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Michael Holmes and Knut Roder

A confluence of crises in a difficult decade

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty or danger, usually associated with a clear choice between alternatives. It involves three features: an event that occurs at a specific moment in time, a serious challenge to established norms, and the opportunity for a transformative moment. The economic crisis that erupted in 2008 proved to be a 'dangerous opportunity' for left-wing parties, whether social democrats, the green left, or the radical left. Initially, it seemed to offer new political and economic opportunities for the left.

The first of these is the economic crisis itself. The events that began in 2008 certainly fit the criteria outlined above: there was a clear trigger moment – the autumn of 2008, when several banks collapsed and others needed rescue; there was a clear systemic challenge – to economies, to societies, to polities; and there was the possibility of economic, social and political transformation. As explained in Chapter 1, the economic crisis itself includes at least four elements. The banking collapse of 2008 led to a sovereign debt crisis after governments intervened to try to prop up their banking systems. This in turn contributed to the very specific Eurozone crisis that developed due to the constraints of EMU, and these three financial and economic factors in turn caused a widespread social and political crisis.

The second overarching crisis is that of European integration. One analysis identified at least 13 different areas where the EU integration process has been challenged by 'separate though related crises' that are 'multi-faceted in their sources, characteristics, and consequences' (Dinan et al., 2017: xx). Apart from the economic recession and the attendant Eurozone crisis, the EU has also had to respond to crises in areas such as migration policy and foreign policy. Indeed, these contributed to an overall legitimacy crisis of the Union, particularly towards the end of this 'difficult decade' when Britain

voted to leave the EU and parties on the right within various EU member states were electorally successful on anti-EU integration platforms.

The third crisis is that of the left. The idea that 'social democracy is in crisis' is widespread (Keating & McCrone, 2015: 1; see also Callaghan et al., 2009; Hickson, 2016). In a wider left context, Sassoon argues that left-wing parties face an 'agonising dilemma' (1997: 12) between defending welfare gains and responding to globalisation. This crisis is evident both in an ongoing electoral decline and a search for a new programmatic vision. This predates the economic crisis, with Anderson identifying in the 1990s 'a wider moral crisis in the identity of the major organizations of the West European left' (1994: 2). But the economic crisis certainly impacted on the left, with former British Labour Party minister Peter Hain asking bluntly, 'why have social democratic parties been in abject retreat?' (2016: v).

One common explanatory factor could be globalisation. Mitchell and Fazi argue that the decline of the left is not just electoral, it reflects a change of core values within society. For them, 'the extreme right have been more effective than left-wing or progressive forces at tapping into the legitimate grievances of the masses – disenfranchised, marginalised, impoverished and dispossessed by the 40-year long neoliberal class war waged from above' (Mitchell & Fazi, 2017: 3). The right has been better able to 'provide a (more or less) coherent response to the widespread – and growing – yearning for greater territorial or national sovereignty, increasingly seen as the only way, in the absence of effective supranational mechanisms of representation, to regain some degree of collective control over politics and society, and in particular over the flows of capital, trade and people that constitute the essence of neoliberal globalisation' (Mitchell & Fazi, 2017: 3).

This book has analysed the confluence of these three crises, and has sought to explain how the economic crisis and the European crisis contributed to the crisis of the left. The analyses have touched on the political challenge of globalisation in Europe and the rise of the right. This concluding chapter argues that the conventional interpretations of the relationship between the left and European integration have been altered by the crises. We start by summarising the existing interpretations of the left and integration, before setting out the argument that the crises created an opportunity for a new left perspective on the European Union, which we term 'alter-Europeanism'. We then analyse the main obstacles baulking the achievement of any new form of programme for the European left in the context of the current form of European integration.

Judging from the case studies in this book, the European left remains broadly supportive of EU integration and is reluctant to embrace Euroscepticism fully. Arguments for any form of 'Lexit' (Guinan & Hanna, 2017) – withdrawal from the EU specifically to pursue a left-wing agenda – are an

exception. However, extensive debates have emerged over the direction of the European Union, indicating that there are limits to the Europeanisation of the left. The economic crisis has significantly altered the relationship of the left and Europe.

