Red Europe Versus No Europe?

The Impact Of The Economic Crisis On Radical Left Voting

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Abstract: Research has shown that radical left parties are likely to be more Eurosceptic than their moderate counterparts, but that radical left voters are not directly influenced by Euroscepticism. However, evidence in that domain remains scarce and the current economic crisis is likely to have changed this voting pattern, due to the Europeanization of traditional left-wing issues, such as social policy cuts and unemployment policies. We thus expect the crisis to have contributed to the politicization of the European issue for many left-wing voters.

This paper investigates the impact of the economic crisis on radical left voting in the EU: to what extent is radical left voting driven by economic evaluations and does the European issue mediate this relationship? Are radical left parties, opposed to a neoliberal EU, more likely to have benefited from the crisis than other parties?

Using the European Elections Study, our analysis identifies the logics of radical left voting and the effect of economic evaluation and Euroscepticism in the 2009 and 2014 European elections, and allows us to assess how five years of deep economic turmoil have impacted voting behaviour.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the attention paid to Radical Right parties (RRPs) in the academic literature, there is very little research on Radical Left parties (RLPs) since 1989. While there may be a number of reasons for this, it has been argued that the electoral decline of traditional Communist parties during the 1970s and 1980s may have led most scholars to think of RLPs as extremely minor and unworthy of study (Ramiro, 2014).

In spite of this, RLPs have not disappeared from the political scene of West European democracies after 1989 and, in fact, in some cases their support has even increased over the years and given them a more relevant role in their countries' politics. Although the clearer examples of success are Syriza (from 4.6% in 2005 to 16.79% in May 2012, 26.9% in June 2012, and finally 36.3% in January 2015, which allowed it to form a government) in Greece and AKEL in Cyprus\(^1\) (31.3% of the votes in the 2011 legislative election), histories of electoral increase over time can be found in other countries such as the Netherlands (the Socialist Party's support is currently 9.7% but it was 1.3% back in 1994 and reached 16.6% of the votes in 2006), or recently in Spain (where United Left and the new RLP Podemos together were supported by 18% of the voters in the 2014 European Election\(^2\)). Moreover, the electoral support of many RLPs is on a par with that of many RRPs (see, for example, the Left Bloc and the Communist Party in Portugal\(^3\); the Left Front in France\(^4\); the Left Alliance in Finland\(^5\); or the Left Party in Sweden\(^6\)). Many RLPs have also had prominent roles in coalition governments in a number of countries.

\(^1\) Of course, both are different stories of success. In contrast to Syriza, AKEL has continued to be one of the two largest parties in Cyprus since the 1960s.
\(^2\) United Left's vote share in the 2009 European Election was 4.2% and reached 10% in 2014. Podemos ("We Can") did not exist yet.
\(^3\) Together, they were supported by 13% of the voters in the 2011 legislative election.
\(^4\) 6.91% of the votes in the 2012 French legislative election.
\(^5\) 8.15% of the votes in the 2011 Finish parliamentary election.
\(^6\) 5.6% of the votes in the 2014 general election.
The electoral relevance of European RLPs seems to have increased somewhat with the economic crisis. Again, the electoral success of Syriza in Greece and the emergence of a new RLP, Podemos ("We Can"), in Spain, as well as the fact that the European United Left/ Nordic Green Left group in the European Parliament rose from 35 MEPs in 2009 to 52 in 2014, can be seen as examples of this. Indeed, these examples provide only anecdotal evidence, but they are consistent with the finding in the literature that the electoral support of RLPs tends to increase under conditions of economic distress (March and Rommerskirchen, 2011; 2012).

This paper looks at support for RLPs at the individual level using the 2009 and 2014 European Election Study (EES). More specifically, it analyses the impact of economic evaluations and opinions about the European Union (EU) on people's support for the radical left and how it evolved under the economic crisis. To do so, we compare these logics at the beginning of the Great recession, in 2009, where only a handful of member states had entered recession, and, in 2014, after austerity policies and bailout plans had been implemented to face extreme recession and severe public debt crisis throughout Europe. We find, first, a significant association between support for RLP parties and negative economic evaluations. Second, the RLP electorate is much more heterogeneous in 2014 than in 2009, made of both hard and soft Eurosceptics. It seems that the economic crisis has activated the European dimension as a meaningful determinants for radical left voters.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we summarize previous research on the topic. Next, we develop our theoretical expectations. Section 4 then deals with the data and methods, while findings are explained in Section 5. Finally, the paper finishes with a conclusion and a brief discussion of the findings.
2. SUPPORT FOR THE RADICAL LEFT AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU

Following March (2011: 8) and March and Mudde (2005), RLPs can be distinguished from other parties because a) they are ideologically located to the left of social democratic and green parties; b) they reject contemporary capitalism (ranging from opposition to neoliberalism and consumerism to rejection of private property and capitalist profit), advocating alternative economic and power structures; and c) they put great emphasis on economic and social inequality, and propose radical redistributive policies.

Besides traditional communist parties (Marxist-Leninist or reformed), other parties such as radical socialists, and green/left parties can also qualify as radical left. In fact, there is consensus in the literature that, in spite of the differences that there are between some of these parties, all of them can be considered to be part of the same family (March 2011).

As mentioned in the introduction, research on RLPs is scarce. Until very recently, most of the literature consisted in case studies of a single party or in a comparison of a handful of them (e.g. Bell 1993a; Bull 1995; Hudson 2000, 2012; Botella and Ramiro 2003; Backes and Moreau 2008; Vasilopoulos et al., 2015). The first attempt to study RLPs in a comparative way has been carried out by March (2011) and March and Rommerskirchen (2012), who focus on the support of RLPs, employing vote share as dependent variable and analyzing the development of these parties from 1990 to 2008, using aggregate data. They conclude that RLPs are more successful in countries with stronger Euroscepticism, as well as in countries with a divided opposition, in those where RLPs were previously represented and in ex-Communist countries. They also found that RLPs manage to gain more electoral support in contexts of higher voter mobilization. On the contrary, the presence of Green parties or RRPs, as well as the existence of an electoral threshold of 3% or
larger, decreases the electoral support of RLPs. Lastly, while GDP does not seem to impact on support for RLPs, the latter are stronger in countries with higher levels of unemployment.

Although very valuable, March and Rommerskirchen's (2011; 2012) work has several shortcomings. On the one hand, they assume that support for RLPs can be explained in the same way both in Western and Eastern Europe. However, both the histories of these countries and of the parties themselves differ to such a great extent, that we must be careful to draw conclusions from analyses that group all of them together. Most RLPs in Eastern Europe are, directly or indirectly, inheritors of parties that were both party and government in those countries. Also, it is likely that much of their support comes from nostalgic voters that would rather see a return to state-socialism. Indeed, those differences are important enough to have shaped RLPs and their voters in the East in a way that has never shaped RLPs in the West. On the other hand, March and Rommerskirchen's (2011; 2012) focus on aggregate-level variables, so they are not able to look at the attitudinal and socio-demographic characteristics of radical left voters.

Comparative studies at the individual level are also scarce. Besides Visser et al. (2014), who focus on radical left ideology rather than on RLPs, the only comparative work so far that deals with radical left voters at the individual level is - to the best of our knowledge - Ramiro (2014). He employs European Election Studies for a period of 10 years (1989 to 2009) and, unlike March and Rommerskirchen (2011; 2012), focuses only on West European countries and looks at the characteristics of RLP voters. He finds radical left voters to be younger than voters of other parties, and more likely to consider themselves working class, to be union members and to live in big city or suburbs. Radical left voters in Western Europe are also less religious than voters of other parties, and have lower levels of satisfaction with democracy. Finally, and more importantly for the topic

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8 But also unlike Visser et al. (2014).
of this paper, they present higher levels of Euroscepticism. The relationship between support for RLPs, economic conditions and Euroscepticism might perhaps help us explain the development of radical left support during the European economic crisis. Very little attention has been paid to all these issues, and, although the analyses in Ramiro (2014) cover part of the period of the economic crisis, there is no reference to it. That is the gap that this paper aims at filling.

