

Opposing Neo-liberal Europe? The Left TNPs and their Groups in the European Parliament¹

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Why has the left failed to benefit from the post-2008 economic crisis? This has been a common refrain in recent years, but is perhaps an unfair question. It is difficult to see *any* one political family as a unique beneficiary, and indeed the right's apparent earlier ideological hegemony has become increasingly unstuck with the 'austerity medicine' having consistently failed to revive the European patient in the manner and time-scale promised. Nevertheless, the victory of the radical left Syriza party in the February 2015 elections remains very much exceptional, and in the short term is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere in Europe (except perhaps Spain). So, it is still remarkable that socio-economic conditions providing a 'perfect storm' for left-wing politics have regularly failed to produce anything like a clear boon for the left.

This paper aims to contribute to answering this overarching question by comparing the policy and ideological response to the crisis undertaken by the three 'left' transnational party federations (TNPs) at European level, the Party of European Socialists (PES), European Green Party (EGP) and European Left Party (EL).² Comparing the three TNPs is an apposite approach. Although TNPs are 'timidly rising actors', relatively weak formations that fall far short of being fully integrated parties, they at the very least aspire to a minimal level of ideological and policy co-ordination (Bardi 2004; cf. Hanley 2008). In short, if there is any EU-wide consensus over the crisis and how to respond to it within a party family, the TNP level is where we might expect to see it reflected most clearly.

Nevertheless, although the crisis has international and European, as well as purely national roots, *no* TNP (including the traditionally most federalist European People's Party – EPP) has traditionally consistently emphasised supranational, rather than simply intergovernmental policy solutions. So expecting a consistent policy response from any party to the international crisis may be premature. In addition, the simple fact that there are three separate 'left' European TNPs itself provides a partial answer to the original question. This division shows in organisational form the disaggregation of the left since its pre-1970s heyday. We might reasonably expect that these three organisations are more likely to be competitive than collusive and thereby further the dilution and diminution of left strength at European level rather than to offer more than the sum of their parts.

Be that as it may, we might usefully use the TNPs to identify some of the main strengths and weaknesses of the left policy response and ask whether/how the crisis has changed these main features? Is there any renewed convergence between the TNPs either in policy or ideology? To what degree is there any coherent response to the crisis emerging? To what degree do the 'Euro-sceptic' positions traditionally associated with the radical left find any resonance among other left-wing TNPs?

The following analysis starts with an overview of the institutional and ideological development of these parties as TNPs: the main similarities/differences in their structure and performance, relationship to and influence within European institutions. In the second half of the paper it discusses the question of the emergence of coherent TNP programmatic positions. While space precludes detailed discussion of TNP stances, emphasis will be put on the degree to which they share ideological and policy proclivities and the prospects (if any) for policy co-operation and convergence post-crisis.

Comparison will highlight many similarities between these TNPs: for instance, they struggle with similar conflicts between intergovernmentalism and federalism, similar hesitations over the development of true transnational parties, and similar constraints over their ability to develop genuinely 'European' policies and to influence European politics effectively. The Greens and EL in particular have many similarities in terms of having expressed aspirations to defend their radical, outsider credentials, and not to be absorbed within the EU mainstream. However, each TNP has resolved these tensions in different ways. The chief difference between the PES, EGP and EL is that in the former two (especially the EGP), these conflicts have gradually diminished and a broad consensus over party goals has been reached, allowing a consolidation of the TNP. This cannot yet be said of the EL, which remains more internally divided and inchoate.

Nevertheless, despite their very different organisational pedigrees, a policy consensus has indeed emerged. All of the three TNPs now claim to oppose neo-liberalism, aspire to a more socially just and ecological alternative and share a number of similar proposals. Be that as it may, this apparent uniformity in general aspirations has so far provided few concrete results and goes little beyond a lowest-common-denominator anti-neo-liberalism that does not necessarily imply a detailed symphony of legislative positions, still less a coherent ‘Euro-sceptic’ position, even among the radical left. Indeed, anti-neo-liberalism is prone to a range of interpretations and policy prescriptions among and between the left-wing TNPs. Deeply held ideological and organisational cleavages among the left have been elided but are far from eroded, not least because of continuing disagreements within the party families themselves. Accordingly, this analysis places in stark relief one of the key weaknesses of the left response to crisis – the failure to set out a coherent vision universally shared among its adherents.

The PES – pragmatic intergovernmentalism

The PES has its origins in the Liaison Bureau of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (established in 1957 to co-ordinate Socialist International member parties operating within the EC member states), and later the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the EC (CSPEC), formed in 1974 to foster greater co-operation in advance of the first direct EP elections in 1979. Both of these organisations had cadre-like tendencies: they were able to promote relatively high programmatic unity amongst the half-dozen core member parties, but had little ability to influence the broader programmes of non-aligned parties, including the British Labour Party, which initially did not join the CSPEC as a full member (Hanley 2008, 66; Hix and Lesse 2002). Indeed, despite a very general manifesto being produced for the 1979 elections, the CSPEC had a largely ephemeral existence: the great ideological variance of European social democratic parties prevented aspirations towards a common European project in the 1980s, and many parties opted out or simply ignored its activity (Ladrech 2000, 93).

Europe was one of the key divisions among social democratic parties to be sure, but, unlike the radical left, it cannot be said that the social democrats put forward consistent ideological critiques of the then-EEC. For one thing, despite occasional criticism of neo-liberalism, since the 1950s no social democratic party can be regarded as substantively anti-capitalist (Sassoon 2010, 243). Moreover, the ideological logic of post-war democratic socialism argued for a progressive internationalism that was at least implicitly compatible with greater European transnational co-operation (Featherstone 1988, 1). No, most social democrats’ ambivalence about Europe stemmed from their traditional national focus – an emphasis on Keynesian economic *dirigisme* via the institutions of the national state. Ignazio Silone argued that ‘there is nothing the Socialists nationalize as quickly as socialism’ (quoted in Ladrech 2003, 114). This may be an exaggeration; but from 1914 until the present, social democrats have often prioritised the national to the international, and this ethos has deeply imbued the conduct of the PES. Still, approaches to Europe varied widely, with British Labour, the Danish Social Democrats and Greek PASOK being the most sceptical (Labour’s notorious 1983 manifesto even advocated withdrawal from the EEC), and the Dutch, Belgian, French and German parties being most favourable towards common policies. Moreover, there has consistently tended to be a north-south pro-/anti-EU cleavage, with the northern social democrats (especially the Nordic countries) markedly less keen (Almeida 2012, 58).

The PES’ formation in 1992 was, typically, less a product of a proactive embrace of transnationalism than a pragmatic response to incentives – a case of the EU’s ‘top-down institutionalisation’ and political spillover (Lightfoot 2005, 35). The social democrats perceived that co-ordination via the EPP allowed Christian democrats far greater policy effectiveness, not least through their party leaders’ summits in advance of European Council meetings. This was a policy effectiveness they wished to emulate (Ladrech 2000, 95; Ladrech 2003).

At the same time, policy differences over Europe had narrowed significantly and a consensus over integration emerged. The failure of the socialist/communist Mitterrand-Mauroy government in France in 1981-4 and the ideological onslaught of Thatcherite neo-liberalism fundamentally dented social democrats' confidence that Keynesian policies at national level were compatible with a globalised economy. On one hand, this coalescence of views was accelerated by the social democrats' inability to articulate any coherent alternative to the really existing EU – somewhat unhappily and grudgingly they began to accept the European Community as a fact (e.g. Hanley 2008, 70). On the other hand, many parties began to hope that economic *dirigisme* at a European level could compensate for the lacunae in their vision. Therefore, many social democrats began to embrace a 'Eurokeynesianism', which would 'temper free market policies *ex ante* via regulation rather than *ex post* via [national-level] regulation' (Almeida 2012, 54; Aust 2004). Such EU-level interventionist socioeconomic policies would nevertheless emphatically *not* be accompanied by political federalism (Ladrech 2000, 145). Overall, it proved relatively easy to 'transfer the notion of an interventionist state from the national to the supranational level' (Ladrech 2003, 125).

This core consensus allowed the rapid consolidation of the PES as a far more relevant actor than the CSPEC. Although there were (and still are) still significant differences over the scope of this European 'party', there was agreement that, at a minimum, it would help policy formulation and reduce transaction costs in order to foster more effective and cohesive policy interventions at EU-level. Moreover, reflecting the social democrats' state-centrism, there was agreement that the primary purpose of the PES was to translate and aggregate national party priorities, but in no way to limit national party prerogatives. Overall, this was a 'party of parties' with weak integrative structures rather than an integrated, transnational 'Europarty' (Moschonas 2004, 130).

Likewise, Hanley notes that all TNPs are functionally intergovernmentalist organisations, since they remain the agents of national principals (Hanley 2008, 66). However, the PES arguably takes this intergovernmentalism the furthest. First, it is led by no fewer than three intergovernmental organisations: the Council, Presidency, and the Leaders' Conference; moreover, its Statutes explicitly restrict the competences of the TNP; they do not conceive of the PES separate from its member parties, but reinforce that its main role is 'engag [ing] member parties', 'developing close working relations' and 'ensuring close collaboration' between the PES, its affiliates and sympathising groups (PES 2009a article 3).