Interpreting the left and European integration

The analysis of the impact of European integration on political parties has generally revolved around two dimensions. The first dimension focuses on the impact on individual parties, with arguments ranging from Euroscepticism to ones saying that parties are becoming more pro-European. The second dimension is more about the impact on party systems than on individual parties, and debates whether or not a single European polity is developing. Both of these dimensions have an impact on parties of the left.

The Eurosceptic line of argument stresses that the left has always been wary of the market principles that underpin European integration. Many social democratic parties were cautious about integration at the outset, as Newman (1983) and Featherstone (1988) point out. Indeed, some were downright hostile to it, notably the British Labour Party and Greece's PASOK, which did not warm to the idea until the 1990s at the earliest. And this tendency was even more pronounced among green left parties and radical left parties. Bomberg comments that 'the EU represents much that greens instinctively oppose' (1998: 3), while March notes that among radical left parties, 'opposition to the "really existing" EU has proven a consolidating factor' (2012: 202). Their view often reflects disappointment at the perceived failure of the EU to deliver on its promise of a 'social Europe' (Attac, 2017: 80).

The alternative perspective to Euroscepticism emphasises the Europeanisation of the left. Ladrech (2002) and Poguntke et al. (2007) argue that the Europeanisation of political parties involves a subtle pressure on parties to adapt policies, strategies and structures to enable them to deal more effectively with the EU. This does not necessarily imply pressure towards a more pro-European position, but in the case of social democratic parties there is plenty of evidence of such a shift (see *inter alia* Featherstone, 1988; Ladrech & Marlière, 1999; Lightfoot, 2005). Even among the green left and radical left, there are suggestions that some see the EU as essentially a flawed but progressive project. Bomberg notes that 'for many green actors, participation in the EU is attractive if not imperative' (1998: 3), while March accepts that several radical left parties 'are increasingly integrationist' (2012: 203).

In overall terms, the Europeanisation thesis works especially effectively in explaining the position of the social democratic left. From the very outset

of the integration process there has been an apparently inexorable move among members of this party family to a more pro-EU stance. It is evident too among green left parties, although here the centripetal force has been less strong. The Europeanisation of the left is least evident among radical left parties, but even here the pattern had been visible, as we argued in our previous analysis (Holmes & Roder, 2012; see also Holmes & Lightfoot, 2016). This is at least partly because of a strong rhetorical commitment to internationalism that exists on the left. Left-wing parties of all types are very supportive of the principle of international cooperation, and that creates a prima facie case for them to support European integration.

The relationship between left-wing parties and integration was changed by the economic crisis. The seemingly inexorable drift towards Europeanisation was halted and in some cases reversed. But this does not necessarily mean that the left became more Eurosceptic. Instead, the crisis highlighted the vulnerability of individual states in the face of global financial forces. So while left parties could see many reasons to leaven their enthusiasm for the EU, they were also sharply aware that some form of European integration could be a valuable safeguard for social rights and freedoms.

Finally, we return briefly to the second dimension of the impact of integration on party systems. Some analysts argue that the EU represents an evolving party political system, different from national systems and still under-developed, but nonetheless distinctly a party political system (see for example Hix & Lord, 1997). Others contend that the EU has not fundamentally changed party system structures, and that 'party systems appear to remain relatively impervious to the direct impact of Europeanization' (Mair, 2000: 47). No single EU polity has developed, and instead party politics in the EU remains steadfastly national in its orientation.

In this conclusion, we will argue that the crisis constituted an EU-wide political shock, though the responses to it are still not wholly Europeanised. But rather than having 28 separate national reactions, the analyses in this book suggest the emergence of regional political systems within the larger EU. And while Mair's argument does have validity, the crisis led left groups in the European Parliament to call for an alternative form of certain aspects of the Europeanisation process – most notably relating to EMU and the single currency. GUE/NGL published a series of 'economic discussion documents on the future of the Eurozone' (Clancy, 2017), the social democrats suggested the 'completion and rebalancing of economic and monetary union as a democratic call out of the crisis' (Socialists & Democrats, 2015) and the Greens called for agreed roadmaps to 'put the EMU on a sustainable footing' (Greens-EFA, 2016).

