



University  
of Glasgow

Tsakatika, M., and Lisi, M. (2013) Zippin' up my boots, goin' back to my roots: Radical left parties in Southern Europe. *South European Society and Politics*, 18 (1). pp. 1-19. ISSN 1360-8746

Copyright © 2013 Taylor and Francis

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/57874/>

Deposited on: 19 July 2013

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

# 'Zippin' up My Boots, Goin' Back to My Roots': Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe

Myrto Tsakatika and Marco Lisi

*Radical left parties actively encourage the participation of their members in internal decision-making and insist on promoting organised links to trade unions and social movements. As a party family, they deviate from what is considered to be the trend in which Western political parties have turned their backs on their social roots. Drawing on the experience of South European radical left parties from the fall of the Berlin Wall until the recent financial crisis, we argue that ideology, electoral incentives, party competition and external events explain the radical left's pronounced emphasis on linkage, while organisational trajectory explains variation within the party family in terms of the linkage strategies pursued.*

*Keywords: Radical Left Parties; Southern Europe; Participatory Linkage; Environmental Linkage; Linkage Strategies; Party Change*

According to Katz and Mair's (1995) influential 'cartel party' thesis, political parties are increasingly orienting their actions towards occupying the state while disengaging from their social roots. It is said that there is no longer a strong incentive for parties to encourage members to take an active role, since the functions they once performed such as party funding and labour-intensive campaigning are now being replaced by state funding and mass media campaigns, respectively. It is likewise argued that parties are confronted with incentives to distance themselves from organisations of civil society, because their appeal is increasingly directed beyond their particular social constituency. Strong and exclusive party links to a small, well-defined range of interest groups carry the risk of alienating other civil society organisations and place excessive constraints on the range of policies that parties can pursue (Kirchheimer 1966). Declining membership figures (Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke 2011) and an overall trend of loosening and pluralisation of party–civil-society ties (Allern & Bale 2012a) are thought to confirm these arguments.

A number of scholars have challenged or qualified the mainstream view that parties are turning their backs on their social roots (Yishai 2001; Caul Kittilson & Scarrow 2003; Allern & Bale 2012b). They have argued that political parties continue to pursue linkage because their electoral stability (Poguntke 2002; Scarrow 2009), legitimacy (Warner 2000, p. 164; Allern 2010) and even—to a certain extent—funding (Pedersen et al. 2004), continue to depend on it. Their research has shown that parties have tended to encourage the active involvement of members (and in some cases sympathisers) by strengthening their rights in candidate and leadership selection (Caul Kittilson & Scarrow 2003; Hazan & Rahat 2010; Cross & Blais 2012) and party policy-making (Gauja 2009). It has also demonstrated that parties have maintained formal ties (Aarts 1995; Poguntke 2002) and, most importantly, enhanced their informal interactions with civil society groups through joint committee meetings, common campaigns and invitations to civil society organisations, whose purpose is to engage them in drawing up party manifestos and key decision-making (Thomas 2001; Poguntke 2006; Allern 2010). It has also been found that parties try to establish new links to social organisations that emerge as a result of social change (Yishai 2001), to create new ancillary structures, such as youth and women's organisations (Poguntke 2002) and to take the initiative to build new external civic organisations (Kitschelt 2006; Verge 2012) in order to target new supporters.

This special issue aims to add to the above voices by examining the linkage strategies of the European radical left party family. Radical left parties have recovered from the collapse of communism (March 2011, p. 1). They have not only remained politically and electorally relevant in European party systems, but also been essential partners in government coalitions (Bale & Dunphy 2011). Contrary to what might be expected on the basis of Katz and Mair's thesis and despite an increasingly common office-seeking orientation, not only have the parties of the European radical left remained committed to their social roots, but there are valid indications that they have prioritised linkage and introduced significant organisational innovations *in order* to pursue the strengthening of ties to their social roots more effectively. Comparative study of radical left parties' distinctive efforts to pursue linkage, as advanced in this special issue, allows us to explore the factors that make it more likely for political parties to prioritise linkage, and consequently to revisit an important aspect of the contemporary theory of party change. We also aim to make a significant contribution to the emerging new research agenda on radical left parties, particularly to the study of their organisational development, social linkages and mobilisation strategy (Bosco 2000; March & Mudde 2005; Della Porta 2007; March 2011; De Waele & Seiler 2012).

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section we present the broad parameters of the research design adopted by the works in this special issue. Drawing on data from the case studies examined in this volume, the third section identifies the instances in which South European radical left parties have launched linkage strategies over the last two decades and sets out to explain why they did so. The fourth section discusses the main findings in terms of how the parties examined have pursued linkage and what

kinds of organisational innovations they have introduced to that effect, focusing on the differences between them. The fifth section examines the relationship between the radical left and civil society during the economic crisis. A final section concludes with a summary and suggestions for further research.

### Linkage in a Crisis Zone

This special issue brings forth original data on the efforts made to strengthen linkages to their social roots since the fall of the Berlin Wall by all relevant radical left parties in Portugal—Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party, PCP) and Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc, BE), Spain—Izquierda Unida (United Left, IU), Italy—Federazione della Sinistra (Left Federation, FDS) and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (Left Ecology and Freedom, SEL), Greece—Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας (Communist Party of Greece, KKE) and Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς της Οικολογίας και των Κοινωνικών Κινήματων (Coalition of the Left, Ecology and Social Movements, SYN)/Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς (Coalition of the Radical Left, SYRIZA)<sup>1</sup> and the Republic of Cyprus—Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζομένου Λαού (Progressive Party of the Working People, AKEL). Given that the FDS and SEL are very recent formations that have yet to compete in national elections, in this article we complement our analysis of the Italian case with data from secondary sources regarding the linkages to civil society of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation Party, PRC) and the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (Party of Italian Communists, PdCI), both relevant parties of the radical left throughout most of the 1990s and 2000s.

