated that 'we don't live on international cooperation here – we live from the approval of our people'. Bloco is perceived as more focused on national politics also by Karatsioubanis from SYRIZA, who claimed that, at least at the beginning of the crisis, Bloco was 'looking towards Portugal a bit more, even though they were part of PEL, GUE/NGL.' Indeed, as shown in the previous chapter, Bloco became more invested in its relationship with SYRIZA once it could parade it as a success story of the left in its domestic arena; similarly, Bloco cooled down that relationship when it became a tool in the hands of its critics and competitors in national elections.

The interviewees from Podemos shared the same view as those from Bloco. Merlo said explicitly that 'national realities are more important' and Albarracín that 'national politics prevails', despite the fact that 'we had austerity measures in Greece and Spain at the same time ... but the parties didn't understand that well.' Echoing Fazenda's comment, Conesa de Lara summed it up by saying that 'when it comes to the real moment ... each one is with their own

electorate'. Indeed, perhaps the minority, radical Anticapitalistas current inside in Podemos is so influential over the party's foreign affairs because the majority current around Iglesias is much more concerned with domestic politics.

The SYRIZA interviewees seemed less convinced by the importance of this factor in hindering transnational cooperation, as they rated it at 2.6, below the overall average. Kanellopoulos pointed out that the primacy of national politics, at least in Greece, 'has declined, subsided ... because European policies are very decisive for domestic policies now'. However, as pointed out in the previous section, that seems to have changed now in Greece, where in the upcoming European elections 'the choices of the electorate are very likely to be subject to internal criteria and strongly influenced by the question of who will win the next government' (Koltsida, 2019).

While the primacy of national politics is, as Walter Baier put it, 'a general characteristic of European politics', what might add to that in the case of LPs, and relatively marginal political forces in general, is their rather limited influence over EU's policy-making, which might therefore discourage them from placing more emphasis on transnational cooperation. Indeed, this factor was rated comparatively high, at 2.6.

Thus, Pedrosa admitted that 'we have very limited influence, [and] there's not much we can do, so sometimes you see cooperation for nothing' – an issue which he attributed not only to electoral performances but also to the PEL's lack of cohesion and the wider absence of a 'European project' of the left. Also, Verstryngge said that 'we all know the limits of the European Union so that could be one of the reasons why our cooperation is not that fluid.' However, O'Donnell made the interesting amendment that 'those who do have influence don't seem to collaborate that more either', thus reinforcing Baier's point that parties of all political strands are primarily focused on domestic politics.

By contrast, interviewees from SYRIZA see in the left's limited influence over EU policies an incentive for transnational cooperation. Giannopoulou illustrated this difference between SYRIZA and the other two parties:

'SYRIZA thinks the exact opposite, that we have to cooperate in order to influence. I heard Mariana Mortágua from Bloco (she's an MP) three months ago in a public event in Madrid. She, as many other people from Bloco, are very nationally focused, and they think that we cannot influence Brussels and we have to give our fight as much as we can here, in our country, so they are not so European-focused. ... I've had a discussion with a Spanish comrade and she told me that Spaniards are not that much interested in European politics and that they don't feel much European. We are more European...'

What might explain this contrast, more than anything, is that SYRIZA has been in government since 2015, unlike the other two parties. This obviously gives the Greek party more of a say in EU affairs, having a seat on the Council, but also a stronger sense of urgency in dealing with EU affairs, which parties without governmental responsibility such as Bloco and Podemos do not have to face at same extent. Also, it could be argued that Bloco and Podemos are still striving to get into government, hence a stronger emphasis on domestic politics. Indeed, the two Iberian LPs are currently in the rather delicate situation of having to balance between supporting the minority social democratic governments and still posing some degree of competition to those social democratic parties (although the upcoming snap elections in Spain might relieve Podemos of that task).

At the same time, while greater transnational cooperation might somewhat increase the influence of these parties over EU policy-making, the best way to do that is by winning elections, which are still of a largely national character, including those for the EP, as confirmed by the quotes provided in the previous section with regard to the upcoming elections. As the journalist Garcia also said, ‘MEPs are more interested in what happens in their own countries, where they get elected’, although ‘this happens to all political families’ according to him. Fazenda concurred, saying that ‘on the international field we are constrained by the results we have in our own country’.

Therefore, parties and LPs in particular appear to be stuck in a vicious circle: they would focus more on transnational cooperation and European politics if they would have a greater influence over European politics, but they can only achieve such influence by performing well in, and thereby focusing more on, national politics. Perhaps they can escape this vicious circle only provided that European elections become more transnational in character and, more importantly, more politically significant. However, that would require an acceleration of European integration in a period when the opposite trend seems to be prevailing. Indeed, some of these parties’ commitment to such a deepening of integration has substantially weakened over the last few years.

Different views on the EU

While the three parties shared similar views on the EU, which contributed to the enhancement of their post-2009 cooperation, those views started to diverge after SYRIZA’s U-turn in July 2015. Indeed, this divergence is seen as the second most significant obstacle to these parties’ cooperation and, in some of the current literature, as the main dividing line of the

European left today (see Keith, 2017, p. 94; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016, p. 346; Nikolakakis, 2016, p. 17). Kanellopoulos went as far as saying that ‘whenever there is a disagreement, it has to do with different views on the EU’.

Moutinho developed on these differences:

‘If we try to come up with a coherent narrative, we cannot say inside [the party] that Europe is the problem and then go to European elections with forces that say let’s try to reform Europe from within, because for us it is not possible: these treaties are not reformable; either you confront them or you propose new treaties if the correlation of forces is different and you have the strength to change this. ... We cannot be inside the institutions thinking that we are going to be able to change them – that is the lesson that we got from the Greek case and Bloco understood it very clearly.’

Moreover, Pureza believes that, in the light of the Greek case, an exit from the Eurozone ‘is a scenario not to be discarded ... if nothing is transformed in the Eurozone’, although that should not be ‘a banner to use to go out on the streets [with]’. Finally, Fazenda believes that ‘if Schäuble wanted to put Greece out of the single currency, they had to do it and to get some sovereignty’. This indicates clear differences between Bloco and SYRIZA in relating to the EU and the Eurozone in particular.