Impact of the crisis

The economic crisis is a strange case of simultaneous left harmony and left disunity. When the banking crisis first erupted, there was a clear and consistent analysis shared across the left. They argued that the essential cause of the crisis was a failure of the private sector. The banks had become too greedy and too focused on short-term profit maximisation rather than long-term development. In addition, there was also recognition of a degree of governmental culpability, for allowing too much deregulation and failing to keep the banks in check. This was not a rejection of the role of governments in general, rather it was seen as governments having become too complicit in right-wing policies.

This view was by no means out of line with mainstream analysis of the crisis. For example, the Levin-Coburn report (US Senate, 2011) concluded that the crisis was the result of failures of both the market and the regulatory system, which had allowed the emergence of very high-risk and complex financial products. In similar vein, the commission established under Barack Obama's presidency highlighted excessively risky borrowing and investments in the financial services sector, excessive deregulation, and a 'systemic breakdown in accountability and ethics' (FCIC, 2011).

However, the common left analysis led to two different interpretations about how to respond. The social democratic approach was that the economic system had been allowed to get out of control, but it could be reined in. What was needed was a return to greater regulation and supervision, greater management of the economy, and a shift away from a corporate culture of excess towards one of long-term sustainability. Essentially, the system had been allowed to run loose; it needed tighter control, but there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the system. In contrast, radical left parties put forward a much more succinct interpretation. Rather than see it as an aberration, the crisis was better understood as evidence of a systemic failure of capitalism, and rather than trying to repair the system the aim should be to replace a broken model.

However, when it came to practical policy responses to the crisis the ideological distinctions on the left were reduced. The social democrats, the green left and the radical left all argued for greater regulation of the financial services sector. They also advocated that the response to the economic recession should involve investment rather than austerity. Indeed, the chapter by Cláudia Toriz Ramos highlights how opposition to austerity was the strongest binding agent when the social democrats, the radical left, the communists and the greens were putting together a framework for government in Portugal. Tapio Raunio's chapter shows a similar case in Finland when the radical left went into government there.
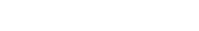
The problem was how to achieve these things. The first barrier to overcome was to get into government, but across Europe, right-wing parties dominated both before and after the onset of the crisis. Indeed, as we noted in Chapter 1, several analyses have pointed out that economic depressions generally tend to favour the right more than the left (Gamble, 2009: 109–110). Nor were social democratic parties in a strong position to challenge the economic orthodoxy being propounded by the right, since they had only relatively recently embraced those policy programmes themselves. Even though those policies were now being questioned, it was hard for social democratic parties to convince voters that their re-conversion was sincere.
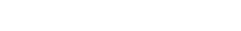
This was also because when social democratic parties did have a chance of getting into government after the onset of the crisis, it was often as a junior partner in a coalition with the right. That meant the social democrats were implementing austerity and cuts, not reversing them. This is evident in Ireland, where the Labour Party came to power in 2011 on promises of renegotiating the strict bailout constraints, only to accept them once in office. The same could be said of the SPD in Germany, which accepted restrictive policies as part of its grand coalition agreement with the CDU-CSU. And while the radical left only rarely tasted government in this period, it could even be applied to SYRIZA in Greece and AKEL in Cyprus, which came to power promising to challenge the diktats of Brussels, only to end up acceding to those demands.

The implication would seem to be that EU constraints made it extremely hard for left parties to pursue any different policy programme when in government. There are some suggestions that the *geringonça* government succeeded in steering Portugal away from stringent austerity, but apart from that, most have accepted – and rather meekly, at that – the parameters set down by the EU and the ECB.

Thus, one overall feature is the collapse of the traditional social democratic vote in several countries. It is particularly noticeable in some of the bailout countries. In Greece, Spain and Ireland (and in Italy, which did not actually receive a bailout but which went through a very similar socio-economic and political crisis), the main social democratic parties suffered significant losses. But it is evident elsewhere too. The traditional social democratic parties suffered bad reversals in France and in the Netherlands, while in Germany and Austria, a steady decline has persisted. In eastern Europe, the social democratic left suffered badly in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Some even refer to social democratic parties becoming 'pasokified', in other words 'reduced to parliamentary insignificance, or at least largely removed from the ability to achieve electoral majorities on the national level' (Mitchell & Fazi, 2017: 2).