The studies in this special issue focus on ‘participatory’ linkage, namely relations between the party leadership and party members (as well as sympathisers in some cases), and ‘environmental’ linkage, i.e. relations between the party and organised groups in civil society. Kay Lawson conceptualised political parties as agencies that forge links between citizens and policy-makers, introducing the notion of ‘participatory’ linkage (Lawson 1980). Parties use participatory linkages to mobilise and involve their members in the political process by channelling the expression and representation of their preferences. Building on Lawson’s work, Schwartz looks at parties as ‘multi-unit’ organisations that are simultaneously engaged in building and maintaining relations among the party subunits and between the party and its external environment (Schwartz 2005). While Lawson’s ‘participatory linkage’ can be conceptualised as one of the most important forms of relations between the party’s subunits, what Schwartz calls ‘environmental linkage’ concerns the relation between the party and groups active in its social environment. Parties, she notes, ‘normally seek to mobilise supporters in terms of demographic or other characteristics, not as indistinguishable voters’ (Schwartz 2005, pp. 38–39). Environmental linkage buttresses one of the essential functions played by political parties, that is, articulating and aggregating interest. It is our understanding that parties’ ties to their social roots are to a large extent captured by these two types of linkage.

Radical left parties in Southern Europe have been selected because they constitute a well-represented and—from a linkage point of view—sufficiently representative sample of this party family in the European context. Radical left parties on the whole remain electorally relevant in Southern Europe (Table 1), which continues to be one of the main areas of European anti-capitalism (March 2011; De Waele & Seiler 2012).

In terms of pre-existing linkages, some of these parties are among the oldest and most established in their respective party systems (AKEL, KKE, PCP) with deep social roots and entrenched practices of democratic centralism. Others have emerged more recently as a consequence of the change that several communist parties have

**Table 1** National Election Results of Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe (1989–2012, %)

	Cyprus	Greece		Italy		Portugal		Spain
	AKEL	KKE	SYN	PRC	PdCI	PCP	BE	IU
1989		13.1						9.1
1989		11.0						
1990		10.3						
1991	30.6					8.8		
1992				5.6				
1993		4.5	2.9					9.5
1994				6.1				
1995						8.6		
1996	33.0	5.6	5.1	8.6				10.5
1999						9.0	2.4	
2000		5.5	3.2					5.4
2001	34.7			5.0	1.7			
2002						6.9	2.7	
2004		5.9	3.3					4.9
2005						7.5	6.3	
2006	31.1			5.8	2.3			
2007		8.2	5.0					
2008				3.1				3.8
2009		7.5	4.6			7.9	9.8	
2011	32.7					7.9	5.2	6.9
2012		8.5	16.8					
2012		4.5	26.7					
Average	32.4	7.7	8.5	5.7	2.0	8.1	5.3	7.2
Total radical left	32.4	13.8		6.4		11.9		7.2

*Sources:* Cyprus: [www.parties-and-elections.de](http://www.parties-and-elections.de); Greece: Greek Ministry of the Interior; Italy: [www.parties-and-elections.de](http://www.parties-and-elections.de); Portugal: Comissão Nacional de Eleições (National Electoral Commission); Spain: Spanish Ministry of Interior and [www.historiaelectoral.com](http://www.historiaelectoral.com).

*Notes:* The average for the total left in Greece does not include the vote obtained by Δημοκρατική Αριστερά (Democratic Left, DL) in the 2012 election. For the 2008 Italian election we consider the vote for the coalition Sinistra Arcobaleno (Rainbow Left, SA). The FDS and SEL will compete for the first time in the 2013 Italian national election.

experienced over the last two decades. This is the case of 'renewer' communist parties in Italy, Spain and Greece (PRC, IU, SYN) which implemented significant ideological and organisational transformations after (or just before) the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>2</sup> Finally, BE and SEL constitute very recent formations with scant organisational roots and strong reliance on 'new politics' issues and the new social media for their interaction with civil society.

The timeframe adopted spans two decades and is delimited by two major events: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the advent of the 2008–12 global economic crisis. Linkage strategies are arduous enterprises whose study requires that we take a long-term view in order to trace their evolution. As seen in the chapters in this special issue, the linkage strategies that parties pursue are usually explicitly launched at a certain point in time—most often in the context of a party conference—as public statements of parties' willingness to reconnect to their grassroots. These statements go hand in hand with the introduction of organisational reforms that parties undertake in order to be able to pursue linkage more effectively. Two decades are a sufficient period of time over which the development of such strategies can be observed.

As to the events that frame the specific time period selected, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a crucial turning point for the parties of the radical left, which—along with their strategy, programmatic offer and organisation—is likely to have rendered them prone to reconsidering their links to grassroots (March 2011). The current economic crisis seems to be marking another crucial turning point in the radical left parties' approach to linkage, given the extent of social mobilisation that the harsh austerity policies have generated. Nowhere are these latest developments more pronounced than in Southern Europe. However, making sense of radical left parties' attempts to enhance linkage to individuals and groups over the last few years, when the economic crisis hit the region, will only be possible against the background of the linkage strategies that radical left parties have developed over the past two decades.