However, while Bloco’s increased Euroscepticism clearly stems from their realisation, in the light of the ‘Greek case’, that a realistic strategy towards the EU institutions should go beyond mere negotiations, there have also been more pragmatic calculations behind it, once again linked to the dynamics of domestic politics. Firstly, the more confrontational attitude towards the EU might have been a tactical choice ahead of the general elections in October 2015, on the background of a growing mistrust in European institutions among the Portuguese electorate (see Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro & Plaza-Colodro, 2018, p. 346).

Secondly, given the Europeanist stance of the PS, Bloco increased its criticisms of the EU as a way to distinguish itself from its main competitor over the left-wing electorate (Fernandes & Carvalhais, 2016, p. 54; Príncipe, 2016, p. 172). Indeed, as it currently supports the PS minority government and its policies, the stance on the EU has arguably remained one of the few political positions that can still clearly separate Bloco from its social democratic partner, particularly in the perspective of the next general elections.

Thirdly, as part of the post-elections parliamentary coalition propping up the PS government, Bloco might have used its more critical stance on the EU as a tool to pressure the government into resisting some of the demands made by the European institutions of the

government. As Fernandes and Carvalhais (2016, p. 50) put it, ‘the anti-European speech ... is presented as a means to ameliorate the country’s bargaining capacity in the EU’.

Fourthly, as pointed out already, Bloco decided to distance themselves from SYRIZA following the latter’s failure to respect its electoral promises, as the events in Greece had significant reverberations in the domestic politics of Portugal throughout 2015 (Fernandes & Carvalhais, 2016, p. 54). Gusmão claimed ‘criticism towards SYRIZA was made equivalent to the criticism of Bloco – same organisation with different national branches’, which might further explain why Bloco has adopted the position, contrasting to that of SYRIZA, of ‘No more sacrifices to the Euro’. Once again, therefore, the demands of national politics seem to play a key role in how parties relate to their partners across the EU and to the EU itself.

For Podemos interviewees too, particularly those associated with Anticapitalistas, the differences over the EU have increased and have affected the cooperation with SYRIZA, although Podemos has less of a coherent approach to the question of the EU than Bloco. Merlo had the most to say about this:

‘Now we have the biggest differences. ... You need a strategy, which Podemos hasn’t established. In Anticapitalistas we’ve elaborated that strategy. We’re in charge of the European Secretariat in Podemos so we’ll have to see how much of our strategy will be adapted or not. ... The institutions need to be challenged at a European level. We, Anticapitalistas, believe the we need to defend the possibility of an exit.’

That is in clear contrast to what SYRIZA is calling for, which is building a broader progressive alliance that would be capable to tilt the balance of forces against the current neoliberal policy design of the EU. Indeed, in contrast to Plan B’s idea of disobedience towards EU treaties, SYRIZA believes that these treaties provide at least some space of manoeuvre for left-wing policies, an argument also increasingly made in the literature (e.g. Parker & Pye, 2017).

Thus, at the previously discussed Transform event in Lisbon from October 2018, Effie Achtsioglou, the Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity in the current SYRIZA government, said that ‘We stand much behind what the treaties ask for: the Founding Treaty for the EU says that solidarity and social cohesion are main goals. It’s supposed to be legal text. First, we need to demand that the treaties are respected, because they are not.’ Indeed, throughout the crisis, the European left focused more on denouncing the austerity measures and the neoliberal agenda underpinning them but less on how they might be opposed concretely within the current legal framework of the EU.

However, even if left-wing policies would be in principle possible within the existing legal framework of the EU, it is apparent that the current balance of forces at the level of the

EU is not favourable in that regard; and it is unlikely for it to significantly shift the other way following the upcoming European elections. Thus, the Euro-reformist approach favoured by SYRIZA and other LPs seems to be rather unrealistic in the current context of power relations at the EU level. At the same time, the more Eurosceptic approach favoured by Bloco and Anticapitalistas is rather underdeveloped in several key aspects: how to attract popular support, how to run the economy outside of the Eurozone and how to rethink European cooperation in a way that their calls for sovereignty are not confused with those coming from the other side of the political spectrum.

At the same time, these differences among the three parties are not entirely straightforward. As Walter Baier pointed out, ‘all of the three [parties] are internally divided on the issue’. Indeed, according to him, ‘Euroscepticism in SYRIZA is growing’, although that has not yet been confirmed by anybody or anything else. Nevertheless, the different views are significant enough that the three parties have not engaged, by the time of completing this thesis in March 2019, in any common electoral activities for the European elections in May 2019, although that is probably also due to the national character of their electoral campaigns.

Lack of a transnational social basis

Scholars of European integration have long addressed the question of the absence of a European demos and the possibilities, or lack thereof, to build it (e.g. Jolly, 2005; Scharpf, 1999; Weiler, 1996). While that absence obviously undermines all parties’ capacity for mobilisation at a transnational level, it particularly affects parties that rely heavily on mass mobilisation to gain support for their demands, such as the three LPs discussed here. Thus, while these parties might build on such a mobilisation strategy to put pressure on governments in their countries, they find it much harder when dealing with the EU institutions. This has been reflected in the limited transnational mass mobilisation during the crisis, with ‘any solidary action being of very marginal importance and existing mainly at very formal diplomatic levels, remote from civil society’ (Crouch, 2013, p. 232).

The interviewees were aware of this structural shortcoming but had little to say about it. Those who did, were divided over the issue. While Merlo from Podemos said ‘we’re working on building it [a transnational social basis]’, Gusmão from Bloco was more sceptical in this regard:

‘As in the case of the trade unions, I think we’re not going to find a solution. The kind of social basis that we can build at the European level is a kind of solidarity-based movements, not

really movements that are acting with the kind of unity that we could see in a national trade union. Actually, that's one of the things that makes me sceptical about the possibility of a Europe-wide change. ... I don't think that there is European workers' solidarity and actually I think it's becoming more and more difficult to build one. And even if one existed, you would have a very hard time having a common agenda between different working classes.'

Indeed, if the social classes that LPs from different member states appeal to and claim to represent do not identify with each other transnationally and thus fail to build a sense of cross-border class solidarity, then how are these parties to build the kind of critical mass they would need in order effect the changes at EU level that they advocate? Moreover, how can they themselves be coherent in the changes they advocate if they represent social groups that might perceive their interests as different, if not opposite? Indeed, the former Chairperson of the Dutch Socialist Party, Jan Marijnissen, stated in an interview for the conservative German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that it has been 'a major mistake of other left parties in Europe to constantly demand European solidarity' and that 'most Frisians don't give a damn about the Greeks' (see Janssen, 2013, p. 33). This illustrates strikingly well how the cleavage between Northern and Southern Europe can also be replicated on the left, despite its internationalist credentials, and even within the labour movement itself (see Bieler & Erne, 2014).