In some cases, the vote has gone to the radical left, suggesting that left-wing voters have become disillusioned with the compromises of government. Again, this is especially noticeable in some of the bailout countries, with the rise of SYRIZA in Greece, of Podemos in Spain, of Sinn Féin and other smaller parties in Ireland, and of the contribution to an alternative government on the part of radical left parties in Portugal. But the radical left is not widespread. In 12 EU member states, there was no radical left party in parliament at any time during the crisis. They are a particularly rare creature in eastern European countries.

In overall terms, the economic crisis highlighted the persistent absence of a single European polity. However, the analyses in this book indicate that the crisis had an immense impact on the EU member states' party political systems. There was no single consistent pattern across the EU, due to different historical contexts and national circumstances. But there is evidence of a three-way split in the European Union. The crisis contributed to the development of what could be termed 'regional political systems' in the EU. Our analysis suggests the emergence of three such 'regional systems'. We can refer to them using geographical labels, though this is perhaps slightly misleading.

There is a group composed predominantly of southern European states, though there is a case to be made for Ireland to be seen as an 'honorary' southern state. These have often been referred to as the 'PIGS' (Dainotto, 2007: 2) and are characterised by historical under-development compared to other EU states, with some rapid growth prior to the crisis, but with particularly sharp crises that resulted in bailouts and severe austerity programmes. The second group is one made up of northern European states characterised by more developed economies and generally by creditor status in the debt crisis. The third group is that of eastern European member states, which have gone through a recent post-communist economic and political transformation.

If there is a positive 'left effect' of the crisis, it is in the 'southern' region. All of these countries were marked by extensive public protest against austerity. This translated into party politics in slightly different ways, but generally, social democratic parties did badly, either straight away or after a period in government. It also meant the rise of radical left parties in some of these countries, particularly in Greece, Spain and Ireland, but also to some degree in Portugal. The picture in Italy is less clear. A traditionally strong radical left was marginalised during the crisis, but a new populist party emerged, the Five Star Movement, which mixed some left-wing policies with a more conventional right-wing agenda.

The 'northern' group includes many traditional social democratic strongholds, such as Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic states. Here, the

impact of the economic crisis was more about limiting austerity rather than opposing it, and there was little evidence of any sense of European solidarity with struggling states. Attitudes to Greece were a litmus test of this, and as Ehl notes laconically, 'helping Greece is a synonym for trouble' (2015). Social democratic parties at best held static, and at worst suffered serious defeats, as in Germany and the Netherlands in 2017. The green left and radical left also did not benefit significantly in any of these countries. There were occasional successes, such as the surge to the Green Left in the Netherlands in 2017, but also setbacks, such as for the Austrian Greens that same year.

Finally, the European left is weakest in the 'eastern' group of states. Indeed, the chapter on Latvia by Karlis Bukovskis and Ilvija Bruge highlights how the term 'left' remains electorally toxic. The analysis in this volume has not looked extensively at these states, partly because few of them have adopted the euro (one of our selection criteria) and partly because the left was already weak in these states before the crisis. Green parties in these states tend to be right- rather than left-leaning, while radical left parties are hardly evident at all in eastern Europe. Social democrats were more prominent, but even here several well-established parties suffered bad defeats during the years of the economic crisis. Notably, the Hungarian MSZP collapsed from over 43% of the vote in 2006 to less than 12% in 2018, the Czech ČSSD went from over 32% in 2006 to 7.3% in 2017, and left parties failed to win any seats in the 2015 election in Poland. These results are not specifically to do with the crisis, but they do link to a growing mood of Euroscepticism in many of these countries.

In overall terms, the crisis created a political opening, but the left was unable to seize that opportunity in Europe. Social democratic parties continued their slow decline, and in some cases, this was accelerated. Green left and radical left parties had pockets of success, but generally remained marginal to politics in most EU countries. The dominant reason for the failure of the left lies in their approach to the European Union itself, and as we argue in the next section, this remains a major stumbling block for the development of a coherent alternative to current notions of European integration.

Alter-Europeanism

While the European Union could not be accused of triggering the initial financial crash, it was a central player in the evolution of the crisis in Europe, particularly with the sovereign debt crisis. This brought to the fore the relationship of the left with the EU. The left responded to the developing crisis with mounting criticism, although this varied in intensity

both according to party ideology and to national setting. But very few left parties actually moved towards a Eurosceptic position. Instead, the speeches and statements and comments across the left are replete with calls for 'another Europe', a 'different Europe', a 'better Europe'. Adopting the idea of *alter-mondialisme* from the French left,[1] there is a clear commitment to the idea of alter-Europeanism.