Accordingly, as the PES has institutionalised, it has developed a limited but fairly effective 'think-tank' function, allowed freedom in policy development and a limited amount of ideological co-ordination, so long as it does not infringe the prerogatives of national parties (Hanley 2008, 70). This policy-making function is one that constituent parties consider extremely useful. Moreover, the PES can be regarded as 'Europeanising' the social democrats, by helping co-ordinate their activity at European level and by mellowing their opposition towards Europe (Ladrech 2000). However, although the PES has facilitated policy convergence and effectiveness to a far greater degree than the CSPEC, there are still significant differences of view among member parties over its role. Parties like the British Labour Party invest little in the PES and see it mainly as a 'networking arrangement' (Hanley 2008, 74). At the other end of the spectrum, the Belgian and Dutch socialists support a more federal structure, while the French PS and German SPD wish to consolidate and develop the organisation, without it becoming a super-party.

As befits its size, the PES has traditionally been seen as one of the more policy effective TNPs. It played a critical role in getting the Employment Chapter inserted into the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty and developing the 1999 European Employment Pact, although partly because of declining support for social democratic parties, it has had less visible influence since, particularly over the Treaty of Nice (2001) and Convention for the Future of Europe (2001-2003), which drew up the first EU draft Constitution (Johansson 1999; Ladrech 2000; Lightfoot 2005). Nevertheless, its EP parliamentary group has become both stable and cohesive, with a vote

cohesion of 91.54% in the 2009-2014 parliament, the third most disciplined group (VoteWatch.eu 2015a).

That said, a more distinct and direct policy impact is difficult to demonstrate. The first EP manifesto to which all PES members signed up was achieved only as late as 1999, although far from all parties actually used it in their campaigns (Almeida 2012, 49). However, even in the 2009 EP elections, while parties such as the French PS adopted the PES manifesto in its entirety, others like the German SPD barely referenced it and British Labour ignored it altogether (Hertner 2011). Even at the zenith of recent social democratic influence over Europe in 1997-2002, when they held office in thirteen of the then-fifteen EU member states, a unity of purpose was conspicuous by its absence. Social democrats were split between traditional Eurokeynesianism (as espoused by the French PS) and the new 'third way' politics that was much more supportive of neo-liberalism, globalisation and EU integration (Therborn 2000). No unified social democratic response was noted over key events like the Iraq War: parties such as the PS and SPD were in the anti-camp, whereas British Labour was joined by some East-Central European parties like the Polish Democratic Left Alliance in uncritical support for the conflict.

After 2008, particularly after heavy defeats for British Labour and the SPD, the economic crisis environment is regarded as definitively ending the 'third way' period in social democracy, and the PES has moved back towards a markedly far stronger critique of neo-liberalism in an attempt to re-engage with its traditional electorate and values. In the 2009 EP election campaign, the PES promoted a manifesto that was more politicised than hitherto and which strongly criticised the 'conservative' EPP for its inability to address the economic crisis (Gagatek 2009, 49–50). Nevertheless, this polarising approach was completely vitiated by the PES' inability to agree on an alternative candidate to the EPP's Jose Manuel Barroso as Commission President (Gagatek 2009, 73–74). Moreover, the longer-term social democratic response to the crisis is still incoherent. For instance, the Portuguese Socialists and Greek PASOK have participated in governments implementing some of the most stringent austerity programmes of all, whereas parties such as the BLP and François Hollande's Socialist Party have latterly campaigned on an implicitly anti-austerity 'pro-growth' agenda, although radical changes to economic policy have been conspicuous by their absence in the conduct of the Hollande government. Given the woeful record of austerity measures in promoting post-crisis economic recovery, the consensus around a 'pro-growth' agenda (whatever this means in practice) is likely to increase. However, past behaviour certainly indicates that any increasing consensus at PES level will co-exist with significantly anomalous policies promoted by PES member parties at national level. Only in the unlikely event that member parties wish to institutionalise the PES as a more genuine 'Europarty' rather than as a limited 'party-network' can this dichotomy between rhetoric and practice be overcome.

The European Greens – incremental transnationalism?

The European Green Party (also known simply as the 'European Greens') was founded only in 2004. However, it was the first TNP registered under the 2004/2003 EU regulation that laid the legal and financial groundwork for European TNPs, and now sees itself as a frontrunner in the development of European political parties (Emmott 2012). In 2004, the EGP claimed to be running the first European election campaign that featured common motifs and slogans in all EU countries (EGP 2008). Since then, the EGP has rapidly moved towards increasing institutionalisation and integration, and far more than the PES and EL (although still with qualifications) it can be said to aspire towards genuine transnationalism. For instance, Green parties accept far greater intervention of the TNP in their policymaking. This includes national party manifestos that explicitly mention the EGP and have common policies (for example, the 'Green New Deal' in 2009). Unlike the PES and EL, the Greens describe the role of the TNP in explicitly transnational terms: the EGP aims to 'accomplish a common green political agenda ...

to ensure close and permanent co-operation among all its Members [to] contribute... to forming European awareness and [to] seek to express the political will of the citizens of the European Union' (EGP 2011a Article 3.4).

This self-proclaimed frontrunner status is difficult to square with the Greens' early origins. When they first emerged on the European stage, they were a small and disorganised force, unable to form a common manifesto or even gain seats in the 1979 EP elections. The Green Radical and European Link (GRAEL) group formed in the European parliament in 1984 contained a number of Green and independent radical parties. It had an often tense relationship with the European Green Coordination (EGC), set up the previous year to help strengthen the visibility of the Greens internationally (Dietz 2002). Yet, like Green national parties at the time, GRAEL was fundamentally split between *Realos* (pragmatic cadres who saw compromise within political institutions as necessary for policy effectiveness) and *Fundis* (who wanted to stay true to their movement origins, sought policy purity and distrusted political institutions). This 'strategic dilemma' between purity and participation led to significant intra-party and intra-group conflict (Bomberg 1998; Hines 2003). By 1989, GRAEL had no 'agreed collective goals to be pursued in Europe' and 'had made no firm decision for or against parliamentarisation' (Bomberg 1998, 109).

However, by the late 1990s, the Greens were becoming an increasingly effective and integrated force. In 1993 the EGC became the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP) and its links with the European parliamentary Greens were increased. The Greens mustered sufficient MEPs to form their own group in 1989. In 1999 their group merged with a number of left-leaning regionalist parties to form the Greens/EFA group without any loss of cohesion (perhaps unsurprising given their shared distrust of the nation-state). By the 2000s the Greens had become among the most disciplined of the EP groups. For example, in the 2009-2014 parliament, the Greens/EFA cohesion rate was 94.68 percent (first place) (VoteWatch.eu 2015a).

Such a dramatic turnaround in views towards Europe contrasts with the steady trajectory of the PES and the very slow integration of the radical left, and demands explanation. After all, the radical left has itself also historically suffered from a 'strategic dilemma' between policy purism and pragmatism, both vis-à-vis Europe and the capitalist system more generally (e.g. March 2011). But one factor in the Greens' greater adaptability towards the EU is ideology. For one thing, from the outset the Greens were almost universally in favour of transnationalism in parallel to developing national policies – after all, contemporary environmental challenges do not respect state borders (Hanley 2008, 171). The Greens express this as 'thinking globally and acting locally' (EGP 2011a, 8). This certainly contrasts with the 'socialism in one country' still espoused by the some contemporary communist parties such as the Greek KKE and Portuguese PCP, which sees the nation state as the building block of true internationalism (Dunphy 2004). Second, the 1980s Greens, while fundamentally divided on their attitudes to the 'really-existing' EU among federalists, confederalists and those favouring withdrawal, failed to develop a consistent ideological opposition to integration. This is because they shared a general consensus that state sovereignty needed to be transferred from the nation-state both to regional and European levels in order to solve environmental problems – even if they disagreed on whether this 'European level' was best addressed via the EU institutions or others (such as the Council of Europe) (Dietz 2002, 133). Yet for most parties, the EU had relatively low salience, indeed, until the early 1990s their concept of a 'Europe of the Regions' remained ill-developed and many parties focussed on local campaigns, effectively ignoring the EU as an issue (Bomberg 1998, 70). Accordingly, Europe has not become politicised as an identity marker among the Greens to the degree it has within the radical left.

A third factor was domestic incentives – national divisions between *Realos* and *Fundis* resulted in divided parties that performed poorly at the end of the 1980s. But by the early 1990s, the *Realos* had won the internal conflicts in many parties and increasingly orientated their parties towards policy pragmatism, involving more hierarchical and 'professional' party organisations (Burchell 2001). Domestic incentives were buttressed by the incentives of the EU itself. Hines

notes how the EU's rules of procedure forced the Greens to learn the skills of consensus and compromise, which helped strengthen the hand of the Realos within the party organisations (Hines 2003). Combined with a wish not to repeat the GRAEL group's negative experience, and a sustained increase in numbers during the 1990s, this enhanced the Greens' wish to strengthen their organisational structures and decision-making in order to be more visible internationally (Hanley 2008, 169). In 1999 the Greens produced their first EP manifesto. In sum, relative to the radical left, the Greens were newer parties more susceptible to the institutional incentives of the EP, with less ideological animus towards European integration and with less hesitancy about transnationalism, all of which pushed them towards a more rapid adaptation towards the incentives provided by European integration. According to Bomberg, by the 2000s the Greens in Europe had become thoroughly Europeanised – their structures were more professionalised and their radical policies (including their attitudes to Europe) had 'mellowed' and moderated significantly (Bomberg 2002).