Of course, national divisions undermining international cooperation – which reveal yet again the pre-eminence of the national – is not a recent issue but has confronted the left as early as the outbreak of the First World War, which led to the collapse of the Second International. But just like then, perhaps the key issue here lies not as much with the differences between the social groups that LPs represent domestically as with the LPs' failure to try and overcome or de-construct these differences, rather than merely reflect and reinforce them. Perhaps the social groups they represent have more in common than it is usually believed. Perhaps, objectively speaking, they already constitute an international, if not transnational, social class, just like there already is an emerging transnational capitalist class; but, unlike the latter, this one has not yet become conscious of its own existence and shared interests, with the European left, including the three LPs, arguably failing to do enough in that regard.

More than that, European LPs seem to have also failed to enable transnational networking and cooperation among their own activists, as the discussion from the previous chapter revealed the elitist character of these parties' networking and cooperation. They have failed to activate their militants and supporters in trying to embolden any significant transnational mass mobilisation, which has been at surprisingly low levels since the start of the crisis (Keith, 2017). As Albarracín put it, 'we have ... our militants, but we're not using them;

that's our main force, the people, but we're not using it'. On top of that, the degradation of living standards during the crisis obviously affected the capacity of ordinary activists to engage in transnational activism, such as attending mass demonstrations like the anti-G8 one in Genoa in 2001, which links directly to the next factor.

Lack of resources

The obvious need for material resources to engage in any transnational political activity was addressed by interviewees from all three parties, who rated it on average at 2.7. According to Kanellopoulos, 'there is a lack of resources to organise more meetings, to have a magazine', while his colleague Karatsioubanis admitted that 'the three of us don't have resources'. Also, Pureza from Bloco pointed out that 'we rely on the capacity of entities like Rosa [Luxemburg Foundation]', because the 'parties themselves don't have that much capacity', illustrating once again how the North-South economic gap is also reflected on the left.

Further confirming the primacy of national politics, Pedrosa said that 'there's a lack of resources for transnational cooperation, yes, because if you have resources you spend them on national politics.' Finally, Verstryngne from Podemos acknowledged that 'you need resources to cooperate with other parties, to travel and so on, and we are from the left', implying that LPs start with an almost inherent disadvantage in terms of financial capacity, as their generally modest political representation gives them limited access to state funds and their kind of politics tends to keep big donors away.

At the same time, Merlo from Podemos claimed 'We get enough resources here, in the EP, for international stuff'. However, this reveals a rather narrow understanding of transnational party cooperation, limited to top party members such as the MEPs. Pedrosa also pointed out that the lack of resources does not affect the cooperation at the upper levels of the parties but only among 'the militants', which links back to the lack of transnational mobilisation. As Wainwright aptly summed it up, 'the crisis has meant a lack of resources, of cutting public money ... people's own personal resources to spend time and money on politics. So the crisis has meant a more beleaguered left, even though the issues have become more urgent.' Therefore, the crisis seems to have had the paradoxical double effect of increasing the left's need for transnational cooperation while also undermining its material capacity for it.

Recommendations: What is to be done?

At the end of the questionnaire the interviewees were asked how the transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos should be improved. Beyond vague generalities, such as Maestu's suggestion that 'we need to draw conclusions from each other's experiences', several interviewees provided recommendations covering their parties' networking and cooperation in both its formal and informal dimensions.

In terms of formal cooperation, Merlo believes 'we should agree on a common strategy on the European Union ... we should coordinate ourselves at the institutional level'. For a start, logistics need to improve, as pointed out by Martinez Lobo, who proposed that parties have a common database, because at the present time 'people working at the local level in Spain have no way to contact the person who is in charge of the same field at the local level in Athens'. Conesa de Lara made a similar point, arguing there is a lack of 'sharing information, what is happening in each country, what initiatives are being taken, who is taking them.'

From a strategic point of view, Katsardis advocated the idea that 'in the EU elections we should not run as parties in each country but as the PEL', ascertaining though the difficulty in doing that, as 'this was not accepted by the majority of the European parties that consider themselves even more federalist than the PEL'. Furthermore, in Verstryngge's view, parties should coordinate more on specific issues that are prevalent in their countries: 'if the corruption is almost the same in Portugal, France and Greece, because we know it's almost the same, why not do a press conference about this corruption and speak to all the media from all these countries?'

More concrete proposals were made by some of the participants at the aforementioned Transform event in Lisbon, "Is Southern Europe the Weak Link of European Integration? Tracing Possible Areas of Cooperation among Movements and Parties". Haris Golemis from SYRIZA/NPI suggested more political coordination at the level of the EU institutions:

'left political forces of Southern Europe, after agreeing among themselves on certain crucial issues which are scheduled to be discussed in European decision-making structures, should put pressure on their respective governments to adopt a common stance. I don't know what the Greek government, the Spanish government, which is now cooperating with Podemos or supported by Podemos, or the Portuguese government do in such cases. Have they ever thought, have you Maria⁶ thought that you could ever discuss with your counterpart in these

⁶ Maria Karamessini, member of the Board of NPI and also Director of Greece's Manpower Employment Organization (OAED).

countries and see that you promote some common action in the European field? And the same question goes for Effie⁷, the minister, whom we will have tomorrow. I think we should urge our people to put pressure on governments to promote this kind of actions.’

Speaking on the following day of the conference, Effie Achtsioglou gave a concrete example along the lines suggested by Golemis:

‘In two months from now, I invited the labour ministers of Portugal and Spain to discuss a common proposal on minimum wage and precariousness to then put forward to the European Council. Tsipras can put more pressure on it if he knows there is a consensus between these three ministers. ... Ending precarity in the labour market and fighting tax evasion – if we focus on these priorities, we can build an alliance.’