Alter-Europeanism implies both support for European integration and a commitment to changing the path of integration in a more progressive, leftist direction. The core analysis of alter-Europeanism is that the EU is here to stay but that it must be reformed. Indeed, the analysis argues that the crisis was caused by globalisation, and that the EU is the only possible bulwark against that globalisation. The individual states are simply too small to be able to deal with the might of global capital on their own, and they need the collective strength of the Union to respond effectively.

However, there is also an acceptance that the EU as presently constituted is flawed, in two main ways. First, there is general acceptance on the left that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit, and that it needs institutional reform to make it more open and accountable. Second, there is broad agreement that the EU is biased towards business interests at the expense of the broader public. For some, this involves a demand for a return to a European social model; for others, it means a more trenchant critique of a neoliberal Europe. Overall, the crisis has strengthened the idea that there needs to be a distinct left vision of a new policy direction for European integration and a more democratic institutional architecture for the EU.

The problem is that the commitment to alter-Europeanism lacks any real substance. There is no agreed agenda, no agreed platform, and this goes right across the spectrum of the left. Even before the economic crisis, Unger stated 'the left is missing an alternative' (Unger, 2005: 12). More recent arguments suggest that 'despite a crisis of neoliberalism, no clear and viable social democratic alternative appears to have (thus far) been forthcoming' (Bailey et al., 2014: 2), and that 'the failure of the centre left to set the political agenda in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis was notable' (Bickerton, 2018). Similar analyses exist further to the left. Gabriele Zimmer, chair of GUE/NGL, accepts that 'left-wing progressive forces have faced a complete absence of a common vision for Europe' (2018), while March notes that 'attitudes to the EU are still too divided for a clear vision of "another Europe" to evolve' among the radical left (2012: 203).

Why is there no consensus? The first problem lies in the nature of the political system of the EU. The power structure in the Union reflects deeply embedded policies and practices that are very difficult to alter. There is a 'treaty fatigue', with governments having little appetite for the long

negotiations required to amend existing treaties or introduce new ones. The various agreements reached by EU governments during the crisis, such as the Fiscal Compact Treaty, were inter-governmental ones that sidelined even the weak supervisory procedures at the EU level. Furthermore, the EU political system acts against the development of alternative programmes. It has no space for a 'loyal opposition': if you are in government, you have a say; if you are not, you have virtually no voice. Even the EP is muted because its dominant approach is to aim for a pro-integration consensus.

The second problem lies in the often fractious relationships on the left. The parties of the left are political competitors, and the European Union has become a means of differentiating themselves from each other. This competition inevitably makes it harder to find common ground. While there might be broad agreement about the need to reform the EU, it comes from quite distinct standpoints and leads to different approaches. There is no shared left vision of what integration should be about. This is reflected in Gabriele Zimmer's appeal that 'instead of tearing ourselves apart over the degree to which the EU is a neoliberal project, something we mostly agree on, we should ask ourselves if we have a vision of what our Europe should look like' (Zimmer, 2018).

This does not just apply to relations between different left-wing parties, it is also evident within parties. Within the social democratic family, there are increasing calls for parties to realise not just the importance of cooperating and developing common programmes and campaigns, but that they should reform their cross-national communication structure by using the PES to enhance the ability to solve problems and take common policy decisions (Nehmitz, 2017). But judging from the case study contributions to this project, the long-term political process of the left debating, never mind agreeing, on a future vision of the EU integration process that distinguishes itself significantly from the direction of previous decades has only started and, lessons learned, needs to become far more coordinated and potent.

In fairness, to link ideas into an attractive and coherent programme of societal change is a difficult task. It is not made any easier in a political context where majorities are difficult to achieve, while EU treaties and other international agreements rule out any radical action, and where the threats of severe market and banking responses deter the implementation of radically different policy agendas. Understandably, most of the electorate were reluctant to risk economic meltdown and political instability, even in the depths of the crisis.

But this creates a third problem. Parties of the left are not the only ones reacting to the EU and the pressures of globalisation, and other parties found it easier to commandeer the terrain. The centre right was best placed

to promote an agenda emphasising stability and a return to an assumed 'normal', while the populist right could exploit people's fears when faced with economic hardship. Their mantra of what former German Green leader Joschka Fischer calls 'neo-nationalism' (Fischer, 2018) includes a very strong dose of Euroscepticism.

However, our analysis here does not suggest that the left across Europe has moved to a similar Eurosceptic position. The experience of a decade of crisis and the EU's response has undoubtedly made the parties on the European left more critical of significant aspects of the integration process. This corresponds to what Leruth, Startin and Underwood have described as the 'embedding' and 'mainstreaming' of Euroscepticism (2017: 4), and indeed the term 'critical Europeanism' is used in their work (Bourne & Chatzopoulou, 2017). But left parties have clearly not followed the 'hard' Eurosceptic stance of 'outright and unqualified opposition' to the process of European integration (Taggart, 1998: 336). Instead, they have expressed 'soft' Euroscepticism, a 'contingent or qualified opposition' (Taggart 1998: 335) rather than outright rejection.

A number of significant new left-wing analyses emerged during the crisis. These include Thomas Piketty's hugely influential re-analysis of capitalism (2014) and the critiques of inequality put forward by Joseph Stiglitz (2012) and Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). These fed into new analyses among left-wing parties, groups and activists, and indeed much of this discussion was characterised by attempts to find a broad common ground among 'diverse political traditions – green, radical left, liberal' (DiEM25, n.d.). Europe's left was searching for a common understanding of the crisis and an agreement on common policy priorities, characterised by a critical but constructive interpretation of European integration. Their aim was 'to repair the EU' (DiEM25, n.d.).

DiEM25, or the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025, was set up by a number of politicians and activists, including notably the economist and former Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis. They argue that 'the EU will either be democratised or it will disintegrate' (DiEM25, n.d.) and their manifesto calls for a more democratic and decentralised EU and a new European constitution, based on what Varoufakis terms 'decentralised Europeanisation' (Varoufakis et al., 2013: 11–12). A similar initiative was Plan B in Europe, which consisted of two conferences held in 2015, one in Paris and one in Madrid. These called for 'a complete renegotiation of the European treaties' and the need for strong involvement of civil-society movements in developing an alternative left trajectory for EU integration (Plan B in Europe, 2015). Similarly, Thomas Fazi argues that 'the best hope for the citizens and workers of Europe lies in a radical reform of the EU and EMU, not in their rejection' (Fazi, 2014: 164).

From interregnum to an altered Europe

Gramsci made the well-known observation that a 'crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this inter-regnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Hoare & Sperber, 2016: 69). The economic crisis produced a moment of serious challenge and significant opportunity for left-wing political parties in Europe. But rather than seize the moment, the left has struggled to turn the crisis to its advantage. As Keating and McCrone note with reference to one branch of the left family, 'given that capitalism itself appears to be in crisis, and the hegemony of neoliberalism may be coming to an end, it seems strange that social democracy should fail to reap the benefit' (2015: 2). The same could equally be said of the green left and radical left.

   This is because the two traditional approaches of the left to the EU both involve an awkward dilemma. The first option would be akin to renewed Europeanisation. The left should support the idea of the further deepening of the EU, by strengthening its economic governance structures. Elements of this can be seen in the proposals put forward by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017, calling for a qualitative leap in integration (OuestFrance, 2017). Macron had, of course, come from a left of centre background, having been a minister in the previous Socialist Party administration of François Hollande, but had left the PS to form his own En Marche! movement. But these ideas run the risk of simply continuing to accede to a neoliberal European Union and accepting a swathe of policy restrictions. This might have been a necessary or even an acceptable compromise before the crisis, but since 2008 the economic and political discourse has shifted.

   The second option would be for the left to go down the Eurosceptic path, by rejecting the EU as a tool for European integration and the Eurozone as impossible to reform and propose credible alternatives that promote a detailed credible alternative vision of a Lexit Europe. But as Chapter 12 by Storey in this volume has argued, there are obstacles to this. Furthermore, Zimmer warns of the danger of demanding a restart of the EU as this can easily be understood as breaking up EU integration processes. Zimmer argues that this 'would only play into the hands of right-wing nationalists as the vacuum created would lead to the disappearance of social and legal rights ultimately affecting most those weakest parts in society' (Zimmer, 2018). If you break the Humpty Dumpty Union, all the left's men would find it almost impossible to put it back together again in their preferred shape, particularly given the strength of the anti-international and anti-European forces on the right.