### **The Importance of Social Roots: Why Radical Left Parties Launch Linkage Strategies**

The country case studies in this special issue demonstrate that all South European radical left parties have initiated linkage strategies over the period studied (Table 2). Linkage strategies have been launched in the context of a founding party congress (PRC in 1991, PdCI in 1998, BE in 1999, FDS and SEL in 2008, SYRIZA in 2012), a re-founding congress (AKEL 1993, IU 2010) or a congress that embeds a party in the context of a stable political coalition with other usually much smaller parties, groups, movements and individuals of the radical left (IU in 1987, SYRIZA in 2001). In other cases linkage strategies have been initiated in the context of a party joining a broader social platform such as the Social Forum (PCP in 2003) or founding a new ancillary organisation (KKE in 1999). At this point, the objection might be made that it is very difficult to establish exactly when a party decides to initiate a new attempt to pursue linkage. It is indeed very likely that the decision has been taken in advance and is only

**Table 2** Linkage Strategies Launched by South European Radical Left Parties (1987–2012)

	Leninist parties				'Renewer' parties				New parties	
	AKEL	KKE	PCP	PdCI	SYN/SYRIZA	PRC	FDS	IU	BE	SEL
1987			x					x		
1989										
1991						x				
1993	x									
1998				x						
1999		x	x			x		x	x	
2001					x					
2003			x							
2008							x			x
2010								x		
2011			x						x	
2012		x			x		x			

publicly announced in a congress or expressed in a particular party initiative. Nonetheless, we will take these key events as relatively reliable approximations. They are significant political events that radical left parties deliberately use in order to signal that they have decided to 'return to grassroots'.

With regard to the question of why radical left parties in Southern Europe launch linkage strategies, four patterns become apparent from the comparative analysis of the case studies in this special issue. These patterns point to specific factors that are likely to be decisive.

The first pattern that emerges from our case studies is that *all* the radical left parties examined have enhanced their efforts to reach out to their social roots over the past two decades. This implies that linkage is important to the party family as a whole by virtue of its ideology. In historical terms, communist parties pursued the tight encapsulation of members and the development of strong and wide organisational ties to specific segments of civil society in order to form 'counter-societies' (Kriegel 1972). The pursuit of strong links to their grassroots was closely related to their need to rely on extra-institutional mobilisation, given their exclusion from and their suspicion of the state apparatus. It was equally related to their ideology and organisational philosophy, according to which the very aim of the party was to unite and direct the class struggle of the proletariat (Lenin [1902] 1963). All radical left parties have inherited this legacy which emphasises the importance of social roots not only in their discourse but also as a central element of their internal functioning.

This ideological appeal has been an important asset for radical left parties in order to mobilise and encapsulate specific groups through their organisations. In other words, despite their increasingly office-seeking orientation, radical left parties remain parties for which ideological consistency is of paramount importance (Charalambous, in press) and whose appeal continues to make reference to championing the interests and values of a particular social constituency (Allern 2010, p. 295). As Lipset and

Rokkan have shown (1967, pp. 1–64), strengthening the ideological and organisational bonds between radical left parties and ‘their’ social constituency enhances party legitimacy by reinforcing partisan alignments and members’ identification. Pursuing linkage to citizens and organised groups that share the party’s goals, values and ideas is thus a stable, long-term priority for radical left parties as a party family insofar as ideological consistency and constituency representation remain central to their legitimacy. Despite the claim made by scholars that by the late 1980s radical left parties had distanced themselves from civil society (Lazar 1988), the articles in this special issue demonstrate that they continue to attempt to maintain proximity to their social roots and to build their appeal on specific ‘natural collectivities’.

The second pattern that can be discerned can be associated with the fact that a certain class of external events seems to play some part in ‘triggering’ radical left parties’ prioritisation of linkage. Most of the instances we have identified when radical left parties have initiated linkage strategies took place in the late 1990s after the rise of the ‘global justice movement’ (GJM) (SYN, KKE, BE, PCP, PRC) and/or very recently, after the sovereign debt crisis in 2010–11 (SYRIZA, KKE, IU, BE, PCP). The rise of the GJM was the first international event that brought the left’s agenda to the fore in a decade, with at least some radical left parties attempting to update and reconsider that agenda from a global point of view (Della Porta 2007). The economic crisis has brought the critique of the policies of austerity to the fore and is forcing the radical left to put forth its own anti-neoliberal agenda. In both cases, the high levels of social protest that ensued rendered the pursuit of linkage to the mobilised sectors a challenge and an opportunity for the South European radical left. This should not come as a surprise to party scholars: parties may be conservative organisations but they are able to adapt to transformations in their external environment by introducing organisational change (Harmel & Janda 1994; Panebianco 1988). Such change may include innovation in the way parties organise linkage to their social roots. Clearly, the events that affect radical left parties’ linkage strategy are the ones that resonate with key features of their ideology. Their continued emphasis on policy-seeking and ideology means that radical left parties’ legitimacy is affected by external events that question, confirm or highlight their core principles and agenda. When radical left parties’ legitimacy is in question as a result of such events, they seem to re-emphasise their links to their grassroots.

A third significant pattern can be associated with parties’ responses to electoral incentives in the national political arena. Some cases in our sample can be explained in terms of party responses to electoral downturns. In particular, in the case of the PCP and IU in the late 1980s, as well as SYN and the KKE in the late 1990s, the parties of the radical left reacted to poor electoral performance by introducing new forms of linkage and relying on new forms of extra-parliamentary mobilisation. Parties’ capacity to control their environment and stabilise influence over their ‘social turf’ continues to be a key to their survival (Panebianco 1988). Even if in the short term radical left parties do not necessarily expect a renewed emphasis on linkage to result in an



immediate trade-off in votes (Allern 2010), they can be expected to signal their prioritisation of linkage after a particularly significant loss of votes. This may be thought of not so much as a knee-jerk reaction and more as a first step in a long-term strategy whereby deepening bonds with the party grassroots will help translate symbolic change into electoral gains.