However, this reveals the rather underdeveloped character of the left’s cooperation in Southern Europe, as one would expect that such channels of communication and coordination as those outlined by Golemis, among like-minded LPs facing broadly similar contexts, would already be in place almost a decade after the start of the crisis. At the same time, the kind of inter-governmental coordination suggested by Achtsioglou obviously requires that LPs other than SYRIZA get into government. As polls currently stand, neither Bloco nor Podemos are likely to win the general elections due in 2019, although they might join social democratic-led government coalitions.

Local elections would be a more realistic terrain for these parties to be making gains in the near future. However, there has not been much talk of transnational cooperation among left-controlled municipal authorities. Only Tatiana Moutinho made an interesting comment in that regard at the same conference in Lisbon:

‘Since next year we have local elections in Greece and Spain, one of the things we’d like to do is around the issue of municipalism. There are many battles on the field, with success, when it comes to water rights, housing, migrants, even healthcare. It’s at the local level where concrete changes for people’s lives are being implemented. We should also maybe write a handbook on municipalism. Municipalism in the South is something different and we should discuss it as a possible alternative.’

Severino, the director of Podemos’ 25MI, also touched upon this in an interview given to the Spanish media. He talked of a ‘municipalist axis’ between some cities in Italy and cities in Spain where Podemos is in government, which represents ‘a fundamental connection vector to know what is happening and to continue working to recover a democratic Europe of the peoples’ (Riveiro, 2017). Perhaps this is indeed a potential area of transnational networking and

⁷ Effie Achtsioglou, Labour Minister in the SYRIZA government as of March 2019.

cooperation that the left in Southern Europe and beyond has not explored enough, despite cities like Madrid, Barcelona or Naples being led by broad left-wing political forces.

In terms of the informal networking and cooperation, Kanellopoulos would want the parties to ‘make our think tanks, academics, journals, publications work together’. Indeed, the European left seems to be lacking its own media. While the role of social media was rated as ‘quite significant’ in the informal networking and cooperation among the three parties, that of magazines and of websites were both rated as merely ‘somewhat significant’. The magazines mentioned most often were *Jacobin* and the *New Left Review*, whose role in keeping people on the left up to date with developments in Southern Europe is also confirmed by Sheehan (2016, p. 171). At the same time, while it makes sense for outlets in English to be the main vehicle for the left in Southern Europe to bring its message to a broader audience, the fact that these two Anglo-Saxon publications are also the most important mass media channels for the dialogue within the Southern European left itself is quite illustrative of the North-South cleavage.

More striking though was the scarcity of examples in terms of websites, apart from the Transform website, mentioned only once, and Bloco’s website *Esquerda.net*, which has a section in English. Thus, as Pedrosa concisely summed it up, ‘there’s no hub of the left, a website of the left where people from these parties go to read stuff’, such as social democratic Social Europe website. In this day and age, the absence of such a hub says less about the left’s lack of resources than its lack of cohesion.

Several interviewees also stressed the need for a more bottom-up approach to transnational cooperation. Rapidis called for ‘building stronger networks in society, social movements, investing more in summer schools’ and for a ‘more often exchange of ideas outside the GUE/NGL and the PEL’. Fazenda claimed, vaguely, that ‘we have to put people in motion’, while his colleague in Bloco, Pureza, called for improving ‘the capacity to develop social movements, both at the national and the European level, that would be at the heart of resistance and [the] alternative’. The need for more popular mobilisation was also acknowledged by people from Podemos, with Merlo contending that ‘we should do European campaigns’ and ‘invest resources to support social movements coordinate themselves’, while Albarracín stressed that ‘we need to get the support of the popular classes and build campaigns on common issues.’

Thus, as the left-wing academic Balabanidis aptly summed it up,

‘I think it’s a two-level question – the one at the top, at the EU level, and the other at the bottom, the social mobilisation level. ... There is already a cooperation ... at the level of party

representatives or leaders. That's why I believe it is most crucial to elaborate cooperation networks ... at the level of social movements.'

However, none of the interviewees made any concrete proposal of how this informal cooperation should improve. Overall, their recommendations seem rather limited and generic, with a few exceptions such as the suggestions made by Golemis at the Transform event in Lisbon. This relative poverty of ideas might indicate that the interviewees, despite almost all of them being prominently involved in the transnational networking and cooperation of their parties, do not think too frequently or systematically about how to improve it, which in turn raises a question mark over whether they and their parties do actually want to improve it.

In any case, following on Balabanidis' point, perhaps these parties should try more and employ at a European level the same approach that brought them success at home: an orientation towards the masses and a strategy of developing, leading or at least actively engaging with social mobilisation. This would not require abandoning electoral and parliamentary politics but striking a balance between that and grassroots activism, between the institutions and the streets – a delicate task that not many LPs throughout history have managed to live up to.

Conclusion

This final chapter has answered the primary research question of this thesis: transnational networking and cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos did increase since the start of the Eurozone crisis, at least according to nearly all the sixteen interviewees from the three parties, although most of them also claimed that process of cooperation to currently be rather inadequate. This ambivalence is largely explained by the significant increase in networking and cooperation immediately before and after SYRIZA's electoral victory in January 2015, which was followed, after the U-turn from July, by an equally significant decrease in the relations between SYRIZA and the other two parties. In corroboration with the findings from the previous two chapters, it seems therefore that, on the whole, the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties has relatively stagnated during the crisis.

Why did it increase though when it did? In line with the assumption of the thesis, it was shown that the increase came as a result of the three parties opposing austerity – a transnational solution to a transnational crisis. Thus, as part of this broader Europeanisation of politics, they

realised they could best oppose austerity also at a transnational level, by supporting each other and coordinating their strategy. That was also facilitated by their similar views on the EU, at least up until July 2015, particularly by the presupposition that they could fight effectively against austerity and the Troika within the framework of the EU.

However, their shared opposition to austerity, embedded in a wider opposition to neoliberalism, was less motivated by international solidarity but by their similar economic contexts. They started to intensify their cooperation once the socio-economic impact of austerity started to be felt in their own countries but also when one of them, SYRIZA, performed well in elections and could thereby serve as a success story that the other LPs could parade in order to enhance their own credibility and perceived legitimacy at home – a key incentive for transnational party cooperation in general. It was the dynamics of domestic politics, therefore, that guided to a large extent the intensification of these parties' transnational.