Nevertheless, according to some commentators, the Greens have found it 'no easier' than any other parties to implement 'real transnational action' (Hanley 2008, 171). Certainly, despite the mellowing of their ideological radicalism, there are still considerable ideological differences between parties. As with other party families, there are significant divergences over views of the EU and the related question of how much primacy to award the TNP. The English/Welsh and Swedish Greens are more Eurosceptic and EU-critical, whereas the German Greens are noticeably more Europeanist and federalist. Generally, Hanley argues that the largest (and not coincidentally, more established) parties tend to be more in favour of the TNP than the smaller ones (which are more dependent on their links with social movements) (Hanley 2008, 172–175). There have been the usual tensions over how much integration to promote and how much emphasis to put on organisation via the EU institutions versus how much to work through extra-parliamentary groups such as the European Social Forum. Moreover, there has been a constant cleavage between the 'red-green' or 'rainbow-green' parties (such as the German Greens and Green Party of England and Wales), who emphasise social questions, egalitarianism and are more critical of neo-liberalism and the 'green-greens' (such as the French and Irish Greens), who tend to be less socially-orientated (Bomberg 1998, 24). Finally, the accession of East-Central European Green parties (such as those in the Czech Republic or Estonia) has complicated matters, bringing in parties who are both more in favour of the TNP as a source of experience and logistical help, and which tend to be more neo-liberal in orientation (similar developments have happened with the expansion of the PES to the East).

That said, overall, the Greens since 2004 seem to have developed a relatively impressive level of policy consensus. Moreover, there appears to be a genuine agreement that the TNP is a useful instrument as a service provider, force multiplier and networking organisation whose effectiveness needs to be developed (Emmott 2012). Given the Greens' generally weak numerical strength, they can be regarded as punching above their weight in this regard.

In addition, the Greens appear to have maximised their influence on the EU policy agenda. In this, they have been helped by an increasingly united green movement able to exert extra-parliamentary pressure, and the genuine salience of environmental issues among European public opinion, which has given them greater leverage than their meagre numbers might imply. For example, their pressure during debates over the Maastricht Treaty is seen as instrumental in the formation of the EU's advisory Committee of the Regions (Hines 2003). Moreover, they have had success in promoting the idea of a Green Europe, managing to channel public pressure into an arguably more radical EU environmental agenda than would otherwise have been possible, all of which has 'enabled them to place certain issues on the European agenda and given them a limited ability to change the trajectory of integration' (Hines 2003, 322). Nevertheless, like the EL, because they have few representatives in EU governments, they have had similarly weak representation in the EU institutions (no commissioners, scant few members of the Council), leading them not to adopt the EPP and PES practice of co-ordinating their policy intentions

before EU Council summits. Moreover, also like the EL, EU enlargement has brought little direct benefit to the EP group, with very weak representation in the new member states (in 2009 the Greens/EFA's ECE representation was one MEP each from Latvia and Estonia; in 2014, they had one MEP from each of Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia). Nevertheless, unlike the radical left until its stellar result in 2014, the Greens have generally managed a stable EP group representation. In 2009 the Greens/EFA group reached a high point of 55 seats (7.5 per cent of the total), a result arguably helped by innovative policies such as the 'Green New Deal' and a reinforced emphasis on social issues in the wake of the 2008 crisis. In 2014 this fell back marginally to 50 seats (6.7 per cent), in part because of Green participation in pro-austerity governments (Brustier et al., 2014).

The EL – wider but not deeper

Like the EGP, the EL was created only in 2004 in response to the 2004/2003 EU party regulation. Unlike the Greens, although this new political party has brought radical left party co-operation at EU level to a historical high, this has hardly been a 'great leap forward' into a new level of transnationalism. Indeed, the EL has demonstrable weaknesses that mean it is still less than the sum of its parts.

The most obvious weaknesses are that, whereas the other two TNPs analysed here now possess a modest consensus over their EU-level policy, the EL remains partially paralysed by long-standing ideological disagreements over the very nature of the EU. Although comparative literature tends to regard the radical left as simply 'Eurosceptic', this is a dramatic oversimplification concealing a range of policy positions. For much of the last several decades, a dichotomy has emerged between 'sovereignists' (including the Portuguese and Greek Communist Parties – PCP and KKE) hostile towards all things supranational and supporting their countries' withdrawal from the EU and the 'Europeanists' (now represented by the Greek Syriza and German Left Party), viewing Euro-rejectionism as regressive protectionism (Dunphy 2004). When we add in the legacy of Soviet-era imposed 'internationalism', it is understandable why this supposedly most internationalist of party families has been remarkably divided at European level, and has long eschewed the creation of pan-European transnational links (Chountis 2010). Indeed, until 1989, when it split, the Communists and Allies Group in the EP was so starkly divided between sovereignists and Europeanists that it never formulated Group policy positions, still less a common EP election manifesto.

This profound ideological-strategic split continued unabated into the 1990s. By 1995, the radical left parties in the European parliament gradually coalesced into the current EP group, with the deliberately complex title of Confederation of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). Nevertheless, neither the GUE/NGL, nor the New European Left Forum (NELF) (launched in 1991 to gather radical left parties twice-yearly to discuss common concerns) made any attempt to form a new TNP, or even a common European strategy – indeed, both stressed their loose, consensual and networking nature and deliberately eschewed anything reminiscent of Comintern-era internationalism (Scholz 2010).

The formation of the EL in 2004 did amount to an attempt to overcome this schismatic past. Europeanist parties increasingly deemed the existing radical left forums inadequate and saw supranationalism (with coordinated policy-making and shared strategic thinking) necessary to combat dominant neo-liberal globalisation and US hegemony (For more on the origins of EL see Dunphy and March [2013]). Nevertheless, it was clear from its foundation that the EL prioritised widening over deepening with the aim of inclusivity to heal historical divisions. It defined itself as a 'flexible, decentralised association of independent and sovereign European left-wing parties and political organisations which works together on the basis of consensus' (EL 2010a). More explicitly than any other TNP, the EL committed itself to being an inclusive bottom-up 'network party' with a number of working groups intending to 'open politics to citizens', specialising in

areas such as trade unions, gender ('EL-Fem') and LBGT issues. Similarly, whereas most TNPs have a clear hierarchy of membership based on countries' relationship to the EU (e.g. full members, associates and observers), the EL (like the Greens) has no explicit membership criteria besides accepting its statutes: full members may be parties in core EU states (German Left), as well as those without immediate membership prospects (the Moldovan PCRM).

From the outset, the EL contained conflicting impulses towards transnationalism and intergovernmentalism. Its internal structure was strongly intergovernmental at founding (Hanley 2008). It has remained so. For instance, EL structures involve no substantial pooling of party sovereignty: whereas all other TNPs (including now the Greens, who originally operated by equality of membership rights and consensus principles) use QMV to some degree in Congresses and leadership bodies, the EL operates according to strict party equality: each member party absolutely irrespective of size has two (gender-balanced) representatives in the Executive Board, and sends seven delegates to the Congress. The EL sees this commitment to intergovernmentalism as essential in underscoring its decentralised, anti-Stalinist self-image. Yet a large proportion of its members are groupuscular micro-parties with little national relevance in their constituent countries, such as the Romanian Socialist Alliance Party (PAS) and Czech Party of Democratic Socialism. That such micro-parties have equal status to larger parties like the Left Party or PCRM in EL bodies is potentially problematic in terms of policy effectiveness, risking slowing down policy-making processes and strategic convergence to the pace of the slowest and/or smallest members.

On the other hand, aspirations to greater transnationalism (and the problems therein) are most evident in the EL's commitment to individual membership -- individuals across Europe can join directly without belonging to any national political party. The EL was long the only TNP to allow individual membership to activists *outside* member parties (although ALDE now allows 'associate membership' for individuals and the Greens have 'supporters') -- these members can form friendship circles which may be admitted to EL with observer status. In practice, individual membership has been controversial: supporters of developing it, such as the Portuguese Left Bloc, see it as one way of developing a new pan-European political consciousness, linking the TNP directly to members who consider themselves Europeans without the mediation of a national party (Hilário 2010). Critics, such as the French PCF, dislike the category for precisely the same reason. Expansion of individual membership rights has been strongly circumscribed by this lack of full support from the EL leadership.

This debate is similar to that within the EGP (Emmott 2012): the Greens have not (so far) decided to institutionalise individual membership as such (since their 'individual supporters network' [<http://isn.europeangreens.eu/>] is still party-based, open only to party members or those admitted as party supporters, not non-party individuals) (EGP 2009b). However, this is a structured network answerable to the EGP council, with a co-ordination team, a regular meeting programme and social media presence, and so appears more effective as a way of pooling grass-roots activists' activity across Europe. Symptomatically, the PES does not have individual members, merely an 'Activists' Network' (<http://www.pes.eu/activist>) that since 2010 can put proposals to the party leadership.

Overall, the EL has consolidated significantly in terms of breadth. By 2013, it encompassed 38 parties and organisations -- 27 as full members and 11 as observers. It has clearly developed a certain momentum and even 'magnetic attraction' as the epicentre of the European radical left, particularly among the small Eastern European parties (Petrenco 2010). Nevertheless, deeper and more effective consolidation in the medium-term is hard to envisage. One of the major weaknesses of the EL is that it still encompasses far from all the important parties in the party family (which cannot be said of the PES or EGP). Several have joined only as observers, such as the Cypriot and Czech Communists (AKEL and KSČM), and several have not joined at all. The reasons for non-participation are varied, but combine ideological and practical objections. Unsurprisingly, the non-joiners include such ardent euro-rejectionists as the Greek

and Portuguese Communist parties, who remain faithful to Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism and ‘national roads to socialism.’ The former in particular has attacked the EL in virulent terms as a ‘puppet of EU imperialism’ whose main aim is allegedly to benefit from EU funding, split European left parties and collaborate with ‘the patently neo-liberal European Union’ (Communist Party of Greece 2004). Other significant non-joiners include the Dutch Socialist Party and most of the Nordic Green Left – parties which remain suspicious of EL for ideological/strategic reasons, being more sovereigntist and negative towards transnational co-operation (Hanley 2008).

An equally critical weakness of the EL as currently constituted is the division between the transnational party and the GUE/NGL EP group. Although in general ‘fear of [TNP] encroachment upon the realm of the national party and the European Parliamentary Groups remains a considerable obstacle to [TNP] development’ (Shaw and Day 2006, 105), in most major TNPs (such as the PES and EGP), the TNP and EP group are now relatively integrated. However, since founding in 2004, EL members have never comprised more than 70% of GUE/NGL MEPs. As of 2014, the total is only 56% (29 of 52). Moreover, the GUE/NGL has included a number of significant parties – principally the Portuguese and Greek communists, Dutch Socialist Party, Swedish Left Party and Irish Sinn Féin – that have not joined EL. In no way, therefore, can the GUE/NGL be regarded as the European Parliamentary group of EL. Although there have been discussions with the EL about forming its own parliamentary sub-group within GUE/NGL (or giving this group a more cohesive name such as the ‘Left Group’), this has been rejected as divisive, leaving the EL to lack *any* visible presence whatsoever within the EP.

This has drastically limited any policy-making influence (weak in any case as the GUE/NGL even at its post-2014 peak only numbers 52 MEPs, has no commissioners and has recently only been represented in the Council via the Cypriot AKEL [2008-13] and Syriza [2015-]). In theory, the EP group could act as the legislative arm of the TNP, co-ordinating national parties in an attempt to implement its manifesto. But with the GUE/NGL group neither committed to the EL manifesto nor the EL members therein wishing to harmonise EL voting positions, the GUE/NGL remains the least cohesive of any EP group bar the radical right, with no demonstrable improvement over time. For example, the group’s Cohesion rate was 79.37 percent in 2009-14 as against 85 percent in 2004-9, indicating a marked *decline* during this period (VoteWatch.eu 2015a; VoteWatch.eu 2009a).

Commenting on this parlous situation in late 2012, the GUE/NGL chair Gabi Zimmer summed up the situation well: ‘a number of parties represented in [the GUE/NGL] hardly show any great wish for an increase in the European cooperation and integration of the left ... Some parties want to view the European Parliament only as a provider of additional resources for their national agendas and political struggles. The heterogeneity of beliefs held by the parties represented in GUE/NGL with regard to the EU and the struggle against the EU crisis are considerable. Behind the different positions and debates there lie deep differences in the assessment of social and political power relations on both the national and the EU level as well as in the conception of ways to transform them’ (Zimmer 2012).

What the EL has certainly achieved is producing a common election manifesto for the first time in the 2009 EP election campaign. Then EL Chair Lothar Bisky regarded this as a ‘minor sensation’ (Bisky 2009). It was certainly a big step in historical perspective (after all, it took 40 years of radical left co-operation in the EP even to get this far). Nevertheless, given the relatively narrow reach and low level of integration that the EL has fostered among the radical left, and the aforementioned lack of policy impact, the manifesto’s impact has undoubtedly been more symbolic than practical. Overall, this means that the party remains less than the sum of its parts – even weaker than the small size of many member parties would indicate – indeed it remains among the weakest of all TNPs, largely invisible at EU level outside radical left circles.

Overall, this comparison of the development of the left TNPs reveals some limitations present in *all* TNPs: they have integrated only in restricted spheres and in each the national party

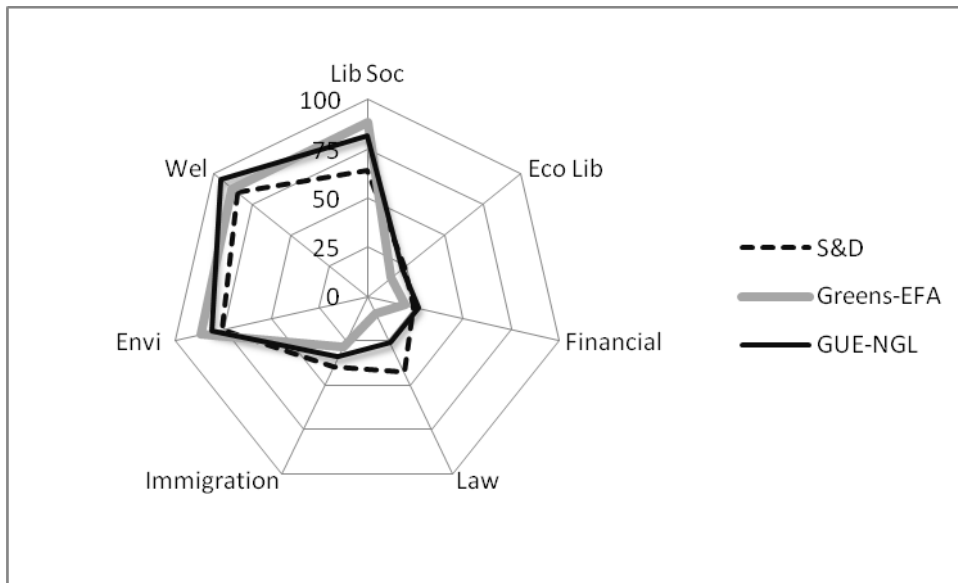
remains dominant. This process has gone furthest in the PES, where there is limited integration in the policy-making realm, but intergovernmentalism prevails elsewhere. By its party structure, declared ideology and the cohesion of its parliamentary practice, the EGP is clearly the most transnational TNP, although as yet still falling somewhat short of being a genuine pan-European party. The EL is somewhat of a mixed bag. It has a proclaimed commitment to transnationalism, but the weak implementation of individual membership, its as-yet vitiated policy-making function and the untrammelled intergovernmentalism of its internal procedures mean that it is certainly the least institutionalised TNP of the three: combined with deep policy disagreements, this arguably means that the EL has the worst of all worlds. Whereas both the PES and Greens have achieved a certain level of strategic stability, the PES as a limited but cohesive intergovernmental structure and the Greens as a more ambitious but less centralised transnational party, the EL is *both* more organisationally inchoate and strategically divided.

Post-crisis policy convergence

The above sections reveal three left TNPs that (despite acknowledged common discussion between TNP leaders and structural similarities) have largely followed autonomous development paths to reflect the wishes of their constituent member parties. But to what degree can the three 'left' TNPs overcome their autonomous paths to forge a common policy consensus? The fact that each TNP has internal disagreements not just about policy but the very scope of action at EU level (particularly the EL) does indicate that a broader cross-party policy consensus may be heavily circumscribed *ab initio*. However, this is far from a naïve question – the European institutions (including the EP) are widely acknowledged as possessing a largely a-political character that depoliticises ideological conflicts and incentivises consensus and compromise in decision-making (e.g. Mair 2005). Potentially at least, it allows such intra-party divisions to be bridged. Moreover the three party families *do* generally co-operate to a significant degree in the European parliament: in the 2009-2014 EP the GUE/NGL's position matched the Greens/EFA and S&D on 69.9 percent and 59.7 percent of votes respectively (VoteWatch.eu 2015b). However, as explored further below, the Greens/EFA position is itself closer to the S&D (75 percent of votes matching), while the S&D (in part because of its pivotal position in forming parliamentary coalitions) coincides with ALDE most of all, followed by the Greens, EPP and only then the GUE/NGL group.

Voting records aside, a strong overall coincidence of policy positions between the three EP groups is shown in Figure 1. Not unexpectedly, all three groups coalesce towards the top left of the table, emphasising expanding the welfare state, environmental protection and liberal social values rather than neo-liberal economics and emphases on law and order and restricting immigration. The Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL positions are particularly close.

Figure 1: Policy position of the EP groups on seven-point policy scale



Note: The seven policy dimensions: ‘Lib Soc’ - liberal society; ‘Eco Lib’ - economic liberalisation; ‘Financial’ - *restrictive* financial policy (low taxation and spending); ‘Law’ - law and order; ‘Immigration’ - *restrictive* immigration policy; ‘Envi’ - environmental protection; ‘Wel’ - *expanded* welfare state. The higher the value on a dimension, the stronger the agreement of the Group on the policies expressed by the specified dimension.

Source: adapted from (Bardi et al. 2010)

Dunphy (2004) has analysed the general ideological basis for co-operation between the radical left, social democrats and Greens in detail, and argues that the picture is complex, with multiple areas for both compromise and contention. With the social democrats, the main common ground can be found over state-centric solutions for overcoming economic and social inequalities, promoting growth and employment within a broadly Keynesian framework with the role of trade unions and the ETUC as core actors in protecting and employment agenda. This framework can support European integration, providing it supports ‘social Europe’ that seeks to mitigate the market-making and neo-liberal emphases of the EU’s economic directives. Whereas contemporary radical left parties usually deny that they are pursuing Keynesian policies as ends in themselves, and maintain an aspiration to ‘transform’ capitalism, they will often agree that current efforts must focus on defending social democratic gains as a bulwark against neo-liberalism, including the core institutions of the welfare state (March 2011). In addition, the contemporary centre- and radical left tend to share a post-materialist consensus over life-style issues, supporting gender, sexual and ethnic equality, environmental concerns and general social justice issues. This assertion needs qualification however, because some of the more traditionalist communist parties (such as the Greek KKE and Czech KSČM) have traditionally been regarded as far less post-materialist in their emphasis. On the other hand, the practice of certain social democratic parties in government (particularly their emphasis on national security and more restrictive immigration policies), conflicts with (most) radical left parties’ emphasis on open borders and free-movement of peoples.

The biggest problem in reaching consensus over such issues is internal divisions within the party families themselves. In particular, radical left parties have often been able to count on the sympathies of considerable numbers of activists within social democratic parties who have helped them with a strategy of acting as the ‘conscience of the left’ and pressuring social democratic parties in a left-wards direction against neo-liberalism. However, particularly under

the influence of 'third way' ideas, social democratic party leaderships were prone to promote neo-liberal policies of privatisation, market deregulation and welfare-state retrenchment (reaching their apogee in the Agenda 2010 cuts to welfare in Germany in 2003-5 that were initiated by the SPD/Green government). Even nominally 'Eurokeynesian' parties such as the French PS have demonstrated a very chequered record in government – for example the PS-led Jospin government of 1997-2002 undertook more privatisations than the previous six governments combined (Dunphy 2004, 102), a significant factor in Jospin's disastrous electoral performance in 2002, and in the electoral collapse of the PCF which had participated fully in that government right until the end of its term in office. There are still a large number of radical left parties, and significant numbers of activists within them, ready to use such records to argue that social democrats are untrustworthy partners and irredeemable defenders of the bourgeois state – and that the mistakes of previous experiences of governmental participation must not be repeated.

Foreign policy differences (including different attitudes to European integration) also continue to divide the centre- and radical left. Broadly speaking, the centre-left remains Atlanticist, while the radical left remains deeply opposed to the Euro-Atlantic political and economic institutions (NATO, the IMF and World Bank), and is prone to a certain Russophilia (although this is contentious within the party family itself). Certainly, common attitudes are found between radical left parties and social democratic activists over individual issues such as Israel's occupation of Palestine and opposition to the Iraq war. The SPD also won votes from the German Left Party in 2002 on the basis of opposition to American military interventionism. However, generally, a gulf remains between the party families on the international military and economic issues -- the radical left position generally supports the dissolution of NATO, opposition to military intervention and the abolition of nuclear weapons, while simultaneously promoting the fundamental reform or even abolition of the IMF and the World Bank for similar reasons, since all these institutions are seen as instruments of neo-liberal American hegemony and thereby interweave globalisation and militarism. The social democratic position, at least at the official level, is largely uncritical of these existing institutional structures. Similarly, social democrats' own occasional misgivings about EU integration have rarely translated into demands for fundamental changes to the EU as such. Indeed, it is the radical left's claim that the social democrats uncritically support EU integration and neo-liberal globalisation that have reinforced its ability to use opposition to the 'really existing EU' as a fundamental identity marker (Moschonas 2009).

In contrast, there is arguably much more common ideological ground between the Greens and the radical left. Many Greens criticise capitalism for its wasteful, growth-centric policies (although they often criticise socialism for the same reasons) and seek alternative economic models which can maximise democracy, local decision-making and social justice, all aims which the radical left can share. Although most Green parties' opposition to capitalism can no longer be regarded as radical (March and Mudde 2005), this is less true of their activists, many of whom cooperate with the social forums and global justice movement alongside the activists of left-wing parties (Doherty 2002). A large number of radical left parties (including several in the EL such as the Portuguese Left Bloc, Danish Red-Green Alliance and Finnish Left Alliance) are explicitly left-libertarian parties who have sought to address environmental, feminist and minority rights concerns alongside more traditional labour-focussed issues.

Nevertheless, as Dunphy (2004) points out, there is much that still divides the Greens and radical left. Above all is the attitude to the nation-state. Whereas both party families espouse localism and local democracy, express hesitation about engaging with the compromises of 'mainstream' politics, and have an emphasis on extra-parliamentary work, in practice, many Greens regard the radical left's viewpoint as much more state-centric, centralist and even hierarchical. This is certainly true of traditional communist parties, though far less accurate as a description of left-libertarian parties already mentioned and even reform communist parties like the Italian Rifondazione Comunista. Nevertheless, engrained Green suspicions of the communists

persist. For instance, Margrete Auken, MEP for the Danish Socialist People's Party, once a radical left but now increasingly a mainstream Green party, regards the traditional communist forms of organisation as constricting on individual activity – top-down organisation ‘kills everything’ as she puts it (Auken 2012). In addition, differences in attitude over the balance between materialist and post-materialist issues still divide the radical left and Greens. For instance, while the radical left can find common ground with the ‘red-greens’ over the priority of egalitarianism, green-greens are much more prone to prioritise libertarian over social issues and even to join right-wing neo-liberal coalitions (for example in Ireland in 2007-2011 and the Czech Republic in 2007-9). On the other hand, a number of radical left parties (such as the PCF and KSČM) continue to defend nuclear power as necessary for national development, a position obviously unacceptable to Green parties.

There are similar convergences and divergences in international policy. Notwithstanding their acceptance of European integration, many Greens remain suspicious of the EU for its neo-liberal, statist and growth-oriented policies, and (far more than the social democrats) advocate structural reform of the EU to address its perceived democratic deficit – all policies which find some resonance among radical left parties. Nevertheless, like the social democrats, the Greens are largely supportive of the existing Euro-Atlantic institutions: while they accept the need for some institutional reform, and are largely anti-militarist – for example, Greens strongly criticise NATO for its lack of emphasis on nuclear disarmament (EGP 2010) -- there is no support for the dissolution of NATO or for radical changes to the Euro-Atlantic neo-liberal financial structures.

Moreover, as Holmes and Lightfoot argue (Holmes and Lightfoot 2007, 152) ‘the devil is in the detail’: although there is much overlap in ideological proclivities, how party family ideologies are borne out in specific policies points to often very divergent emphases. Nevertheless, and particularly after the 2008 crisis, there are several policies that can form the basis for agreement. For example, Table 2 compares the post-2008 manifestos and major policy documents of the PES, EGP and EL, marking some of the main policy proposals. Where there is approximate agreement between two parties these are marked in *Italics*, and where all three parties have a modicum of agreement, these are marked in **Bold**.

Table 2: Policy priorities of the left TNPs, 2008-2015

<i>Party</i>	<i>PES</i>	<i>EGP</i>	<i>EL</i>
<i>Policy area</i>			
<i>Economic</i>	<p>‘Social Economy’/Social Union’</p> <p>Fundamental reform/regulation of financial markets/banking system, Banking Union</p> <p><i>Limits on financial pay and bonuses</i></p> <p>Measures against tax avoidance/tax havens (Youth) employment emphasis and investment in ‘smart green growth’</p> <p>Skills and training focus via EU budget</p> <p>Investment in co-ops</p> <p>Completion of EU internal market</p> <p>European Central Bank to focus on growth and employment</p> <p>Financial transaction tax Eurobonds for sustainable debt refinancing</p> <p><i>European Independent Credit Rating Agency</i></p> <p>Flexible budgets and debt-reduction (2014)</p>	<p>‘Social Europe’, Greener, sustainable economy</p> <p>Reform of financial markets; EU watchdog needed; European Banking Union</p> <p><i>Breaking up banking groups, properly size financial sector</i></p> <p><i>Limits on financial pay and bonuses</i></p> <p>Measures against tax avoidance/tax havens</p> <p>Focus on employment and ‘New Green Deal’</p> <p>Localisation of economy</p> <p>Non-growth model: GDP and GDP per capita should no longer play predominant role; social progress clause in European law</p> <p>ECB to focus on social and ecological development and improving life quality</p> <p>Financial transaction tax Eurobonds for sustainable debt refinancing</p> <p><i>Increase progressive income tax and harmonise European taxation</i></p> <p>Increase environmental taxes</p> <p><i>Reform Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) to focus on sustainable growth</i></p> <p>Debt-alleviation of EU indebted countries</p> <p>Increase EU budget</p>	<p>‘Social Europe, Europe of Rights’</p> <p>Social, ecological, anti-capitalist economy</p> <p>Changing existing rules of the international economic and financial system</p> <p><i>Public and social control over banking system</i></p> <p>Abolish tax havens</p> <p>Employment, social and environmental protection as priorities</p> <p>Nationalisation of strategic sectors - end to privatisation</p> <p>ECB to focus on social and ecological development and issuing credit</p> <p>European public bank of social and solidarity-based development funded by ECB</p> <p>Financial transaction tax Eurobonds for sustainable debt refinancing</p> <p><i>Creation of European public rating agency</i></p> <p><i>Raise income taxes and harmonise European taxation</i></p> <p>Raise workers’ wages and incomes</p> <p><i>SGP replaced by new pact of growth, full employment, social and environmental protection</i></p> <p>Debt-alleviation of EU indebted countries</p> <p>Debt Abolition</p> <p>European Debt Conference</p>
<i>Social</i>	‘New Social Europe’: improved standards in	Green New Deal: investment in education,	Investment in education, health and social care,

	<p>social, health and education policies Strengthen welfare systems via fair tax policies</p> <p>EU minimum wage Universal access to public services Fair work-life balance</p> <p>Strengthening rights of workers, children and elderly</p> <p>Anti-discrimination legislation Support gender equality - European Women’s Rights Charter</p> <p>Measures to regulate legal and combat illegal immigration</p> <p>Cooperation against organised and cross-border crime</p>	<p>science and research</p> <p>EU minimum wage <i>End to competition in public services</i></p> <p>Strengthen workers’ rights</p> <p>Oppose discrimination</p> <p>Support gender equality</p> <p><i>Develop EU charter of fundamental rights</i> Fair migration – oppose Fortress Europe. Frontex border control system to acknowledge International Refugee Conventions and the European Convention on Human Rights.</p>	<p>public transport</p> <p>EU minimum wage/pension <i>Oppose privatisation of public services</i> Maximum 35-40 hour working week</p> <p>Strengthening collective workers rights</p> <p>Full employment. Reject ‘flexicurity’</p> <p>Oppose discrimination</p> <p>Support gender equality</p> <p><i>Develop EU charter of fundamental rights</i> Oppose Fortress Europe. Oppose Frontex. Migrants to work in EU without restriction</p> <p>Oppose EU anti-terrorism policy</p>
<i>Enviromental</i>	<p>Sustainable development; EU to achieve global 30% cut in emissions by 2020</p> <p>Investment in ‘smart green growth’, environmental transport Support for developing countries to fight climate change Form global energy and development forum European Common Energy Policy Reform of CAP</p> <p>Monitoring of nuclear power</p>	<p>Sustainable development; EU to achieve global emissions cut of 30% by 2020, 55% by 2030 Green New Deal – new green technologies, sustainable transport Support for adaptation of developing countries</p> <p>Binding international climate agreement European Renewables Community Reform CAP</p> <p>End investment in nuclear power <i>Oppose GM foods</i> Reform Common Fisheries Policy Create five million ‘green collar jobs’ Animal protection</p>	<p>Sustainable development; EU to achieve global emissions cut of 30-40% by 2020 Increase use of renewable energy</p> <p>Technology transfer to developing countries</p> <p>Reform of CAP (but without neo-liberalism)</p> <p><i>Oppose GM foods</i> Rural development policy</p>
<i>Institutional</i>	Strengthen transparency of	‘Democratic refoundation’	Popular control of EU

	<p>EU institutions; regulate lobbying; democratic control of EU via national parliaments Greater role for EP – legislative, budgetary and control powers <i>Regions and local authorities to have greater role in EU politics</i> Gender-equal EP and EU Council</p>	<p>of Europe; Strengthen transparency of EU institutions; regulate lobbying EP to have right of legislative initiative <i>EU as effective multi-level democracy</i> More politically integrated Europe via EU-wide referendum <i>Referenda on landmark EU decisions</i> Proportion of MEPs to be elected on transnational lists</p>	<p>institutions EP to have right of legislative initiative No to Lisbon Treaty <i>Referenda on landmark EU decisions</i> Generalise proportional electoral system in EP elections</p>
<i>International</i>	<p>Support Millennium development goals Support fair trade and poverty reduction <i>Raise overseas development aid</i> Support developing countries within WTO Reform of decision-making in IMF, WB, UN Strengthening EU Common Foreign and Security Policy European common defence via NATO Common European anti-terrorism policy International disarmament EU enlargement to Western Balkans, support for Eastern Partnership</p>	<p>Support Millennium development goals Fair trade first <i>Oppose TTIP in its current form</i> <i>Raise overseas development aid</i> WTO to transform free trade to fair trade agenda Reforming UN to achieve multilateral global governance <i>EU to support UN in conflict resolution – create European Civil Peace Corps</i> Environmentally and human-rights focussed EU foreign policy Nuclear disarmament Support EU enlargement, focussed on Mediterranean and Eastern Europe</p>	<p>Support Millennium development goals Support fair trade and poverty reduction <i>Oppose TTIP; no US-EU free market</i> Debt redemption for poorest countries WTO to exclude agriculture and end neo-liberal agenda Revise WB/IMF structural adjustment programmes Conflict resolution based on OSCE and reformed UN <i>EU to respect international law and strive for political solutions to all conflicts</i> End to EU military engagement abroad; review military co-operation with USA Dissolve NATO –replace with new International Co-operative Security system Replace EU Defence agency with disarmament agency Oppose European missile defence International disarmament Support EU enlargement, particularly to Turkey</p>

Sources: (PES 2009b; PES 2010, PES 2014; EGP 2009a; EGP 2012c; EGP 2014; EL 2009; EL 2010b, EL 2014)

Table 2 reinforces that, whatever the specific nuances, there is general agreement on the broad parameters of policy between the three party families: each seeks a socially just, environmentally sustainable economy that invests in public services, with regulation and reform of the financial

markets a must, a focus on poverty reduction at home and abroad, protection for minorities and the disadvantaged and foreign policies that focus on environmental regulation, support for developing countries and conflict resolution. There is a basic level of agreement on the need to reform EU institutions in the interests of greater transparency and popular input (although wide variance on the proposed mechanisms), and even a consensus that international economic organisations need reform (although significant differences on which institutions, and the nature of that reform).

In general, there is least consensus in world affairs and most in the intra-EU economic realm. For example, despite commitments to fair trade, poverty reduction and international disarmament, neither the PES nor the Greens propose fundamental reforms to the existing global architecture (and indeed the PES wants augmentation of European defence and anti-terror capabilities). The EL is the only TNP explicitly to oppose the neo-liberalism of the WTO, WB and IMF (although without advocating clear alternatives) and is the only consistently anti-militarist TNP, completely rejecting NATO, US-led European Missile Defense and EU militarisation.

However, a perhaps surprising amount of common ground on economic policy is shown, not just on general aspirations such as overcoming tax havens and tax avoidance, but on more specific proposals such as reform of the European Central Bank, a financial transaction tax and Eurobonds. Furthermore, the EL agrees with the PES on the need to replace the private credit ratings agencies with a more public ratings agency in order to overcome the over-weening power of American private groups on EU economic policy. The EL and Greens can agree on replacing the European Stability and Growth pact (with its emphasis on neo-liberal economics) with one focussed on socially and environmentally sustainable growth.

It goes without saying that, unlike the other TNPs, the EL's anti-neo-liberalism is often a proxy for anti-capitalism (though this is not always explicit). This is shown in far greater hostility to the existing economic architecture, a preference for greater structural reform, as well as more direct economic *dirigisme* (e.g. via re-nationalisation and raising public sector wages). Nevertheless, there is a general level of consensus on moderating market excesses via greater state intervention.

It is quite clear that this consensus has been accelerated as a result of the economic crisis. In the 2004 EP election, only the EL had much critical to say about neo-liberalism (see Table 3). By 2009, all three TNPs devoted a considerable part of their EP manifestos to castigating the current economic model for producing the crisis, although only the EL and Greens *directly* attacked neo-liberalism – the PES did so only more implicitly (see Table 3). Moreover, the PES' adoption of a financial transaction tax is significant, since the party has only belatedly and hesitantly embraced it (it was not present in their 2004 manifesto). This brings the PES position much closer to that of the radical left and Greens, who have been advocating such measures since the early 2000s, although in general (and this was particularly marked in 2014), the PES' positions are much more generalist and less policy-specific, more focussed on criticism of austerity than neo-liberalism *per se*, than the other left TNPs'. According to some, the PES' increasing internal homogeneity, particularly its East-West divisions, have prevented it having a coherent, co-ordinated or even adequate ideological response to the crisis, and the 2014 programme is even a step backwards in this regard (Brustier et al. 2014).

Table 3: Changing views of neo-liberalism from TNP manifestos

	2004 EP Election	2009 EP Election	2014 EP Election
PES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our vision of the European Union is a community based on the principles of the social market economy and mutual cooperation for the benefit of all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European elections are...the choice between our vision of a progressive Europe...Or a conservative, regressive Europe in which the future of our countries and people is left in the hands of the market and of forces beyond democratic control • We must promote better cooperation in Europe to manage globalization for the benefit of everyone. They say adapt to the market. We say shape our future • The global financial crisis has exposed the weaknesses of the unregulated Market • This crisis marks the end of a conservative era of badly-regulated markets. Conservatives believe in a market society and letting the rich get richer, to the detriment of everyone else. We believe in a social market economy that enables everyone in society to make the most of the opportunities globalization offers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right wing has created a Europe of fear and austerity...we have fought for a strong, socially just and democratic Europe • Austerity-only policy has harmed our economies and punished those least responsible for causing the crisis • After the end of the Troika missions, another model within the framework of the EU Treaties should be established, which has to be democratic, socially responsible and credible • The right wing has used neoliberal policies to cut provisions that have helped people bounce back after tough times. We will fight for a Europe that leaves no one behind
EGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want a social Union built on the basic principles of equality and solidarity • We resist the neo-liberal tendency to leave everything to the market • For us Greens, the EU must play an important role in reforming and regulating the presently unfair system of globalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The financial crisis and credit crunch have brought the failings of current economic and social policies sharply into focus. They have exposed a wider systemic failure • The dominant neoliberal ideology in Europe has established a system where the interests of the few come before the general well-being of its citizens • The neoliberal majority in the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission is guilty of bowing to the demands of industry lobbies, putting short-term profits before the general interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neo-liberal deregulation has created financial markets solely driven by short-term greed, resulting in the global financial crisis that is still with us today • The medicine of austerity that has been prescribed to countries in crisis for several years now has increased social division and injustice, jeopardised the well-being of many of our fellow citizens, undermined the capacity of our societies to prosper, and crucially, weakened democracy • We need cooperation within the EU to deal effectively with these issues. The transformation we advocate must go hand in hand with a democratic re-foundation • Instead of socially deaf and environmentally blind austerity, we propose three coherent avenues to sustainability: fighting unemployment, poverty and all forms of social injustice; transforming our economies with innovation and eco-efficient

			solutions to tackle climate change and environmental degradation; re-regulating the financial industry so it serves the real economy. We call this a European Green New Deal
EL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new vision is inspiring growing numbers of Europeans and uniting them to join in great mobilisations to resist the imposition of a capitalist one-way street that is an attempt to trap humanity in a new social and cultural regression • In Europe...the people are suffering from the policies of globalised capitalism implemented by governments in the interest of big capital and lobbies • We want to build a project for another Europe and to give another content to the EU... alternative to capitalism in its social and political model • We want a Europe free from the antidemocratic and neoliberal policies of WTO and IMF • As political forces of social transformation, we want to contribute to this new dynamic that is resolutely attacking neo-liberal policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are facing financial, economic and social crises, a crisis of the whole system... • The crisis is caused by the globalisation of hazardous neo-liberal capitalism, which is...being pushed ahead by irresponsible elites in charge of politics and economics • The crisis is once more demonstrating the failure of neo-liberal globalisation, which has, on a global scale, maximised the profits of the financial market's main players without any state control and intervention. Politics, states and entire societies are subordinated to uncontrolled financial markets • As a result, the neo-liberal foundations of the EU treaties are called into question, particularly in reference to the idea of an "open market economy with free competition": the unchecked free circulation of capital, the liberalisation and privatisation of public services, and the status and mission of the European Central Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The starting point of our proposal is our opposition to the crux of the debt crisis in Europe: neoliberal policy that has minimised the contribution of capital to financial needs, imposed austerity programmes, lead to the termination of democracy and working rights and to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in a series of EU member- states • The financial crisis was the pretext for going further into ultraliberalism, for imposing barbaric austerity plans, and social and democratic regressions • In country after country, we see the "Troika" landing...With the complicity of our governments, they lower our wages and pensions, slash public services, privatise and plunder. The result is rocketing unemployment and precariousness; life is becoming harder • Stop austerity to prevent human and humanitarian catastrophe • We do not accept the neoliberal criteria of Economic and Monetary Union and demand that employment, social development and democracy be given priority

Source: (PES 2004; PES 2009b, PES 2014; EGP 2003; EGP 2009a; EGP 2014; EL 2004; EL 2009; EL 2014)

This policy convergence among the TNPs has been furthered by some (albeit limited) attempts among the broader left to find a common left response to the crisis. Whereas the political foundations of each TNP largely work in isolation from each other, the European parliament has helped bridge differences through conferences and workshops discussing policy options. One major such instance was the forum ‘Another Road for Europe’ in the EP on 28 June 2012 that gathered MEPS from the S&D, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups alongside social movements and civil society organisations to discuss exits from the crisis.³ Also indicative was the Left Caucus, a cross-party group representing MEPs from the three left EP groups set up by eight MEPs in 2011. The Caucus aimed to respond to the defeat of the left in the June 2009 elections by provoking ‘an ongoing debate and exchange of views among ... progressives ... in ... a much more comprehensive, open-minded, transparent and persuasive way’, aiming to ‘organise debates and hearings, adopt common statements and engage in shared legislative and political work’ (Left Caucus 2011). Nevertheless, despite indicating an increased wish to have common policies that bridge the confines of the normal political families, the Left Caucus petered out after initially publicising proposals for overcoming the economic crisis.

Might such attempts to bridge ideological and policy cleavages result in more united and effective left intervention at European level? Certainly, an opportunity was presented by the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union from June-December 2012, which made AKEL’s Demetris Christofias the first communist to head the EU’s agenda-setting body. For sure, the six-month presidential period is too short to make a substantive impact (and in any case the presidency is traditionally an impartial body that is supposed to stand for the EU’s general interest). Be that as it may, at Christofias’ inaugural speech, he lambasted austerity policies and the unaccountability of the markets, while defending ‘A Europe of social cohesion, prosperity, security and growth’ (Christofias 2012). Significant also was that in January and May 2012, the PES invited Christofias to its pre-Council leaders’ meetings in order to discuss common approaches during the Cypriot presidency (e.g. Cyprus News Agency 2012). The EGP also offered a generally positive assessment of the prospects of the Cypriot presidency (Sakadaki 2012). Despite the institutional and temporal limitations, the presidency offered at the very least the prospect of greater trust-building and contact between the different families of the left. Nevertheless, with AKEL losing the Cypriot presidential election in February 2013, the chance of significantly building on this period was lost.

Altogether, growing commonalities between the left TNP manifestos and incipient co-operation initiatives must be weighed up against significant, lasting barriers to more integrated positions. Most obvious is that, despite the GUE/NGL achieving a historical high of 52 seats in 2014, the left parties still make up a minority of the European parliament and have only achieved a marginal increase overall (39 percent of seats since 2014 as opposed to 37 percent in the 2009-2014 parliament). They still have a minority of European national governments. Only a significantly greater representation in the EP, *combined with* a greater share of positions in the European Council, might really give the potential for fuller left-wing legislative and executive authority at the EU level. Much obviously depends on whether the Syriza government in Greece can achieve any real or symbolic moderation of austerity policies that might provide a demonstration effect and credibility breakthrough for distinct left-wing policy prescriptions elsewhere, which at the time of writing looks exceedingly dubious. Moreover, the failure of the last period of centre-left dominance of Europe in 1997-2002 certainly allows some reasonable doubt to be cast on any such potential even should the left gain optimal results in years to come.

Of equal importance is that *de facto* MEP co-operation between the party families still leaves much to be desired. Not least is the perennial problem that the TNP manifesto cannot simply be read as a blueprint for MEPs’ legislative actions, especially in the case of the radical left. If we don’t have clear policy coherence within each party family, it is difficult to envisage it across the broader left!

Additionally, the aforementioned legislative coalitions between the EP groups look still less impressive on more detailed analysis (see Table 4). Certainly, the 2009-2014 parliament indicated a close co-operation between the GUE/NGL, Greens/EFA and S&D on gender issues (c. 90% vote correspondence) environmental, development, legal affairs and civil liberties issues (over 80% correspondence), but on economic and monetary affairs and employment and social affairs there was a congruence of only circa 50%! This is markedly *less* co-operation in these areas than in the 2004-2009 parliament (when GUE/NGL co-operation with the PES was c 55% and with the Greens/EFA c. 70%. These statistics needs explanation, since they clearly conflict with the increasing economic congruence noted in the TNP manifestos. On closer analysis it is clear that the GUE/NGL is the outlier – the Greens/EFA and S&D coincide with each other over 70% of the time in these *and other* policy realms. Furthermore, their positions in all policy areas align with each other *more than in the previous parliament* (75% versus 70%), but with the GUE/NGL *less than in the previous parliament* (S&D coalitions with the GUE/NGL have fallen from 62% to 60% and Green/EFA coalitions with GUE/NGL from 74% to 70%).

What explains this? It is plausible that whereas the consensus on anti-neo-liberalism has helped draw the Greens/EFA and S&D closer together, particularly on economic issues, it has coincided with a toughening of positions *within* the GUE/NGL. This was alluded to in Zimmer's aforementioned remark that several GUE/NGL constituent parties apparently do not want greater co-operation. Moreover, within the GUE/NGL, some have noted that the absence of 7 Italian MEPs from the 2009-2014 parliament (because of the collapse of the Italian radical left in 2008) deprived the group of some of its more pragmatic and Europhile members and given greater emphasis to a more intransigent newer influx (e.g. de Jong 2011).

On even closer inspection, the GUE/NGL's harder line is apparent. When the GUE/NGL disagreed with economic and employment initiatives supported by both the S&D and Greens/EFA, the primary reason for dissensus was both the GUE/NGL's reticence about supporting any initiatives that might smack of neo-liberalism, and its preference for profound structural reform. For instance, on 13 June 2012, the GUE/NGL opposed a law on 'Economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability in the Euro area' on the basis that it did not change the prevailing preference for 'undemocratic' austerity measures. In contrast, the Greens/EFA and S&D supported it because it entailed support for growth measures, employment and Eurobonds.⁴

In February 2011, the GUE/NGL opposed the EP resolution on the 'ECB Annual report for 2010'.⁵ The group argued that the ECB was not independent, and was being 'politically manipulated' by bankers in such a way as to embed austerity policies within the EU body politic. The ECB needed reform of its statutes and parliamentary control of its activities, in order to focus on full employment, the economy and sustainable growth and not simply budgetary stability. In contrast, despite manifesto demands for reform of the ECB, the Greens and S&D were satisfied with the resolution's demands for greater ECB transparency and support for policies like Eurobonds. Similarly, among other votes, the GUE/NGL group opposed legislation on employment policy and promoting workers' mobility on the grounds that they fetishised labour market flexibility over social protection, and promised positive measures that were mere palliatives (the Greens and S&D in contrast argued that labour market flexibility was one of the fundamental freedoms of the EU).⁶

Table 4. Matching positions between left EP groups on key issues

Issue	Group	2004-2009			Group	2009-2014		
		<i>PES</i>	<i>Greens/EFA</i>	<i>GUE/NGL</i>		<i>S&D</i>	<i>Greens/EFA</i>	<i>GUE/NGL</i>
All areas	PES	X	69.83	62.01	S&D	X	74.96	59.72
	Greens/EFA	69.83	X	74.04	Greens/EFA	74.96	X	69.93
	GUE/NGL	62.01	74.04	X	GUE/NGL	59.72	69.93	X
Agriculture	PES	X	63.20	49.26	S&D	X	69.48	57.52
	Greens/EFA	63.20	X	53.12	Greens/EFA	69.48	X	68.81
	GUE/NGL	49.12	53.12	X	GUE/NGL	57.52	68.81	X
Budget	PES	X	74.94	62.65	S&D	X	74.67	66.37
	Greens/EFA	74.94	X	68.92	Greens/EFA	74.67	X	71.26
	GUE/NGL	62.65	68.92	X	GUE/NGL	66.37	71.26	X
Civil liberties, justice and home affairs	PES	X	82.32	73.08	S&D	X	84.86	71.10
	Greens/EFA	82.32	X	80.35	Greens/EFA	84.86	X	80.05
	GUE/NGL	73.08	80.35	X	GUE/NGL	71.10	80.05	X
Constitutional and inter- constitutional affairs	PES	X	61.65	42.48	S&D	X	76.72	38.93
	Greens/EFA	61.65	X	61.17	Greens/EFA	76.72	X	53.82
	GUE/NGL	42.48	61.17	X	GUE/NGL	38.93	53.82	X
Culture and education	PES	X	80.60	64.18	S&D	X	90.00	61.25
	Greens/EFA	80.60	X	72.39	Greens/EFA	90.00	X	66.25
	GUE/NGL	64.18	72.39	X	GUE/NGL	61.25	66.25	X
Development	PES	X	92.13	89.89	S&D	X	92.52	83.18
	Greens/EFA	92.13	X	91.01	Greens/EFA	92.52	X	88.79
	GUE/NGL	89.89	91.01	X	GUE/NGL	83.18	88.79	X
Economic and monetary affairs	PES	X	74.27	55.58	S&D	X	85.49	51.68
	Greens/EFA	74.27	X	68.69	Greens/EFA	85.49	X	53.63
	GUE/NGL	55.58	68.69	X	GUE/NGL	51.68	53.63	X
Employment and social affairs	PES	X	73.88	57.96	S&D	X	77.52	51.38
	Greens/EFA	73.88	X	73.88	Greens/EFA	77.52	X	56.65
	GUE/NGL	57.96	73.88	X	GUE/NGL	51.38	56.65	X
Environment and public health	PES	X	73.55	74.81	S&D	X	85.66	83.06
	Greens/EFA	73.55	X	87.53	Greens/EFA	85.66	X	89.89
	GUE/NGL	74.81	87.53	X	GUE/NGL	83.06	89.89	X
Foreign & security policy	PES	X	68.88	58.85	S&D	X	67.90	41.25
	Greens/EFA	68.88	X	65.10	Greens/EFA	67.90	X	59.15
	GUE/NGL	58.85	65.10	X	GUE/NGL	41.25	59.15	X
Gender equality	PES	X	85.83	86.61	S&D	X	91.89	91.51
	Greens/EFA	85.83	X	88.19	Greens/EFA	91.89	X	89.19
	GUE/NGL	86.61	88.19	X	GUE/NGL	91.51	89.19	X
Internal market and consumer protection	PES	X	61.54	66.15	S&D	X	80.14	69.50
	Greens/EFA	61.54	X	85.38	Greens/EFA	80.14	X	63.12
	GUE/NGL	66.15	85.38	X	GUE/NGL	69.50	63.12	X
International	PES	X	57.14	55.56	S&D	X	60.45	53.15

trade								
	Greens/EFA	57.14	X	85.71	Greens/EFA	60.45	X	81.36
	GUE/NGL	55.56	85.71	X	GUE/NGL	53.15	81.36	X
Legal affairs	PES	X	78.40	75.93	S&D	X	74.07	58.80
	Greens/EFA	78.40	X	91.36	Greens/EFA	74.07	X	71.76
	GUE/NGL	75.93	91.36	X	GUE/NGL	58.80	71.76	X

Source: (VoteWatch.eu 2009b; VoteWatch.eu 2015b)

These examples indicate that despite ostensible programmatic similarities, deeper ideological cleavages between the left TNPs over socio-economic issues remained highly relevant. Although the crisis has produced greater verbal consensus over the need to combat neo-liberalism, and even a core of policies to do this, the voting records indicate that anti-neo-liberalism is still understood very differently. While greater consensus is possible over issues that do not relate directly to this cleavage (for example human and minority rights issues), ostensible common ground over economic policies is vitiated by the radical left's continued commitment to transformative change of capitalism. Unlike the Greens and social democrats, the radical left (at least within the EP) regards amendment of neo-liberalism short of major structural changes as half-measures which largely duck the critical issues.

Finally, the biggest obstacle to further pan-European left unity is undoubtedly the structure of the 'European' electorate, which is still, composed of national parties rooted in national electorates. The national electoral dynamic is a competitive one that the more co-operative, consensual impetus of the European parliament, the commitment to common TNP manifestos and networking between TNPs cannot counterbalance. Nationally, the three party families are certainly increasingly prone to co-operate (for example, Greens, social democrats and the radical left have joined coalitions in France, Italy and Finland since the 1990s, the RGA has supported the social-democratic-green-social liberal coalition in Denmark from 2011-14, and the Swedish V joined a 'Red-Green' coalition (modelled on the governing coalition in Norway) in 2008-2010 that unsuccessfully contested the 2010 election). Nevertheless, pan-left co-operation is often less than the sum of its parts, since each party family's electorate overlaps to a considerable degree and they are fishing in the same pool for new voters. Radical left parties can certainly increase their support bases from non-voters and social liberals, and not infrequently the radical right (March 2011). However, dramatic increases in the support of one left party often coincide with a fall in the vote for another (such as the SP in Netherlands gaining from the Labour Party in 2006 and the LP and Greens in Germany winning at the expense of the SPD in both 2005 and 2011).

Conclusion

The European level of the left's party activity shows clearly some of the weaknesses that have beset its response to crisis. First, most, obviously, their representation at European level, even combined, falls way short of a legislative majority in the EP. Second, reflecting their roots in national parties, the left TNPs are largely content to plough their own furrows in terms of organisation and programmes. Despite increasingly common policy understandings, which have only increased since the 2008 international economic crisis (particularly a consensus over the need to find more equitable, socially just and environmentally sustainable alternatives to neo-liberalism) there is little obvious *direct* policy learning between parties. There are some exceptions: the Greens at least admit to close observance of how other TNPs respond to party legislation (Emmott 2012). Moreover, initiatives like the Left Caucus furthered (however briefly) joint policy discussion.

Third, the TNPs do not act as fully effective force-multipliers for their national parties. Only the EGP is moving, after a slow start, towards a more institutionalised transnational party.

The largest left TNP, the PES, has certainly also become a more consolidated and strategically consensual organisation, but it has limited its ambitions to becoming an intergovernmental lynchpin. Yet, relative to these groups, the EL has the worst of all worlds, primarily because the intergovernmental/federal disagreements noted in the other party families are overlaid with a more persistent ideological/strategic divisions over the EU itself. In addition, the EL's weaker links to the GUE/NGL and the party family beyond the EP are debilitating. Given that the EL is the party family most opposed to neo-liberalism, its own internal weaknesses cannot but weaken the potential for any putative anti-neo-liberal 'front' within the EU.

Finally, the increasing policy consensus is wider than it is deep. It certainly has not amounted to a marked increase of legislative co-operation except perhaps between the PES and EGP; rather, the legislative activity of the TNPs shows that 'anti-neo-liberalism' is rather a hollow shell, lacking either a generally agreed strategic component or voting prescriptions. Shared understandings of a post neo-liberal model remain absent. For the PES and Greens, the focus is on modest within-system reform and their voting positions place them as largely accommodationist towards the current direction of the EU. In contrast, despite the pro-European sentiments of the European Left party, the GUE/NGL (or at least significant elements within it) continues to regard anti-neo-liberalism as a proxy for anti-capitalism, and to adopt rejectionist positions that aim to demonstrate that the EU is structurally flawed and incapable of modest 'reform.' It remains to be seen whether the lasting effects of the crisis will cause a greater shift towards more radical opposition to the EU's economic model within the PES or EGP, or greater consensus within the GUE/NGL. Without these, a substantive, rather than just rhetorical, alternative to neo-liberalism may be dead in the water.

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¹ This article is adapted from a chapter in Richard Dunphy and Luke March, *The European Left Party* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming, 2015).

² Although the Greens traditionally regarded themselves as ‘neither left nor right but ahead’, I follow a number of recent authors as considering them as on the left, by virtue of the egalitarianism of their ideology and the left-wing self-placement of many of their supporters (cf. Doherty 2002; Dunphy 2004; Richardson and Rootes 1994).

³ See www.anotherroadforeurope.org/index.php/en (site no longer available).

⁴ See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20120613&secondRef=ITEM-010&language=EN&ring=A7-2012-0172#3-310-000> (accessed 24 February 2015).

⁵ See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2011-0361&language=EN> (accessed 24 February 2015).

⁶ See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2011-0258&language=EN> (accessed 24 February 2015).