Before going into details about the role attitudes towards integration might have on the radical left vote, we want to stress the importance of economic evaluation in the model. We know from previous research that RLPs are positively affected by bad economic conditions in their countries (March and Rommerskirchen 2011; 2012), which might be explained by the emphasis of this kind of parties on economic redistribution and equality. The relationship between economic distress and support for RLPs has only been tested at the aggregate level, but we expect voters with stronger negative evaluations of the economy to be more likely to vote for RLPs. Considering the difference of economic context between 2009 and 2014, and the importance of the economic crisis, we also expect the economic dimension to be a stronger determinant of RLPs vote in 2014. Indeed if the global financial crisis started in September 2008, with the bankruptcy of the Lehman and Brothers bank, it’s only from mid-2009 and early 2010 that the heart of the crisis unfolded, especially in the Euro zone, with Spain and Italy implementing austerity plans, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus receiving bailout packages. From 2009 to 2013, the public debt of Euro zone members went from 68% GDP to 84%, GDP growth went down to -4.4% of GDP by the end of 2009 while unemployment rate kept rising, going from 9% of the labour force in the EU (9.5% in the Euro zone) in 2009, to 11% in 2014 (12% in the Euro zone) (source: World bank data), with these averages hiding drastic variations among members. Consequently our first two hypotheses are: 

\[ H1. \text{Support for RLPs increases with negative evaluations of the economy.} \]
H2. The effect of negative economic evaluation is stronger in 2014.

The kind of Euroscepticism that RLPs advocate is one that is based on the evaluation of the EU’s economic and social returns rather than based (at least nominally) on national / identity-related issues. As Hooghe et al. (2002) demonstrate, the radical left family presents, together with the radical right, the lowest levels of support for European integration. The explanation, according to Haas (1958) is that the EU is perceived as the product of mainstream parties, dominated by the same market-liberal ideology that the radical left rejects. Therefore, the Euroscepticism of these parties cannot be equated to radical right Euroscepticism. Left-wing Euroscepticism is based on concerns about the effects of integration on social protection and the capacity of governments to carry out redistributive policies (Hooghe and Marks 2007). RLPs are characterised by their strong internationalism (March and Mudde 2005), and so theirs is arguably not a principled opposition to integration but a rejection of the European project as it currently stands. This soft Euroscepticism is defined by support for integration and opposition to the current goals, results and/or institutional architecture of the EU (Taggart, 1998; Hooghe and Marks, 2007). For example, in its Fourth Congress in 2013, almost six years after the start of the financial crisis, the Party of the European Left (PEL)9 defended "the foundation of a new process of economic, social and political integration, at the European regional level" (PEL 2013). The parliamentary group of European United Left / Nordic Green Left, to which the PEL members belong alongside other RLPs, also declares something similar when it argue that "[they] see it as [their] mission to make the European Union more human, more transparent and more tangible." (Guengl.eu 2014).

So, opposition to the EU does not necessarily mean that all RLPs are against European integration, and while a handful of parties are more clearly Euro-sceptic (e.g. the Greek communist

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9 The PEL is a pan-European party which groups together RLPs from 21 countries. Most (though not all) of the members of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left group in the European parliament belong to the PEL.
party, or the Nordic RLPs), many others hold a more nuanced position. Our first hypothesis is that this alter-europeanism finds an echo in the electorate and that RLPs voters are not uniformly Eurosceptic, but that a share of them are critical Europeans (Wessels, 2007), i.e. supporters of integration, even wishing further economic, social and political integration, albeit guided by an anti-capitalist ethos and being critical of various aspects of it, may it be the economic dimension, the balance of power between the different institutions (in particular the weaker role of the European Parliament) or of the orientation the EU advocated in terms of austerity policy.

In the present study, we chose to focus on economic alter-Europeanism due to the importance of the economic dimension for RLP and their anti-capitalist criticism. The position of RLPs vis-à-vis the EU reflects on their absolute opposition to the measures taken by the latter during the European financial crisis, as well as on their complete rejection of the austerity measures set by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the "troika") on those countries that needed to be bailed out as a result of the sovereign debt crisis.10 While RLPs attribute the responsibility of the crisis to the neoliberal/capitalist system, including both their national governments and the EU, their soft Euroscepticism could also have led people that hold the EU responsible for the economic situation in their countries to support RLPs.