It was that dynamics that has also chiefly hindered their cooperation, as the primacy of national over European politics was identified as the most significant obstacle in that regard. As discussed in the previous chapter, when SYRIZA ceased to be a success story, both Bloco and Podemos decreased their cooperation with it, also on the background of their diverging views on the EU following the U-turn of the Tsipras government. On top of that, the limited influence that these parties exert at the EU level also compels them to focus on their domestic politics, where they have better odds to make an impact. Indeed, only by winning elections at home they would be able to gain more influence at the EU level and thus be more motivated to focus on transnational cooperation.

Another structural factor, the absence of a transnational social basis, has also hindered the cooperation among these parties, as they found it more difficult to employ at the European level the strategy of social mobilisation that they used, successfully, in their domestic arenas. Indeed, the impact of the crisis on living standards further undermined that capacity for mobilisation, in a period when the left arguably needed it more than ever. At the same time, that has also been a failure on behalf of the parties themselves, which did not do much in terms of involving their militants and supporters in the process of transnational cooperation, which thus remains limited to the higher echelons of the parties. Thus, the parties' strategic reorientation from popular mobilisation towards institutional activity is even more pronounced at a transnational level.

When asked how their parties' transnational networking and cooperation could improve, some of the interviewees pointed to the need of increasing their formal coordination at the

European level, for example ahead of Council meetings, but also to create more channels for communication and networking, not just at the top levels of the parties but also among the rank-and-file activists. However, most proposals proved rather generic, which suggests that increasing their transnational cooperation is perhaps not a priority for any of these parties at the present time, as also illustrated by the pronounced national character that the upcoming European elections will have in all three countries.

Conclusion

Despite its self-professed and sometimes proven internationalism, the left in the EU has always lagged behind the transnational cooperation of other political families, partly because of its own weakness after 1989 and partly because of deeply-rooted divisions over the question of European integration. This research project stemmed from the assumption that the markedly transnational character of the Eurozone crisis and its austerity-based management would boost the transnational cooperation of left parties.

Such a boost would have been most likely to happen in the countries most affected by the crisis, that is, Southern member states such as Greece, Spain and Portugal. Indeed, as Chapter 2 revealed, all three countries experienced substantial austerity measures under the supervision of the so-called Troika, which framed its management of the crisis in a moralistic narrative about the cultural differences between Northern and Southern Europe. However, austerity largely failed to reboot these countries' economies, having had instead substantial negative economic and social effects, which led to the emergence of significant anti-austerity social movements and the decreasing popularity of mainstream parties.

The latter effect proved most substantial in Greece, where the social democratic party PASOK nearly collapsed, allowing for SYRIZA's spectacular electoral rise, which culminated with its victory in January 2015. While the social democratic parties in Portugal and Spain also suffered sizeable losses, they were not dramatic enough for Bloco and Podemos respectively to replicate SYRIZA's success to the same extent. Thus, they had to be content with providing key parliamentary support to minority social democratic governments, which is likely to be maintained following the 2019 general elections in both countries.

These three parties also broadly share, as shown in Chapter 1, several programmatic and strategic features that would have facilitated even more the enhancement of their transnational networking and cooperation during the crisis. All three parties emerged in reaction to a gap on the left in their countries, in between a neoliberalised social democracy and an ossified communist party. That was also reflected in their neo-reformist programme, which in contrast to the 'radical' label commonly attached to these parties advocates for what is more or less a classic social democratic agenda focused on the defence of social rights, public services and the welfare state, coupled with New Left themes such as gender equality and the environment.

Indeed, given the neoliberal measures implemented by its government, there is a case to be made that SYRIZA has moved to the right of this neo-reformist profile.

The key programmatic feature shared by the three LPs that, as revealed in Chapter 5, turned out to be most significant in enticing them to further their cooperation after 2009 is the opposition to neoliberalism, which in the context of the crisis took the form of opposition to austerity. Their similar views over the EU also seem to have played a role in that regard, as they blamed the neoliberal architecture of the Eurozone for the crisis and the EU institutions for the way it reacted to it. However, those views started to visibly diverge after July 2015, with Bloco and Podemos adopting a markedly more Eurosceptic stance than SYRIZA, a development facilitated also by their lack of governmental responsibility – perhaps the most important difference between these parties.

Another key similarity, at least in the first years of the crisis, was the parties' strategy of social mobilisation, which allowed them to become the political mouthpieces of the anti-austerity movements and make significant electoral gains. However, as they became more electorally successful, that gradually gave way to an increasingly electoral and parliamentary strategy, on the background of a decline of social movements and, in the case of SYRIZA, also due to participation in government. At least in the case of Bloco and Podemos, that strategic reorientation has not been particularly fruitful, as both have either regressed or at best stagnated in polls ahead of upcoming general elections in their countries.

Their withdrawal from the streets into the institutions is even more pregnant at the transnational level. Despite their networking, particularly in the case of SYRIZA and Bloco, being rooted in the anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and despite the rise of significant anti-austerity social movements during the crisis, the parties have largely failed to engage transnationally with these movements, even less so to use them as a channel for their own cooperation. This has been best reflected by the strikingly few instances of transnational mass mobilisations, apart from the odd Blockupy demo, in a period of increased Europeanisation of politics that arguably required the left to pursue such transnational mobilisation more than ever.

That failure is also due to external factors such as the degradation of living standards brought about by the crisis, particularly among the youth, as well as the decline of the transnational social movements themselves, with no initiative managing to match the role played by the ESF before 2009. Furthermore, at a more structural level, the absence of a transnational social basis, not as much in itself as of itself, poses further obstacles to transnational solidarity and mobilisation, particularly when the dominant narratives fuel the

North-South cleavage. Indeed, that cleavage may sometimes be reproduced even within the left, thus further undermining its capacity for transnational solidarity.

However, these parties have done very little in building the international consciousness of the social groups they aim to represent. Indeed, despite their rank-and-file activists being the most valuable resource they have, as aptly put by one of the interviewees, these parties have largely failed to involve them in the process of transnational party cooperation, which is mostly limited to party leaders, MEPs and other party officials – an expression of the increasingly top-down character that SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos have developed over the last few years.