   So we return to the third option of alter-Europeanism. This involves keeping the existing European Union but developing a comprehensive programme to alter it. The problem lies in the failure of the left to construct

its own narrative for a new social, political and economic balance in Europe. For the social democratic left, they had been relatively recent converts to neoliberalism, which made it harder for them to undertake another sudden volte-face. The green left struggled to make their environmental agenda heard during the crisis, while the radical left were much more focused on a defensive agenda, trying to protect existing structures rather than promoting new goals or ideals.

In the meantime, the debate is moving on. The economic crisis is very far from finished. The political consequences are only beginning to be felt, and for many the social and economic damage to their lives is still a very real, daily experience. But as we write in 2018, the daily headlines have moved on, to issues of migration and Brexit and Trump and illiberalism. The left therefore needs not only a convincing new agenda for the EU, it needs to connect this effectively to broader issues.

An alter-Europe needs to put forward a programme for three things. First, it needs to present an argument for a reformed, democratic political structure for the EU, with greater democratic governance of the euro being a priority. Second, it needs to set a new policy agenda for the EU, including not just the Eurozone and other economic policies, but also a vision for all the EU's policies, including social policy, foreign policy and environmental policy. Third, it needs to present a strategy by which the left can gain power in order to implement these reforms.

The experience of the European left, across all three left party families, has been quite varied and ranges from electoral rise to collapse. In general, parties of both the radical left and the green left have remained stable or even increased their national shares of vote, though only by limited amounts in most cases. The occasional triumphs, such as that of the Dutch green left in 2017 and the exceptional success of newcomers such as Podemos and SYRIZA, should be noted in particular. But the radical left and green left remain confined to just a few countries, and in most of those they are no more than a marginal political presence.

Social democrats have had a tougher time. Several have suffered serious electoral defeats, notably in Greece, Spain, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany and France. They have held on to power in several countries, though this has been something of a poisoned chalice. When they attain governmental office, it is usually as a junior partner in a right-led coalition, meaning that they end up implementing austerity policies – and thus further alienating core supporters.

For the time being, it appears that most parties on the radical left, in line with parties from the more centre left green and social democratic parties, accept the need to work for a common left future vision of a reformed EMU and EU integration processes. Similarly, Busch et al. (2016: 82) argue not

only that the left has a major role to play in reforming an EU and a Eurozone that has been marred by a decade of crisis, but go even further by arguing that this is inevitable, as 'the EU will only survive, if it adopts the best discourse for the future that allows progressive actors to push for a different model that is Europe based on solidarity' (Busch et al., 2016: 82).

The crisis is far from over. Economic growth is one thing, but the social damage from years of austerity is much more long lasting. And the political fallout is also still developing. The rise of populism and identity politics and the resurgence of the far right represent an ongoing challenge. As we write in 2018, the crisis is in the daily headlines less than before. But it is very far from being resolved or from having played itself out. The analysis in this book suggests that for the left, the transformations triggered by the crisis are only just starting to take effect.

There is a steadily emerging conversation about reform of the EU, encompassing both a rebalancing of the political architecture and a refocusing of the policy agenda. On the political aspect, the main aim is to enhance the democratic legitimacy of the EU; on the policy side, the ideas focus strongly on a rejection of austerity and neoliberalism, and on promoting reform of the EMU and strengthening the social dimension of the EU. However, one significant problem remains. These reform discussions remain strongly at the elite level. In terms of appealing to voters and electorates, the left is still struggling to find a way of selling a vision of another Europe. The left might be starting to generate new ideas, but it is not yet turning that into the hard currency of votes.

Note

1 The term *alter-mondialiste* emerged in France as a positive alternative to the label 'anti-globalisation', which was often inaccurately applied to critics of globalisation. The contention was that these critics are not against greater global connections, they want stronger but better connections, in the sense of being more just, more fair and more equal. Thus, *alter-mondialisme* implies changing the direction of globalisation rather than being against it (see Massiah & Massiah, 2010).

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