A fourth and final pattern that can shed light on the question of why radical left parties launch linkage strategies is discernible in their responses to changes in national party competition. In Portugal, the PCP attempted to differentiate its ties to civil society, particularly in terms of revisiting its environmental linkage strategy, in order to prevent the further electoral advance of BE at its own expense at the turn of the twenty-first century. In much the same way, the Cypriot AKEL had modified its participatory linkages in the early 1990s in order to prevent membership defection and the electoral rise of a ‘renewer’ competitor, the *Ανανεωτικό Δημοκρατικό Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα* (Renewalist Democratic Socialist Movement, ADISOK). Moreover, newer radical left parties with weak social roots can be expected to be more vulnerable to the lack of organisational resources than established ones (Kitschelt 2006). The struggle for the mobilisation of new sectors and the attempt to appeal to groups with previous loyalties will lead newer parties to adopt a more aggressive, competitive strategy. This was the case with the emergence of the BE in 1999, as well as with SEL and FDS in 2008. In contrast to new parties, established radical left parties with traditional ties to a particular constituency and particular groups may take those links for granted, neglecting the pursuit of linkage.

The tendency to strengthen linkage when adopting or returning to an oppositional role is also related to the radical left parties’ competitive strategy. In some of the cases studied in this volume, it seems that when radical left parties pursue office they tend to de-emphasise linkage, or at least not stress it to the same extent as when they follow an oppositional strategy. This pattern is discernible in the trajectories of both parties of the Greek left: SYN and the KKE neglected linkage over most of the 1990s, when they prioritised office-seeking, but they re-emphasised linkage when their strategy became oppositional and protest oriented. In a similar vein, the PRC prioritised linkage with social movements while taking an oppositional role, but was less able to pursue these links consistently when the party decided to participate in the centre-left coalition government headed by Romano Prodi in 2006. This pattern is also detectable in party attitudes towards linkage over the current economic crisis. The case studies in this special issue reveal a distinction between AKEL (a party in charge of a government forced to implement severe austerity measures) and SEL (which seeks participation in a future centre-left coalition), on the one hand, and the radical left parties that are in opposition, on the other one. While the latter have all reinvigorated their linkage strategies and actively tried to link to the new actors that have arisen out of Southern Europe’s new politics of protest, the former have found themselves in fairly awkward positions with regard to linkage (see the section on the financial crisis below).

To summarise, all radical left parties in Southern Europe have engaged at least once in launching linkage strategies over the last two decades. In some cases this can be

attributed to responses to external events, electoral incentives or changes in the dynamics of party competition. In all cases, as we argued, it is first and foremost their ideological legacy which dictates their constant concern with linkage. It is part and parcel of their ideology that they must be seen to represent the interests, ideas and values of a particular constituency. Failing to do so would damage their legitimacy.

### **Participatory and Environmental Linkages of the South European Radical Left**

As shown in the previous section, all of the parties studied in the chapters of this volume have launched explicit linkage strategies over the past two decades. In all cases—with the exception of the PCP—this has been marked by the introduction of organisational innovations that would enable them to pursue participatory and/or environmental linkage more effectively (Table 3). This section demonstrates that there are persistent differences among radical left parties in Southern Europe with regard to the way they pursue linkage, mirrored in distinct types of organisational innovation. Divergence, it will be argued, can be explained in terms of party legacy and organisational trajectory (Allern 2010; Verge 2012).

With regard to participatory linkage, AKEL, the KKE and the PCP continue to operate on the principle that the party leadership should remain all powerful vis-à-vis party members, while implementing—to varying degrees—internal change aimed at retaining the encapsulation of members and building or maintaining a compact and self-contained subculture. Similarly, the PdCI, founded in 1998 as a minority ‘orthodox’ split from the ‘movementist’ PRC, reproduced the traditional mass party structure based on democratic centralism (Bordandini & Di Virgilio 2007). Since the late 1990s, the KKE has undergone a profound ‘re-bolshevisation’ in terms of its reinstatement of the organisational principles of democratic centralism (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou, this volume). AKEL experienced a limited internal reorganisation in the early 1990s which allowed its members greater participation rights, while maintaining a veto for key decisions at the higher echelons of the party. The aim was to strengthen the new leadership both within and outside the party, increasing its legitimacy through the implementation of more democratic rules (Charalambous & Christophorou, this volume). The PCP, on the other hand, has not introduced any significant changes in the way it exercises participatory linkage over the democratic period and has thus continued to abide by the principles of democratic centralism, despite an alarming number of dissidents leaving the party (Jalali & Lisi 2012).

IU, BE, SYN/SYRIZA and PRC (as well as FDS and SEL) have implemented significant innovations in the way they organise the participation of their members and in the decision-making rights they allocate to members and supporters. Their aim has been to stimulate bottom-up participation of members and achieve greater involvement of supporters. This was particularly evident in the case of PRC, which broke with the mass party tradition based on the active role of party members and favoured the participation of sympathisers and less committed militants. The new organisational structure not only accepted internal dissent and distinct political