Another valuable resource that all three parties arguably possess, the prevalence within their ranks of academics with expertise in economics and political science, has also been underused in the process of transnational networking and cooperation, despite some attempts in that respect like the Transform-led Akademia Network. Indeed, the networking among these party academics themselves seems rather limited, where there is any at all. There are almost no cross-Mediterranean links among them, as they are tied to universities either in their own countries (mostly in the case of Bloco and Podemos) or in a Northern European country (see the SYRIZA-UK connection), as another reflection of the North-South cleavage that has surfaced on several occasions throughout the thesis. At the same time, more objective factors, such as the presumably reduced mobility of academics from the region most affected by the crisis or the impact of the marketisation of higher education on the public engagement of academics might also explain their limited role in party networking and cooperation – an interesting avenue to be explored in future research.

Also limited seems to be the role of the parties' political foundations, which lack the resources of their counterparts in Germany and therefore have rather delegated the task of galvanising transnational networking to Transform. The political foundation of the PEL seems indeed to play an important role in the informal networking between SYRIZA and Bloco and their respective foundations, but less so among all three parties, as Podemos' foundation is merely an observer member of the network. Thus, although Transform was rated as the most significant channel for informal networking and cooperation among the three parties, even the interviewees working for Transform admitted that the network is lagging behind the demands of the objective situation for enhancing left cooperation in Southern Europe.

Overall, Chapter 3 revealed that the informal cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, which was rated as merely somewhat significant for the wider party cooperation, has experienced a relative stagnation since the start of the crisis. That is contrary to the expectation that these parties would focus more on this type of cooperation, via social movements in

particular, given their limited access to the formal channels that influence EU's policy- and decision-making processes, with no sway over the Commission and only one seat on the Council.

Formal cooperation, as shown in Chapter 4, was overall rated as quite significant. The peak of that cooperation was reached in the period around SYRIZA's victory from January 2015. Despite the older relation and higher ideological convergence between SYRIZA and Bloco, the relationship between SYRIZA and Podemos took precedence during those months, due to Spain's greater weight in the balance of forces at the EU level and to Podemos standing better chances at the time to come into government. For Podemos as well as Bloco, SYRIZA was a success story of the left that they could use in their own domestic arenas as they were preparing for general elections that same year. Thus, the increase in transnational networking and cooperation was fuelled by pragmatic considerations linked to national politics rather than by sheer international solidarity. Indeed, there was no such significant increase at the beginning of the crisis, when the social impact of the Troika-led austerity was only yet felt in Greece.

The dynamics of domestic politics also largely explain the visible decline in the parties' networking and cooperation, particularly in terms of bilateral relations, following SYRIZA's U-turn from July 2015. Indeed, that was a seminal moment for the wider European left, which has subsequently seen its divisions over the question of the EU enhance more than ever in the post-1989 era. Both Bloco and Podemos had to defend themselves from critics and political competitors by distancing themselves from SYRIZA and also by adopting a more combative stance towards the EU; Bloco in particular, which also used that as a way to distinguish itself from their pro-European rival PS. Thus, the bilateral relations between SYRIZA and each of the two Iberian parties, which were never formalised but rested upon previous ideological affinities and mostly individual connections between top party officials (not including here their work in GUE/NGL and PEL), have cooled down significantly since July 2015. Moreover, both Podemos (Anticapitalistas in particular) and Bloco have developed links with other forces on the Greek left, such as Popular Unity.

Therefore, of all three, Bloco and Podemos have the closest relationship today, facilitated not as much by their ideological similarities – the Trotskyist connection of some of their currents notwithstanding – but by their geographical proximity, similar political contexts and similar views on the EU. Their tighter relationship is best reflected in the leading roles they both play in the Plan B/NPM initiative, which represents a break with their previous unconditional support for European integration. However, this initiative's calls for sovereignty bear the risk of being assimilated with the nationalism of the right, although the calls for

reforming the EU from within equally bear the risk of allowing the nationalist right to appear as the only alternative to the status quo. More importantly, the economic policies that Plan B/NPM would pursue in the eventuality of an exit from the Eurozone and even the EU are rather vague, while the strategy for popular mobilisation in support of such a scenario is virtually absent. This latter shortcoming only reinforces the argument about the top-down character of the transnational cooperation of these parties and of the European left in general.

With Podemos not being a member of the PEL and Bloco increasingly critical of its Europeanist position, the transnational networking and cooperation among the three parties is mostly limited to GUE/NGL, the only organisation that all of them (still) belong to. Here, the interaction is more pragmatic and circumstantial, due to GUE/NGL being the most politically relevant transnational framework of the European left today, and rated as such by the interviewees themselves, despite its well-known shortcomings, a salient lack of cohesion above everything. Depending on the outcome of the upcoming European elections, GUE/NGL could see its more Eurosceptic elements defect, including Bloco and Podemos, although this strand of the left is unlikely to gain enough seats for a separate group in the EP.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the formal cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos is the lack of any trilateral relations. This is at odds, at least partly, with the thesis' core assumption that these parties would have sought to build a transnational front in order to oppose the Troika and its austerity policies more effectively, as called for even by some of their leaders. Such trilateral cooperation did not develop even at the peak of their relations, in early 2015, a year when all of them faced general elections and could have arguably benefitted from more transnational coordination. While in 2019 there are again general elections in all three countries, the decline in the relations between SYRIZA and the other two means that any trilateral cooperation is more unlikely than ever since 2009.

Overall, the formal networking and cooperation among these three parties has also relatively stagnated during the Eurozone crisis, despite being deemed as more significant than the informal one. In other words, the left in Southern Europe, and beyond, has largely failed to capitalise on the opportunity provided by Eurozone crisis to significantly improve its transnational cooperation, as acknowledged already in the current literature (see Keith, 2017; Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016; Chiochetti, 2014).

More than that, the actors involved in that process who have been interviewed as part of this research were rather vague and generic in suggesting how to improve the transnational cooperation of the left. One of the few concrete suggestions, to coordinate ahead of Council meetings, would really make sense if more LPs would come into government across the EU.

However, that seems quite implausible at the moment, although Podemos and Bloco might be able to play a role along those lines if they join social democratic-led governmental coalitions following the upcoming elections in their countries. In any case, the poverty of ideas in terms of what is to be done suggests that increasing the transnational cooperation among them is not a priority for these parties.

Various reasons for that have been identified and discussed in Chapter 5 and reiterated in this conclusion. However, the factor that underlies both the lows and highs of these parties' cooperation and which has surfaced systematically throughout this thesis is the primacy of national politics – a structural obstacle to transnational cooperation that, the Europeanisation of politics notwithstanding, all party families are confronted with. Another obstacle, more specific to the left, that has also figured prominently throughout the discussion, lies with the increasing divisions over the question of the EU, not only among the three LPs studied here, but on the European left as a whole, which could see in the near future some LPs transitioning from cooperation with each other to competition.