We hypothesize that, as a consequence, the radical left electorate is heterogeneous, with some supporters holding a negative opinion on integration as a whole, and some who wish even further economic, social and political integration, albeit guided by an anti-capitalist ethos. In other

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10 As expressed by the Party of European Left: " Popular sovereignties have been flouted by the centralisation of powers in technocratic institutions executed by the «Troika» (the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission)" (PEL, 2013: 5)
terms, we hypothesize that RLP electorate is made of hard Eurosceptics, and of soft Eurosceptics (supporters of integration who are critical of the economic situation), and so:

\[ H3. \text{Support for RLPs is higher among non-supporters of European integration.} \]

\[ H4. \text{Support for RLPs is higher among Euro-supporters who are dissatisfied with the economy.} \]

By its length and depth, as well as by the political disturbances it has produced, it is likely that the economic crisis has had an impact on attitudes beyond the one we just documented. It has strongly contributed to politicize the European issue. Politicization happens when an issue gains salience in political discourses and decision-making processes and produces political conflict (Rokkan 1999; Bartolini 2001; Hurrelman 2012; de Wilde 2011). An issue can be said politicized when it is responsible for polarized attitudes among public opinion and political actors. The current economic crisis has revealed this potential for conflict without a doubt, given the importance the European question has gained in Medias and national political arenas over the past 5 years (de Wilde 2011; Statham et Trenz 2014; Hurrelman et al. 2013). We can list a few examples of this process: the protests against austerity and in favor of a “social Europe” that have flourished in Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal (Della Porta et Mattoni 2014), the increased mobilization of European parties in favor of alternative projects for the EU during the 2014 campaign, and the fact that in the 2014 elections, around a quarter of the seats were taken by Eurosceptics or Euro-critic parties. In the present study, we expect this politicization to have largely benefitted to RLPs, in spreading contestation among supporters of integration and in increasing the share of alter-Europeans in their electorate:

\[ H5: \text{The effect of economic dissatisfaction on supporters of integration (H4) is stronger in 2014.} \]

In the next section, we explain the research strategy and data that will be employed to test these hypotheses.
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Data
To test our hypotheses, we rely on the 2009 and 2014 European Election Study (EES) to have data covering all Western European countries with RLPs. These cross-country surveys were conducted in all 27 member states directly after the European elections of June 2009 and May 2014. As explained above, RLPs are hardly comparable in Western European and post-communist contexts. In order to make sure effects are comparable for all parties and countries, we restricted the analysis to Western European countries. Among those, 16 had RLPs running for the 2009 and 2014 elections: Denmark (Socialistisk Folkeparti: the Socialist People's Party), Finland (Vasemmistoliitto, Left Alliance), Sweden (Vänsterpartiet, Left Party), Greece (KKE, the Greek Communist Party, and Syriza, the Radical Left Coalition), Spain (Izquierda Unita, United Left, plus Iniciativa Internacionalista-La Solidaridad entre los Pueblos, Internationalist Initiative – Solidarity between Peoples., in 2009 and Podemos, We can, in 2014), Portugal (Bloco de Esquerda, Left Bloc and Coligação Democrática Unitária (CDU, made of the Portuguese Communist Party and the Portuguese Green Party), Italy (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista, Communist Refoundation, plus Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori, the communist workers’ party in 2009, and in 2014 L’Altra Europa – Con Tsipras), Cyprus (AKEL, Progressive Party of Working People), France (Front de Gauche, Left Front, Lutte Ouvriere, Workers’ struggle, and Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, New Anticapitalist Party), Belgium (Walloon and Flamish Workers party of Belgium: PTB-go! (Parti du Travail de Belgique) and PVDA (Partij van de Arbeid van België), Luxembourg (La Gauche / Déi Lénk, The left), Ireland (Sinn Fein and the Socialist Party), Germany (Die Linke, the Left), the Netherlands (Socialistische Partij, Socialist Party), and Austria (in 2009 Kommunistische Partei Österreichs), for a total of 23 RLPs.
Don’t know answers and refusal were marked as missing and excluded from the analysis. In total, the N is 20,655 observations. In order to account for the clustering of observations by countries (15), we use hierarchical modelling.

**Dependent variable**

The dependent variable is a binary measure of vote intention for RLPs. It is coded “1” when respondent declared she will vote for one of the 23 RLPs running for the upcoming 2009 or 2004 elections, and coded “0” otherwise. As a consequence, we use binary logistic regression. In our sample, 1,166 respondents declared a RLP vote intention, versus 1,202 in 20014.

**Independent variables**

In order to measure economic evaluation, we rely on a 5-point scale question on retrospective assessment of the economic situation over the past year, ranging from a lot worse to a lot better (with the middle category stating that the economic situation remained the same). To be included in the analysis, the variable was dichotomized to take the value 1 for respondents who held the most negative views (those who answered “a lot worse” and “a little worse”), and 0 for those thinking that the situation improved or did not worsened.

To investigate attitudes towards integration among RLPs supporters, we rely on the traditional measure of diffuse support: the membership question (Brinegar and Jolly 2004; McLaren 2006). Respondents are asked whether their country’s membership to the EU is a good thing (coded “3”), a bad thing (coded “1”) or neither bad nor good (“2”).

An interaction between attitudes towards integration and economic evaluation is computed in order to test the hypothesis that dissatisfied with the economy increases support for RLPs among Euro-supporters (hypothesis 4).
Finally, we are interested in the effect of the economic crisis on these determinants. For this reason, all independent variables (and interactions) are included in an interaction with a dummy for the 2014 election (in separates models). This settings allow us to measure if the effects of these determinants has increased over the course of the economic crisis.

Regarding controls, based on previous research on vote for RLPs (Ramiro, 2014), we accounted for age (using a continuous measure), education (4-point scale, used as ordered categorical variable), gender, union membership, location (binary variable for living a large city of a large city’s suburbs), being unemployed and being a worker. In addition we included a 10-point measure of left-right self-positioning, and a binary variable for support for government. All variable are standardized to allow for coefficient comparisons.

4. RESULTS

Our first model (Model 1) includes support for integration and economic evaluation (and control for the election year), in order to test hypotheses 1 and 3. Model 2 includes the interaction terms between economic evaluation and the 2014 dummy (hypothesis 2). Model 3 includes the interaction terms between membership and the 2014 dummy (control model for hypothesis 3). Model 4 tests the interaction effect between membership and economic evaluation, while model 5 includes a 3-term interaction to assess whether this effect is stronger in 2014 than in 2009. All models are displayed in Table 1 below, odd ratios are reported. For clarity’s sake, we computed marginal effects for interactions, they are displayed in figures 1 to 4 below.

Before turning to our variables of interests, we first describe the effects of control variables. The results in model 1 go in line with Ramiro’s results from 2014: RLP’s voters are younger than other voters (a one point increase in age yields a 10% increase in the likelihood to vote for RLPs), and they tend to live in large cities or suburbs (this category of urban voters are 13% more likely
to vote for RLPs than voters living in small cities or rural areas). Finally, we find that being unemployed is a strong predictors of RLP vote (25% more chances) but that being a manual worker is not a significant determinants. It is likely that in the context of economic crisis the anti-austerity and pro-social policies stance that characterizes RLPs attracted people directly hurt by the crisis, beyond the traditional pool of manual workers. We find no significant effect for gender and education. Regarding other controls, without surprise we find that left-right positioning and support for government are strong predictors: a one point increase to the right on the ideology scale increases by 28% the chances to vote for RLPs, while supporting the government decreases these chances by 50%.

As a first step in our analysis, we test the effects of economic evaluation on vote intention for RLPs (hypotheses 1 and 2). We see that voters who have a negative evaluation of the economy have 13% more chances to choose RLPs (odds ratio=1.132). The relationship is as expected positive but the effect remains limited (and not strongly significant). In model 2, we interact the retrospective economic evaluation with the 2014 dummy to assess if this effect has grown stronger due to the financial crisis. Figure 1 displays the predictive margins for economic evaluation in 2009 and 2014 respectively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV= vote intention for RLP</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>5.218***</td>
<td>3.378***</td>
<td>10.19***</td>
<td>5.332***</td>
<td>8.355***</td>
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<td>1.116*</td>
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<td>Supports the government</td>
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<td>0.970</td>
<td>0.978</td>
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<td>(ref:&lt;=15 yrs old)</td>
<td>(0.0885)</td>
<td>(0.0897)</td>
<td>(0.0886)</td>
<td>(0.0884)</td>
<td>(0.0895)</td>
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<td>0.967</td>
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<td>(0.0905)</td>
<td>(0.0886)</td>
<td>(0.0880)</td>
<td>(0.0901)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
<td>(0.149)</td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union membership</td>
<td>1.150**</td>
<td>1.167**</td>
<td>1.153**</td>
<td>1.148**</td>
<td>1.168**</td>
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<td>(0.0802)</td>
<td>(0.0816)</td>
<td>(0.0805)</td>
<td>(0.0801)</td>
<td>(0.0818)</td>
</tr>
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<td>City: large cities or suburbs</td>
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<td>1.137**</td>
<td>1.135**</td>
<td>1.136**</td>
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Odds ratios; Standard errors in parentheses. *p <0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
The effect of economic evaluation does change between 2009 and 2014. In 2009, holding a negative view in the economy does not influence vote choice: the marginal effect of moving from a positive or neutral evaluation of the past year to a negative evaluation is a change of -0.01 (not significant, p value of 0.19), the prediction moves from 0.05 to 0.037. In 2014, the marginal effect goes up to 0.04 (p value of 0.000), producing a change in prediction from 0.12 (positive views) to 0.165 (negative views). Contrary to what was found by previous studies at the aggregate level, economic evaluation was not central in RLP vote in 2009. However, as expected (hypothesis 2) the impact was stronger in 2014, after 4 years of deep economic turmoil, but the effects themselves remain very limited.

At first sight, model 1 tells us that positive attitudes towards integration have a significant negative impact on vote intention for RLPs: a one-standard-deviation increase in support for membership decreases by 22% the likelihood to vote for RLPs (Odds ratio=0.781). To assess whether this effect is present in both elections, we include in Model 3 and interaction between membership and the 2014 dummy. Figure 2 displays the predictive margins for both 2009 and 2014. Like in the case of economic evaluation, we see that the negative impact of support for
integration is driven by what happened in 2014. Indeed, in 2009, we see no significant difference in terms of predictions: hard Eurosceptics (declaring membership is a bad thing), ambivalent (neither good nor bad category) and euro-supporters (declaring membership is a good thing) all have predictions around 0.04. In 2009, the membership variable has a (non-significant) marginal effect of -0.003. On the contrary, in 2014, the marginal effect of moving from one category to the next is 0.03 (p value<0.000). The European dimension seems to have no effect on RLPs vote in 2009, but this changes in 2014, where we see a significant different between Eurosceptics, more likely to vote for RLPs and Euro-supporters.

Figure 2. Predictive margins for retrospective economic evaluation in 2009 and 2014:

In model 4, we test for a mediating effect of economic considerations on attitudes towards integration. We argue that, due to their strong position against neo-liberalism, austerity policies and to their social vision of the European project, RLPs attracts critical Europeans, those who support integration but want a different Europe (hypothesis 4). Model 4 includes an interaction between membership and economic evaluation variables. It shows is that support for Europe, when combined to negative evaluation of the economy, has a reverse effect: it increases the likelihood to vote for RLPs. Figure 3 displays the average marginal effect of economic evaluation on
membership. We see that the interaction produces a significant effect (0.014) only among those who support integration (both effects for Eurosceptics and ambivalent voters are non-significant).

Figure 4 displays the results of the three-term interaction between membership, economic evaluation and year (model 5). As in previous cases, the logic is different in 2009 and in 2014. RLPs are attractive to critical Europeans, but only in 2014. Among Euro-supporters, to hold a negative evaluation of the economy (as opposed to positive or neutral evaluations) produces a 0.06-point change. As expected, when it comes to attitudes towards integration, the RLPs electorate in 2014 is more heterogeneous than it was in 2009. The discourse, values and policy position of the European Left attract voters who are supportive of integration. In addition to traditional hard Eurosceptics voters, the radical left discourse on Europe and on the economy managed to attract soft Eurosceptics as well.

*Figure 3. Average Marginal effects of negative economic evaluation on the relation between membership and preferences for RLPs*
**DISCUSSION**

“The neoliberal choices resulting by the exigences of the globalised, financial and militarised capitalism lead to intolerable social regression and lead Europe into a dead-end – more than ever, it is time to resist and to open an alternative perspective.

We, the delegates from 29 left parties from all over Europe belonging to the Party of the European Left, gathered in its 2nd Congress to declare our strong will to contribute actively in the European Union, beyond its borders and in the EU Member states to change today European policy for a more democratic and just Europe, committed with the creation of employment and dignified jobs, social protection, ecological development and fight for Peace in the World.”