**Table 3** Innovations Associated with Linkage Strategies (1987–2012)

	Participatory linkage	Environmental linkage
AKEL	Increased members' rights in candidate selection	Introducing recognisable candidates from civil society organisations
KKE	'Re-bolshevisation', re-structuring cells on a sectoral basis	Establishment of new ancillary trade union, 'popular committees'
PCP	No significant changes	Pursuit of links to social forum (SF)
PdCI	No significant changes	Establishing links to trade unions and SF
SYN/SYRIZA	Members' referendum for selecting MEP (member of the European Parliament) candidates	Left coalition, SF, SYN Youth engagement with new social movements, support for solidarity initiatives
PRC	Party 'circles' and drawing of manifestos with participation of both members and sympathisers	Establishing links to social movements (SM), SF, emphasis on extra-parliamentary mobilisation, links to trade unions
FDS	'Houses of the left', 'confederal' structure	No significant changes
IU	Members' participation in drawing up manifestos ( <i>areas</i> ), primaries	Left coalition, SF, social platforms
BE	No formal leadership, rotation in office	SF, active support of SM in the parliamentary arena; high levels of membership/leadership overlap with SM
SEL	'Nichi's factories'	New types of mobilisation ('mail bombing', 'flash mobs')

traditions, but also aimed to build a network with social groups through forms of participatory democracy—for instance, in the elaboration of party manifestos (De Nardis 2005). This development can also be seen in IU's statutory provision for candidate selection primaries and its thematic *áreas* aimed at opening up party policy-making to all members, non-members and social movements (described by Ramiro and Verge, this volume), both foundational principles of IU from the late 1980s.

Likewise, SYN members' referenda to establish the order of candidates for the European Parliament (EP) on the party lists, an innovation introduced in 1992 (Tsakatika 2010), and the BE's application since 1999 of principles of 'polyarchic' leadership, MPs' rotation and intra-party democracy serve the same purpose. The openness of both FDS and SEL in terms of policy-making input, i.e. through the local 'Houses of the Left',<sup>5</sup> thematic fora and referenda as well as the SEL leader's online support circles (Fabbriche di Nichi), is a more recent expression of the same imperative of empowering party members. In practice, SEL seems to be more effective in implementing the new forms of participatory linkage than FDS, although the impetus towards greater openness has diminished during the Monti government (see below). New modes of mobilisation have also been adopted as part of broadening individual members' repertoire of participation beyond traditional party structures, involving practices such as 'mail-bombing' and 'flash mobs' (Bordandini, this volume). Furthermore, some of these parties have been actively encouraging the politicisation of their younger cohorts through novel channels, for instance by supporting their involvement in new social movements and solidarity initiatives, as shown by SYN Youth in Greece and the BE in Portugal. For all six parties, empowering members in party decision-making has been a genuine aim but in practice it has often encountered obstacles due to the overwhelming strength of factions (SYN, IU, BE, PRC, FDS) or the leadership (BE, SEL).

Moving on to environmental linkage, AKEL, the PCP, the KKE and the PdCI have aimed to guide civil society organisations from the top down through their ancillary organisations, to which they lay exclusive claim; they follow the traditional 'transmission belt' model associated with parties based on the Leninist model, which sees the party as a political and intellectual vanguard meant to educate the masses (Table 4). Their primary focus is on trade unions, where the party by and large directs the political aims and the mobilisation strategy of its ancillary organisations. AKEL, the KKE and the PCP are all highly successful in maintaining formal or quasi-formal, stable and enduring ties to the Παγκύπρια Εργατική Ομοσπονδία (Pan-Cyprian Labour Federation, PEO), the Πανεργατικό Αγωνιστικό Μέτωπο (All Workers Militant Front, PAME) and the Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (General Confederation of Portuguese Workers, CGTP), respectively. The PdCI had also sought to establish strong organisational ties to the largest Italian trade union, the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian General Confederation of Labour, CGIL), with limited success.

AKEL is singular in this respect among current European radical left parties, as it not only dominates the trade union movement but also maintains an extraordinary

**Table 4** Participatory and Environmental Linkage

	Participatory linkage				Environmental linkage				
	Direction	Strength	Range	Direction	Strength	Range	Direction	Strength	Range
<i>Leninist parties</i>									
AKEL	Top-down/DC	High	Members	Top-down	High	Broad and exclusive	Top-down	High	Broad and exclusive
KKE	Top-down/DC	High	Members	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs
PCP	Top-down/DC	High	Members	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs
PdCI	Top-down/DC	High	Members	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs	Top-down	High	Exclusive, TUs
<i>'Renewer' parties</i>									
SYN/SYRIZA	Bottom-up	Moderate	Members	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs
PRC	Bottom-up	Moderate	Members/supporters	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs
FDS	Bottom-up	Moderate	Members/supporters	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs
IU	Bottom-up	Moderate	Members/supporters	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs	Mutual	Moderate/informal	Broad, SMs + TUs
<i>New parties</i>									
BE	Bottom-up	Moderate/loose	Members/supporters	Mutual	Moderate – weak/informal	Privileged, SMs	Mutual	Moderate – weak/informal	Privileged, SMs
SEL	Bottom-up/e-democracy	Loose	Members/supporters	Mutual	Moderate – weak/informal	Broad and non-exclusive	Mutual	Moderate – weak/informal	Broad and non-exclusive

Note: DC = democratic centralism; TU = trade union; SM = social movement.

network of other ancillary organisations within civil society organisations that reach every nook and cranny of Cypriot society, including youth and women's associations, cultural and athletic activities, farmers' organisations and the business sector. It has also reached out to sectors of civil society, such as environmental NGOs, which are to be found outside the range of its own ancillary structures. Over the last decade the KKE has restructured its entire party organisation in order to accommodate the needs of its ancillary trade union, PAME, while remaining extremely critical of social movements, such as the GJM, over which it has no influence. As shown by Lisi (this volume), the PCP has also prioritised its links to the main trade union. It did take small and reluctant steps towards approaching the new social movements in the early 2000s, but only when it became clear that its failure to engage with them would benefit its main competitor. The election in 2012 of a former member of the PCP's Central Committee as the new secretary-general of the CGTP confirmed the continued influence of the party over the trade union movement. All three parties generally favour more traditional modes of mobilisation, such as strikes and mass demonstrations, and tend to distrust or to rely little on social movements or activist practices.

The pioneering experience of the PRC was of the utmost importance for the evolution of environmental linkage between South European radical left parties and the new social movements. In this respect, the PRC model influenced all the parties examined in this special issue, with the exception of the KKE, the PCP and AKEL. In accordance with the organisational transformation and ideological renewal implemented after the IV Congress (1999), the PRC aimed to break with the democratic centralist tradition, establishing organic, strong, less exclusive and more mutual ties to social movements and independent trade unions (*comitati di base*), 'internalising' the movement experience and reinvigorating its political action and mobilisation practices (De Nardis 2005; Bordandini & Di Virgilio 2007).

Drawing on the PRC model, environmental linkage between SYN, IU, BE, FDS, SEL and the new social movements has since mostly taken place informally through loose leadership and membership overlap and in the case of SYN/SYRIZA through the establishment of a connective role for social solidarity initiatives or by providing a bridge that links the movements together. These ties are also used to further parties' aims of recruiting cadres and integrating members: they may be seen as a 'functional equivalent' or substitute for the mass party subculture. Radical left parties' links to social movements may be mostly informal but, contrary to what some scholars assume (Poguntke 2002), they are not necessarily weak. They are often enduring despite variation in levels of social movement mobilisation over time. BE, SYN, IU, FDS and SEL (as well as the PRC before them) adopt, articulate and champion the 'new politics' claims of these movements in the political arena. They gain in terms of legitimacy by presenting themselves to the electorate as the social movements' privileged and reliable allies.

More formal interactions between these parties and the social movements have also been advanced through the coalition strategy (IU, SYRIZA) and participation in social

platforms alongside other organisations of civil society such as (but not exclusively) the national social fora (BE, SYN, IU and PRC in the past). This change was related to a shift in mobilisation strategy, aiming to broaden participation to non-members ('independents') and to institutionalise cooptation of friendly civic organisations.

With the exception of SEL, which according to its delegates does not look for close or exclusive ties to particular trade unions (despite promoting the unity of the trade union movement in Italy), all the parties examined pursue preferential links with trade unions, alongside their commitment to develop and maintain links to new social movements. While SYN has gone down the route of setting up its own rudimentary collateral organisation in the labour movement and the FDS has built privileged links to the CGIL, the IU and BE have preferred to rely more on membership and cadre overlap in the unions closest to them, the now fully independent *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers' Commissions, CCOO) in Spain and the PCP-dominated CGTP in Portugal, respectively. However, newer parties such as BE have experienced considerable difficulty in developing links to established labour organisations. BE, SYN and SEL (as well as the PRC before them) are open to direct collaboration with base-level labour committees that are not necessarily part of the official trade union confederations.

With regard to the direction (Duverger [1951] 1964), strength and exclusivity of linkage (Allern 2010), our findings show that there is considerable variation in the way party linkages are pursued within the radical left party family (Table 4). On the one hand, parties adhering to the Leninist tradition—such as AKEL, the KKE, the PCP and the PdCI—have established top-down linkages with their members and civil society organisations, with strong and exclusive ties. On the other hand, 'renewer' and newer parties have preferred mutual, looser and less exclusive links with organised groups. They have promoted 'new politics' issues and the bottom-up participation of their members and supporters. Although they have attempted to build strong ties with civil society and have often introduced marked organisational innovations, in practice the informal character of this relationship has led to weaker and less stable links than those developed by democratic centralist parties. Overall, these results confirm the importance of the organisational trajectory on the type of linkages pursued by radical left parties.

### **Linkage in the Financial Crisis: The Radical Left Divided?**

The adverse social effects of the recent economic crisis have triggered high levels of civil society mobilisation against the South European governing parties, constrained to apply painful austerity measures and structural reforms. The factors that were identified in the previous sections as explaining why (ideology, external events, electoral incentives and party competition) and how (history and organisational trajectory) radical left parties pursue participatory and environmental linkage go a long way towards explaining their responses over the crisis period.

AKEL is the only radical left party in Europe that is currently in charge of government under crisis conditions. It finds itself constrained to implement austerity

measures and extensive structural reforms under pressure from markets, credit rating agencies and EU fiscal norms as much as other governments in the region. AKEL seems to be using its linkages to civil society organisations to pacify the wave of social protest that could potentially arise, as noted by Charalambous and Christophorou (this volume).

The Italian case highlights the fact that, in addition to government incumbency, an office-seeking strategy may also limit the mobilisation potential of the radical left. While FDS has displayed a strong opposition to the Monti government, contesting not only the austerity measures but also labour and pension reforms, liberalisation policies and the dismantlement of the public sector, SEL has adopted a more moderate position given a prospective alliance with the main centre-left party, Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD). Despite its (inevitable) reliance on extra-parliamentary mobilisation, SEL has agreed to sign an agreement with the PD for the next general elections (scheduled for spring 2013). This has caused some disgruntlement within the party, which demonstrates the difficulties involved in combining office- and policy-seeking objectives.

Radical left parties in Greece, Spain and Portugal have put up strong opposition to government measures and have taken to the streets alongside trade unions and social movements. IU is supportive of strike action organised by the main trade unions, but seems to be having trouble connecting to the social movements that have emerged in response to the crisis. Despite the fact that there was a higher proportion of IU members among participants in the Indignados (Indignants) movement<sup>3</sup> than of members of other parties (Martín 2012), the anti-party character of the movement and the wait-and-see strategy adopted by the IU leadership have been obstacles to the IU assuming a leading role in the mobilisation of civil society, even in times of crisis.<sup>4</sup>

The BE and SYN/SYRIZA are involved in social mobilisation, supporting the new social movements, activist practices and solidarity initiatives such as the Indignados that have arisen in response to cuts and labour reforms, articulating their claims in the political sphere and pursuing a mutual partnership with them. On the other hand, the PCP and the KKE have put all their weight behind trade union protests and strikes and tried to steer popular mobilisation through their ancillary organisations. They have not connected to the new social movements, the KKE going as far as to reject them as little more than a distraction from the main aims of the class struggle. While in Portugal radical left parties are finding it difficult to connect to new social movements because, much like in Spain, they are confronting generalised attitudes of scepticism and anti-partyism, the Greek radical left is facing a completely different situation. The June 2012 elections brought about an overhaul of the Greek political system and system of interest representation, SYRIZA being the main beneficiary in terms of votes, and individual supporters and trade unionists (from the broader centre-left) joining its ranks en masse. Tsakatika and Eleftheriou (this volume) argue that SYRIZA's internal pluralism and unitary approach to environmental linkage have strengthened its legitimacy and credibility and given it a clear advantage over its longstanding competitor, the KKE.



## Conclusions

The studies of South European radical left parties' linkages which populate this special issue have not confirmed the claim that parties are turning their backs on their members and organised groups. On the contrary, findings add to the comparative literature that stresses the importance parties attribute to prioritising these links. From a comparative perspective, ideology emerges as a key factor in explaining the extent to which parties prioritise linkage. Despite profound differences within the party family, all radical left parties pursue linkage because this is part of their ideological core and very *raison d'être*. Moreover, they have pursued linkage in ways that have resonated with their legacy, introducing changes with the aim of maintaining or reinforcing their political identities, as well as their normative conception of democracy. This finding indicates that Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage-based approach may well continue to be a relevant lens with which to assess linkage, and the comparative study of linkage across party families a fruitful pursuit if we wish to make sense of variation. Further research could explore, for instance, the possibility that party families such as the Greens and the extreme right whose ideology also emphasises ties to the grassroots are as inclined to pursue linkage as the radical left party family.

Our findings only partially confirm the general trends in the evolution of European parties' participatory and environmental linkages, involving, respectively, the trend towards internal party democratisation and the trend towards the establishment of looser and broader links between political parties and organisations of civil society. While democratic centralist parties in Southern Europe (PCP, KKE, AKEL) deviate from the trend of allocating greater decision-making rights to members, 'renewer' and newer parties converge, as they have a strong commitment to grassroots' participation and intra-party democracy. In terms of environmental linkage, the Leninist parties remain vanguardist and thus deviate from the general trend that sees the rise of more informal and less exclusive links. Developments in SEL, FDS, BE, SYN/SYRIZA and IU demonstrate that these parties do attempt to relate on a more mutual basis to a multitude of groups and introduce important organisational innovations that reinforce the role of parties as 'receivers' rather than 'transmitters' (Katz & Mair 2012). However, 'renewer' and newer parties of the South European radical left still generally prefer to maintain strong (though informal) ties to a limited number of groups, namely those they see as more representative of, or whose interests they interpret as being akin to, those of their social constituencies. They aim to be seen as the privileged political 'representatives' of social movements and trade unions rather than simply one of the latter's political contacts. Further comparative research is required to explore whether these findings can be generalised to radical left parties in other countries in Europe and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Luke March, Donatella Della Porta, André Freire, Manos Matsaganis and the editors of *South European Society and Politics* for valuable comments on previous drafts.

Myrto Tsakatika would like to acknowledge financial support from the Caledonian Research Foundation which assisted in the completion of this project.

## Notes

- [1] SYRIZA is a political coalition between SYN and a number of small groups, social movements and parties of the Greek extra-parliamentary left which was forged in 2001, remained an electoral coalition between 2004 and 2012 and was transformed into a unified party on the eve of the June 2012 legislative elections.
- [2] With the term ‘renewer’ communist parties we emphasise the organisational changes that these parties have undertaken since the collapse of communism. Therefore, our classification does not follow the distinction between ‘conservative’ and ‘reform’ communist parties elaborated by March (2011, pp. 16–19), which is based mainly on the ideological evolution of this party family.
- [3] The Indignados movement, initiated by Spanish protestors in Madrid on 14 May 2011, rapidly spread to Greece and other European countries. It demanded the reversal of austerity policies, and direct democracy. Their protest has involved mass demonstrations and open assemblies in central squares of large urban centres.
- [4] We would like to thank Luis Ramiro and Tània Verge on this point.
- [5] The ‘Houses of the Left’ were local structures with the aim to gather contributions from civil society and coordinate and mobilise different types of associations and organisations, as well as underprivileged social groups (immigrants, young, evicted, etc.). They emerged with the birth of the Rainbow Left and then recognised in the FDS’ statutes as a central component of its organisation.

## References

- Aarts, K. (1995) ‘Intermediate organizations and interest representation’, in *Citizens and the State*, eds H.-D. Klingemann & D. Fuchs, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 227–257.
- Allern, E. H. (2010) *Political Parties and Interest Groups in Norway*, ECPR Press, London.
- Allern, E. H. & Bale, T. (2012a) ‘Political parties and interest groups: disentangling complex relationships’, *Party Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 7–25.
- Allern, E. H. & Bale, T. (2012b) ‘Conclusion: qualifying the common wisdom’, *Party Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 99–106.
- Bale, T. & Dunphy, R. (2011) ‘In from the cold? Left parties and government involvement since 1989’, *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 269–291.
- Bordandini, P. & Di Virgilio, A. (2007) ‘Partito dei Comunisti Italiani. Ritratto di un partito di nicchia’, *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 261–296.
- Bosco, A. (2000) *Comunisti. Trasformazioni di partito in Italia, Spagna e Portogallo*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Caul Kittilson, M. & Scarrow, S. E. (2003) ‘Political parties and the rhetoric and realities of democratization’, in *Democracy Transformed? Expanding Political Opportunities in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, eds B. E. Cain, R. J. Dalton & S. E. Scarrow, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 59–80.
- Cross, W. & Blais, A. (2012) ‘Who selects the party leader?’, *Party Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 127–150.
- Charalambous, G. (in press) *European Integration and the Communist Dilemma. Communist Party Responses to Europe in Greece, Cyprus and Italy*, Ashgate, Farnham.
- Della Porta, D. (ed.) (2007) *The Global Justice Movement: Cross-National and Transnational Perspectives*, Paradigm, Boulder, CO.

- De Nardis, F. (2005) 'Sinistra in movimento. La Rifondazione Comunista dalla resistenza globale al governo di alternativa', *Quaderni di Scienza Politica*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 409–455.
- De Waele, J. M. & Seiler, D. L. (eds) (2012) *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, Economica, Paris.
- Duverger, M. ([1951] 1964) *Political Parties*, 3rd edn, Methuen, London.
- Gauja, A. (2009) 'Internal party democracy and policy formulation: rationales, trends and relevance', paper presented at the European Consortium on Political Research joint sessions, 14–19 April 2009, Lisbon.
- Harmel, R. & Janda, K. (1994) 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 259–287.
- Hazan, R. Y. & Rahat, G. (2010) *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and Their Political Consequences*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Katz, R. S. & Mair, P. (1995) 'Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party', *Party Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 5–28.
- Katz, R. S. & Mair, P. (2012) 'Parties, interest groups and cartels: a comment', *Party Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 107–111.
- Kirchheimer, O. (1966) 'The transformation of the West European party systems', in *Political Parties and Political Development*, eds J. LaPalombara & M. Weiner, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pp. 177–200.
- Kitschelt, H. (2006) 'Movement parties', in *Handbook of Party Politics*, eds R. Katz & W. Crotty, Sage, London, pp. 278–290.
- Kriegel, A. (1972) *The French Communists: Profile of a People*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Jalali, C. & Lisi, M. (2012) 'Quand le changement semble dangereux: l'évolution du Parti communiste portugais', in *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, eds J. M. De Waele & D. L. Seiler, Economica, Paris, pp. 180–204.
- Lawson, K. (1980) 'Political parties and linkage', in *Political Parties and Linkage: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. K. Lawson, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 3–24.
- Lazar, M. (1988) 'Communism in Western Europe in the 1980s', *Journal of Communist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 243–257.
- Lenin, V. I. ([1902] 1963) *What Is to Be Done?* Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Lipset, S. M. & Rokkan, S. (eds) (1967) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, Free Press, New York.
- March, L. (2011) *Radical Left Parties in Contemporary Europe*, Routledge, London.
- March, L. & Mudde, C. (2005) 'What's left of the radical left? The European radical left since 1989: decline and mutation', *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 23–49.
- Martín, I. (2012) 'Political disaffection revisited: the *Indignant* movement in Spain, or a different way of doing politics', paper presented at the conference 'Voting and Protesting in Europe since 2008', Georgetown University, Washington, 17–18 April
- Panbianco, A. (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pedersen, K., Bille, L., Buch, R., Elklit, J., Hansen, B. & Nielsen, H. J. (2004) 'Sleeping or active partners? Danish party members at the turn of the millennium', *Party Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 367–383.
- Poguntke, T. (2002) 'Parties without firm social roots? Party organizational linkage', in *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges*, eds K. Luther & F. Müller-Rommel, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 43–62.
- Poguntke, T. (2006) 'Political parties and other organizations', in *Handbook of Party Politics*, eds R. Katz & W. Crotty, Sage, London, pp. 396–405.
- Scarrow, S. (2009) 'Political activism and party members', in *Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour*, eds R. J. Dalton & H. P. Klingemann, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 636–654.

- Schwartz, M. A. (2005) 'Linkage processes in party networks', in *Political Parties and Political Systems: the Concept of Linkage Revisited*, eds A. Römmele, D. M. Farrell & P. Ignazi, Praeger, Westport, CT, pp. 37–60.
- Thomas, C. (ed.) (2001) *Political Parties and Interest Groups. Shaping Democratic Governance*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO.
- Tsakatika, M. (2010) 'Bloco de Esquerda and Synaspismos on European Integration: organization, strategy, ideology', paper presented at the 60th PSA Conference, University of Edinburgh, 29 March.
- Van Biezen, I., Mair, P. & Poguntke, T. (2011) 'Going, going . . . gone? Party membership in the 21st century', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 24–56.
- Verge, T. (2012) 'Party strategies towards civil society in new democracies: the Spanish case', *Party Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 45–60.
- Warner, C. (2000) *Confessions of an Interest Group. The Catholic Church and Political Parties in Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Yishai, Y. (2001) *Land of Paradoxes. Interest Politics in Israel*, SUNY Press, Albany.

**Myrto Tsakatika** (PhD Essex) is a Lecturer in Politics at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow. Her research interests lie in European Union and South European politics. Her latest publications appeared in international peer reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy and Europe–Asia Studies*.

**Marco Lisi** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Studies, Universidade Nova of Lisbon. He has published two books on Portuguese political parties and several articles on political parties and electoral behaviour in international journals such as *West European Politics*, *South European Society and Politics* and *Representation*.