Some of the limits of this research have already been acknowledged, such as the scarce findings on the most informal aspects of networking and cooperation – for example, the social events that take place on the periphery of more official forms of interaction. Indeed, it would be interesting to further explore the relation between formality and informality in the transnational cooperation of these parties: where does one start and where does the other begin, and what are the dynamics between the two? Research along those lines has been done already in relation to some of the main party families, such as Christian democracy (see Kaiser, 2013) and social democracy (see Salm, 2016), although more so in the field of history than political science.

More generally, while the findings of this research contribute by themselves to the study of EU politics, they would do so even more if better embedded in the broader context of transnational party cooperation in the EU today. While some parallels to the case of social democracy have been drawn throughout the thesis (e.g. the much higher convergence between the EP political group and Euro-party of this political family), more comparative research in this direction would be worth pursuing. Suffice to say for now that, at least when compared with the three main political families, the left is significantly less cohesive transnationally, as illustrated by the limited convergence between GUE/NGL and the PEL. The reasons for this might have to do with the obstacles identified in the cooperation among SYRIZA, Bloco and Podemos, such as the limited influence over EU politics and the lack of material resources, but also with the sheer greater longevity of the transnational structures of the main political families (see Kaiser, 2007, for the case of Christian democracy).

However, while in the short-to-medium term the left can only do so much to address some of these obstacles, it could certainly do more about at least two of its key shortcomings. Firstly, the left should address the top-down character of its transnational cooperation and strive more to build transnational mobilisation in support of its policies, including coordinating more with trade unions, social movements and other grassroots groups. That would not have to entail an abandonment of the work through institutions such as the EP, which currently monopolises the LPs' transnational activity, but reaching a balance where the two fields of work would feed upon each other.

Secondly, the left needs to address its lack of a coherent and inspiring vision of Europe, capable of galvanising that kind of transnational mobilisation. For, while the views over the question of the EU diverge within most political families (see Bomberg, 2005, for the case of the Greens), they seem to be more significant and damaging in the case of the left, which is increasingly divided between defending the EU in the name of internationalism and calling for a return to national sovereignty in the name of anti-neoliberalism. Perhaps the way forward for the left is to overcome this false dichotomy and put forward an alternative vision of democratic and bottom-up European (and global) cooperation. Such a vision would arguably require these parties to also go beyond the confines of their neo-reformist outlook and propose systemic alternatives to the current framework of capitalism, which is perhaps inherently unable to deliver a truly united Europe.

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Annex 1 – List of interviewees

SYRIZA

Angelina Giannopoulou – Researcher at SYRIZA’s Nicos Poulantzas Institute and facilitator of the “European Integration and the strategic perspectives of the radical Left” project of Transform.

Christos Kanellopoulos – Member on SYRIZA’s Secretariat of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy.

Giorgos Karatsioubanis – Former member of the Central Committee of SYN and, since 2015, of SYRIZA; also a member of the party’s departments for international and European affairs.

Vasileios Katsardis – Former member of SYN Youth and current press officer for SYRIZA MEPs.

Dimitris Rapidis – Member of the party’s Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, working for the SYRIZA delegation to the EP.

Bloco

Luís Fazenda – Founding member and former parliamentary leader of Bloco, long-standing member of its Political Committee and currently the head of the party’s department of international affairs.

José Gusmão – Former MP between (2009-2011), current assistant of Bloco’s MEP Marisa Matias, member of the Political Bureau, and second on the list for the up-coming European elections.

Tatiana Moutinho – President of CUL:TRA and facilitator of the “Strategies for the European South” project of Transform.

Nuno Pedrosa – Assistant of Bloco’s MEP Marisa Matias.

José Manuel Pureza – Current MP, member of the party’s National Board and academic.

Podemos

Daniel Albarracín – Leading member of Anticapitalistas, political advisor for GUE/NGL and in the EP for the Committee on Budget and the Committee on Panama Papers, economist.

Jorge Conesa de Lara – Assistant to Podemos MEP Lola Sánchez Caldentey.

Enrique Maestu – Assistant to Podemos MEP Tania González Peñas and one of the party's initial members.

Amelia Martínez Lobo – Assistant to Podemos MEP Lola Sánchez Caldentey and member of Anticapitalistas.

Alejandro Merlo – Member of the International Secretariat of Anticapitalistas and current assistant to Podemos MEP Miguel Urbán.

Lilith Verstryngge – Assistant to Podemos MEP Estefanía Torres Martínez.

Others

Hibai Arbide Aza – Spanish journalist with left-wing leanings, close to people in Podemos, and currently working in Athens for the television network *teleSUR*.

Walter Baier – Former National Chairman of the Communist Party of Austria (1994-2006) and Coordinator of Transform ever since the establishment of the network.

Yiannis Balabanidis – Greek political scientist with left-wing leanings, who also works at the Minister of Economy.

Pablo Garcia – Spanish journalist with left-wing leanings, who covers EU affairs in Brussels for *El Diario*.

Jim O'Donnell – Irish left-wing activist and long-standing staff member of GUE/NGL.

Nikos Sverkos – Greek journalist with left-wing leanings who has been covering SYRIZA since 2006.

Hilary Wainwright – Left-wing academic and activist from the UK, research fellow of the Transnational Institute and contributor to Transform's website and yearbook.

Annex 2 – Questionnaire

Section 1: Transnational networking and cooperation before 2009⁸

- Can you please tell me what is your role in your party and in the transnational networking and cooperation among your party and the other two parties or in the wider left-wing transnational networking and cooperation?
- Where do you locate the origins of the transnational networking and cooperation among the new left parties in Southern Europe – Bloco, Syriza and Podemos?
- In your opinion, *before 2009*, how significant for transnational cooperation between SYRIZA and Bloco were the following structures and organisations (on a scale from 1 to 4*)?

	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Bilateral communication structures/channels between parties (please mention)					
Individual connections (please mention)					
European Anti-Capitalist Left					
European Left Party					
European United Left/Nordic Green Left					
Academic institutions and networks (please mention)					
ATTAC					
European Social Forum					
Political foundations and think tanks (please mention)					

⁸ Given that Podemos was established only in 2014, Section 1 of the questionnaire was not applied to the interviewees from this party.