(Final declaration of the European Left 2nd Congress, November 23-25 2007)\(^{13}\)

The final declaration of the 2nd European Left congress from 2007, the platform coordinating European RLPs’ campaign for the 2009 European elections, stated very clearly the general orientation for the 2009 campaign: further integration but not along the lines of the European project as perceived by the European Left. This critical stance against the economic orientation of integration was doubled with a commitment to further integration and changing the EU’s political orientation. In its 2014 manifesto, the European Left’s take on the European project became even

clearer, with a call for “Escaping austerity, Rebuilding Europe” \(^{14}\), for supporting further integration and a strong shift in terms of economic and social policies at the European level. This appeal to an alternative European project echoes the two characteristics we found in the pool of RLPs partisans.

First, supporters of RLPs are dissatisfied with the economic situation. Second, they do not systematically oppose European integration. Indeed, contrary to findings by March (2011) and March and Rommerskirchen (2012) at the aggregate level and to Ramiro’s work (2014) at the individual level, we do not find that RLPs’ pool of supporters are unanimously Eurosceptic. Euro-supporters are attracted by RLPs alternative discourse on the EU, especially in times of economic crisis. In that sense this is very much in line with the official discourse of the European Left. Our analysis shows that this logic is at play only in the 2014 elections and that the European dimension does not play a significant role in the 2009 RLP vote. Although the analysis in its present stage does not test this directly, it is likely that the economic crisis and the austerity turn throughout Europe has activated the European dimension among voters. And it is likely to produce a tremendous change in both national and European politics.

Indeed, from the start, the EU has been theorized as an apolitical object, for two main reasons. First, the neo-functionalist theory, which dominated the institutional design and academic discourse for several decades, favors the technocratic dimension over the political one, judging the latter as too conflictual (Haas 1958; Lindberg et Scheingold 1970). Second, the European polity was said too complicated and distant from citizens to be part of their everyday considerations and political calculations (Zaller 1992; Gaxie et al, 2011; Duchesne et al. 2013; Hurrelman et al. 2013; Van Ingelgom 2014). Since 2010, the Great recession has calls for a recall of these conclusions.

Over the last four years, European institutions have actively impacted economic and social policies of member states in an unprecedented manner. The strong mediatization of financial rescue measures and the Greek crisis did not allow national governments and European institutions to neutralize the political potential of the crisis (White 2011; Statham et Trenz 2014) and our analysis shows that this process found an strong echo in the 2014 elections and in the RLPs electoral success.

As an attempt to disentangle the relationship between support for Europe and preference for RLPs, we used a measure of specific support, in line with Easton’s definition (1965), where specific support means approving the current shape of the European project and the EU’s policy output. In lack of a better measure, we used an interaction between the diffuse support measure and economic evaluation to isolate voters who lack specific support. We find that, when they are dissatisfied with the economy, Euro-supporters have higher chances to vote for RLPs, hence showing that the alternative discourse of these parties (at least, in the terms of the European Left Party) finds an echo among voters. At the time of the 2009 elections, the global financial crisis had just started a year before and the state of the economy was nothing near the turmoil it would enter in 2010 and the subsequent years, especially within the Euro zone. Our analysis reflects that, showing how the 2014 elections were different from the 2009, and providing an explanation for the 50% increase in seats of these parties. RLPs supporters are very likely to call in majority for an alternative European project, and not to call off integration per se, being in this sense strongly different from radical right supports.

These results obviously call for a more fine-grained analysis in order to investigate this duality of RLPs supporters vis-à-vis the EU, using additional indicators of opinion on the European question (in particular to differentiate between diffuse support, i.e. principled approval for
European integration, and opinion towards the EU as it is and its policies, in a more comprehensive way than in the present analysis) and accounting in a more robust way for economic changes between 2009 and 2014. However, this study already shows that RLPs electorate cannot be labelled Eurosceptic *per se* but that an important part of it supports integration. Beyond the RLPs case, one implications of these findings is to call for more systematic empirical differentiation between diffuse and specific support, as well as among the different categories of Euroscepticism.
References


Van Ingelgom, V. 2014. Integrating Indifference: A Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Approach to the Legitimacy of European Integration. ECPR Press.