Transform Europe Network					
World Social Forum					
Other (please mention)					

* 1 = insignificant; 2 = somewhat significant; 3 = quite significant; 4 = very significant

- Can you please expand on the role played by the organisations you consider to have been *very significant* for the transnational cooperation among Bloco and Syriza prior to 2009?
- How prevalent would you say *informal* transnational networking and cooperation was compared to *formal* institutionalized cooperation before 2009, and why?
 - much more prevalent
 - somewhat more prevalent
 - equally prevalent
 - somewhat less prevalent
 - much less prevalent

Section 2: Transnational networking and cooperation since 2009

- Do you think the transnational networking and cooperation among Bloco, Syriza and Podemos *since* 2009/2014 has:
 - intensified very much
 - intensified somewhat
 - remained the same
 - decreased somewhat
 - decreased sharply
- If you believe that cooperation among the three parties has intensified since 2009, in your opinion, how significant were (on a scale from 1 to 4*) the following factors?

	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Europeanisation of politics					
Isolation in national politics					

and the need for ‘allies’					
Reaction of the EU to the crisis					
Similar economic contexts					
Similar political contexts					
Transnational cooperation of social movements					
Transnational cooperation of trade unions					
Transnationalisation of capitalism					
Ideology					
Opposition to ‘neoliberalism’					
Similar views on the EU and the crisis					
Diffusion of ideas, policies, and practice					
Need for publicity and legitimacy					
Strategic coordination					
Other (please mention)					

* 1 = insignificant; 2 = somewhat significant; 3 = quite significant; 4 = very significant

- With which of the other two left parties did your party have a stronger transnational cooperation since 2009 and why?
- In your opinion, since 2009/2014, how significant for the transnational cooperation among Bloco, Syriza and Podemos have been (on a scale from 1 to 4*), the following structures and organisations?

	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Bilateral communication structures/channels between					

parties (please mention)					
Individual connections (please mention)					
European Anti-Capitalist Left					
European Left Party					
European United Left/Nordic Green Left					
Academic institutions and networks (please mention)					
AlterSummit					
ATTAC					
DiEM25					
Plan B for Europe					
Political foundations and think tanks (please mention)					
Transform Europe Network					
World Social Forum					
Other (please mention)					

* 1 = insignificant; 2 = somewhat significant; 3 = quite significant; 4 = very significant

- Focusing now on *informal* networking and cooperation, how prevalent would you say this has become in relation to formal institutionalized cooperation since 2009, and why?
 - much more prevalent;
 - somewhat more prevalent;
 - equally prevalent;
 - somewhat less prevalent;
 - much less prevalent.
- In your opinion, how significant for the *informal* networking and cooperation among Bloco, Syriza and Podemos have been (on a scale from 1 to 4*) the following?

	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Academic institutions and networks (please mention)					
Conferences/summits (please mention)					
Individual connections (please mention)					
Think tanks & foundations (please mention)					
Magazines (please mention)					
Social media (please mention)					
Websites (please mention)					
Mailing list					
Other (please mention)					

* 1 = insignificant; 2 = somewhat significant; 3 = quite significant; 4 = very significant

- In your opinion, how significant are (on a scale from 1 to 4*) the following factors in hindering the transnational cooperation among Bloco, Podemos and Syriza?

	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Differences in national contexts					
Inadequate transnational cooperation between trade unions					
Lack of a transnational social basis					
Limited influence over EU policy					

Popular disillusionment with the left / possibility of change					
Primacy of national politics					
Different views on the EU					
Different views on transnational cooperation					
Different strategies to oppose austerity					
Wider ideological differences					
Lack of leadership					
Lack of resources					
Personal rivalries (please mention)					
Other (please mention)					

* 1 = insignificant; 2 = somewhat significant; 3 = quite significant; 4 = very significant

- Do you think that the current level of transnational cooperation among Bloco, Syriza and Podemos is adequate?
- If you think that the transnational cooperation should be intensified, how should this be done in your view?

03 May 2016

Dear Vladimir Bortun

Study Title:	<i>Transnational networking and cooperation of new left parties in Southern Europe since 2009: Syriza, Bloco and Podemos</i>
Ethics Committee reference:	15/16:28

Thank you for submitting your documents for ethical review. The Ethics Committee was content to grant a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, revised in the light of any conditions set, subject to the general conditions set out in the attached document.

The Ethics committee provide a favourable ethical opinion with following requirements. These requirements are:

1. The professional capacity of the participant should be explicitly acknowledged
2. An additional statement should be added to the consent form to the effect that "I do not require agreement from my employer or any organisation to which I have an affiliation to participate in this research"
3. Given that these may be status individuals the researcher ensures that issues around anonymity and confidentiality are clarified
4. The phrase " additional consent of participants will be sought for projects with significantly different research aims and objectives from the original research" be removed. The phrase should be replace with "may be used for other REC reviewed research." This is sufficiently broad and is a phrasing of consent that the Faculty Ethics Committee agree to being used.
5. Participants should be clearly warned, verbally and in the letter of information, that sensitive information should not be disclosed to the researcher.

There is no need to submit any further evidence to the Ethics Committee; the favourable opinion has been granted with the assumption of compliance

The favourable opinion of the EC does not grant permission or approval to undertake the research. Management permission or approval must be obtained from any host organisation, including University of Portsmouth, prior to the start of the study.

Documents reviewed

The documents reviewed by The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
Application Form	1	18/04/2016
Participant Information Sheet(s)	1	18/04/2016
Consent Form(s)	1	18/04/2016
Invitation Letter	1	18/04/2016
Interview Questions / Topic List	1	18/04/2016
Other – please describe: Letter/email to data custodian of Archives	1	18/04/2016

Statement of compliance

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements set out by the University of Portsmouth

After ethical review

Reporting and other requirements

The enclosed document acts as a reminder that research should be conducted with integrity and gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments

- Notification of serious breaches of the protocol
- Progress reports
- Notifying the end of the study

Feedback

You are invited to give your view of the service that you have received from the Faculty Ethics Committee. If you wish to make your views known please contact the administrator ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

Please quote this number on all correspondence – 15/16:28
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Yours sincerely and wishing you every success in your research

Chair

Dr Jane Winstone

Email: ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk