The views of Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe about social policy: Cases of Greece, Portugal and Spain

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Abstract: There is no doubt, that the last economic crisis has influenced the social and political life and has transformed the governments’ policies. As a result, social democratic and right wing parties’ policies have been conformed to this rapidly changed social, economic and political environment. The aim of this proposal is to present the views of Parliamentary Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe about social policy. In addition, Radical Left Parties in this region share common views in aspects such as social policy. The overall objectives are to examine the cases of Portugal, Spain and Greece (Izquierda Unida, Bloco de Ezquerda, SYRIZA) and if the views of these parties about social policy (educational policy, health policy and employment policy) have been changed during the current economic crisis. Especially, this examination focalizes on ideological level and on the level of political proposals, how they assume the crisis. Secondly, we research their political actions, which they suggest in the level of political practice and in different actions like demonstrations, strikes, etc. Besides, this article focuses on this geographical region, because differ in terms of economic performance and size, but share recent history of successful transition to democracy and common membership of the Southern European 'model' of welfare.

Key words: left parties, political parties, comparative politics, social policy, welfare state

Introduction

The current financial crisis in combination with the social and environmental crisis have determined the political guidelines on which the views of the parties are based. Through this framework Radical Left design and propose its criticism.

The Radical Left in Southern Europe is characterized by the specific circumstances of every country. The financial political and social in the entity countries form the structure of their proposals but is based on some basic ideological guidelines of the European Left. Left Parties’ views depend on the social background, the potency or the flaw of social culture. According to Hildebrandt and Daider “the parties who belong in this sphere are
in exploring of a recent pluralist character, between convention and the social requests of integrity and revitalization. Both exist in every party – both are lived and needed in parallel by the parties’ members, like the old symbols of the working class and the new symbols of a changed world” (Hildebrandt & Daider, 2009:6).

The challenge for Radical Left in Europe during the current financial crisis is to propose applicable measures because, as it is obvious, the crisis found Radical Left unprepared. This can be justified from the non-increase of its electoral power. Another problem for Radical Left is that is divided into separate small parties that need to make coalescences in order to collect the appropriate percentance to be elected in the parliament. This problem makes Left parties non-efficient and slow in decision making processes.

Social policy aims to improve the human welfare and ensure the human rights. Radical left parties insist that the only way to preserve the above is the existence of extended state intervention and increase of funding. State is the provider and the modulator of these policies and should promote public health and education for all through effective systems. Also, unemployment should decrease and this will happen only with the public investment that will create new jobs. Radical Left is against privatizations and supports changes like the decrease in the working hours without decrease in the salaries.

The historical and political similarities, the common tension of indicators and data and the similar unfavorable economic situation that Portugal Greece and Spain are the main reasons to examine the views of Radical Left Parties in the above three essential key - issues of social policy.

**The case of Greece-SYRIZA**

In Greece parliamentary democracy re-established with the constitution of 1975 and until now, with a small exception at 1989 (governmental coalition), the two big parties, socialists (PASOK) and right-wing party (ND), alternate in power. Radical Left did not have extended power since the establishment of the democracy and until 2001
Synaspismos was the major political party of Radical Left except the Communist Party (KKE). The Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA) started to take its current shape at 2001 with the “Space for Dialogue for the Unity and Common Action of the Left” and is typically regarded to be launched before the legislative elections of 2004. The Coalition currently comprises the following parties: Active Citizens, Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI), Ecosocialists of Greece, Internationalist Workers' Left (DEA), Red, Movement for the United in Action Left (KEDA), Renewing Communist Ecological Left (AKOA), Radical Left Group Roza, Synaspismos (SYN), Xekinima - Socialist Internationalist Organization (CWI) and several independent leftist activists.

Greece currently faces the danger of a bankruptcy and socialist government took austerity measures in order to avoid this danger. These measures are the reason for hard criticism from SYRIZA because they believe that social rights are going to break and the lower classes are going to be discredited. Socialist government of PASOK faced hard criticism in the parliament from all the opposition parties and especially from SYRIZA and the strikes are daily phenomenon. SYRIZA believes that strikes and demonstrations are the ways to push the government not to implement the measures that IMF, EU and the big financial interests necessitate, as SYRIZA believe. Ideologically, is against the reduction of social policies and believes that only with a strong welfare state and enforcing public financing in order to create development, the country will get out of the crisis.

Health Policy

In Greece, the necessity to encase the gaps in primary health services attempted systematically with the enactment of Law N1397/1983 where, for the first time, the National Health System was introduced, covering an oversized gap in health.

The basic principles of the ESY were:

- The state has the responsibility for providing services to all citizens.
- The Health System is public.
• All citizens have the right to access health services regardless of economic, social and professional status
• Health services provided by a single, decentralized system (Alexiadou, 2007: 58).

ESY comprise the main leading reform in the area of social policy in contemporary Greece, because incorporates the largest national mechanism for vertical redistribution of resources towards social justice. However, ESY failed to accomplish lot of its objectives and to manufacture a relationship of trust with citizens.

Certainly the ideological origins of the ESY were the reduction of health inequalities in the sense of equal opportunities in the healthcare and reducing disparities. This comprises a complex multifaceted problem and especially an ambitious endeavor. In more complex dimensions are included, the differences between ethnic groups, social conditions, jobs, workers and unemployed people from different educational and income levels and different sex (Venieris & Papatheodorou, 2003). Consequently, this noble goal goes far beyond a traditional health policy. However, the extent of the creation of the ESY combat inequalities in health care is not satisfactory.

In this context, SYRIZA accuses PASOK and ND because of the the neoliberal health policies that initiated in the early '90s and nurtured gradually and steadily, having the following main features:

a) Restriction of public health spending and increased private spending, respectively. Greece is second only in terms of private health expenditure in GDP (reaching 48.3%) in all OECD countries.
b) Privatization of certain functions of public hospitals (accounting, cleaning, security, catering, waste management, etc) and renting of public beds, including intensive care beds in the private sector.
c) Promote public-private cooperation for construction of public hospitals in return for the management and operation for some time.
d) Transfer to the private sector of social care and rehabilitation.
e) Reduction of nurses in public hospitals and flexible industrial relations.
f) Expansion of private health and private health insurance with a configuration of high rates of profitability.
g) Increase the participation rate of patients in drug costs and restrictions on freedom of access to primary health care.

SYRIZA argue that these measures have led to deterioration of public health services, have loaded additional burdens on recipients and increased total social cost of health services offered (SYRIZA, 2010).

On this basis, the axes of an alternative model by the radical left party of Greece for health have the following characteristics:

- Health can not be a commodity but a public and social good available to all citizens.
- The purpose of the public health system is to provide free and adequate health care coverage to those in need.
- Development of public primary health care with free access for all citizens.
- Organization of the system at central, regional and local levels with distinct levels of responsibility and resources.
- Ensuring high quality services, adequate staffing of medical facilities and hospital personnel and with adequate remuneration.
- Ensure the representatives of workers and users in health administration units.
- Direct integration of major private health facilities in public and social control; establish a strict framework for the operation and control of other private clinics and diagnostic centres and their integration over time, the single public health system - welfare.
- Checking the prices of medicines and combating oligopolistic structures in the production and marketing, and strengthening the role of public agencies
- Funded by a single state budget and the health sectors of insurance funds.
- It is based on an integrated network of public information services, prevention, primary care and health promotion linked to a single enhanced secondary and tertiary care (SYRIZA, 2010).
In concluding, SYRIZA is against the privatizations in health and suggests the creation of a system that will have the aim to offer equal and quality services to the citizens. This system will be implemented through policies that will restructure the management of the health system in order to make it transparent and will increase the state funding to the sector. In that way, IU believes that the system will become more effective and equal.

_Educational Policy_

Responsible for education is the Ministry of Education. However, the total of the education services provided in Greece form a much more complex, multilevel and differentiated infrastructure. Education in Greece is compulsory for all children 6-15 years old. Namely, it includes Primary (Dimotiko) and Lower Secondary (Gymnasio) Education. Post-compulsory Secondary Education, according to the reform of 1997, consists of two school types: _Eniaia Lykeia_ (Unified Upper Secondary Schools) and the Technical Vocational Educational Schools (TEE). The duration of studies in _Eniaia Lykeia_ (EL) is three years and two years (a' level) or three years (b' level) in the Technical Vocational Educational Schools (TEE). Mutual student transfer from one type of school to the other is possible. As a consequence of the classification of the education institutions, a title (school-leaving certificate, degree etc.) is compulsory for students at each education level in order to continue to the next. Each educational level admits students with special educational needs.

Post-compulsory Secondary Education also includes the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK), which provide formal but unclassified level of education. These Institutes are not classified as an educational level, because they accept both Gymnasio (lower secondary school) and Lykeio (upper secondary school) graduates according to the relevant specializations they provide.

Public higher education is divided into Universities and Technological Education Institutes (TEI). Students are admitted to these Institutes according to their performance
at national level examinations taking place at the second and third grade of Lykeio.

The new educational law that government wants to pass through the Greek parliament (August, 2011) in combination with the reduction of public financing in education [public expenditure from 4% of GDP in 2005 has been reduced to 2.75% in 2010\(^1\), have caused the counteraction of opposition and especially of the Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA).

Due to the financial crisis and under the pressures of IMF and EU the Greek government is reducing the financing for social policies, including educational policy and this became the main reason for SYRIZA’s criticism.

Starting from the primary education, the main points of SYRIZA’s criticism are the repeals - mergers of schools and the absence of social education. For this reason, underlies that school program has to be supported by courses like environmental education, gender equity, health education, music and sports, human rights, the value of peace, etc. Also, the daily program has to be facilitated by daylong school and the appropriate infrastructure.

SYRIZA proposes for the non-compulsory secondary education, the creation of United Lyceum of theory and action and the implementation of post-secondary course circle of Technical Professional Education exclusively public and free of charge. In addition, the proposal about the access in Higher Education Institutions is characterized by the basic idea of SYRIZA about the catholic right of citizens to participate in the general education without class barriers, exempting the family from the expenses for the tuition centers.

About tertiary education, SYRIZA is against the imminent reform, because they believe that it strengthens real neo-liberal tendencies and attempts to insert enterprises to the public university. Simultaneously, the academic structure changes while the cost of

\(^1\)For more information about the current public spending for education in Greece see: http://www.imerisia.gr/article.asp?catid=12333&subid=2&pubid=98443206
reproduction and education of labor force aggravate the students. In addition, the new measures degrade the public, free of charge and self-administrative character of university and establish a direction to private economy through the triptych competitiveness - employability – mobility (SYRIZA, 2010).

The peaks of political oppositions for higher education policy are:

1. Access system at Higher Education Institutes (AEI). SYRIZA accuses the government for anachronistic methods and propose the legislative consolidation of the right of every school graduate to study for free in State University.

2. Upgrade and reconstruction of all academic institutes. They emphasize on the region and believe that the universities in provincial cities, through another reform program, can become an engine for development.

3. Development of basic research. They believe that in the first year, but especially in postgraduate studies, there is an opportunity to deepen knowledge, dissemination of scientific information and promote research, which is much needed in our country.

4. Transparency at all levels of management and operation of universities; in the planning of the Institutes, in the elections of teachers, to the design of curricula, at doctoral theses, undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations.

5. Networking with international academia. They support that Greece must not be excised from processes, international exchanges and abuses the opportunity for the public university to win and give naturally knowledge and research possibilities within international programs especially from countries or universities, which are very advanced.

6. Necessity of option in multiple books. They support that this measure will break speculation of publishers. They also emphasize on the development of academic publications and on the infrastructure (libraries, auditoriums, laboratories, centers, computer networks, student halls, restaurants, etc).
7. Scholarships. Support to the students that they need it in order to complete their studies.

8. Permanent employment of the teaching and research staff as right and duty towards public university. They suggest the increase of salaries and the permanent presence of teachers in order to preserve the university.

9. Asylum. They believe that the only way to ensure students rights and the academic freedom is to consolidate the university asylum.

10. The financing of education. A key objective of SYRIZA’s educational policy is to increase the public expenditure to 5% as a starting point. This measure will promote the development, the innovation and research in University.

In conclusion, SYRIZA’s proposals concentrate on issues of equality of educational opportunities (school failure / leakage, discrimination against migrant children home, etc., forms of compensatory education, negative impact of mergers and terminations schools k.t.o.) and characterize all levels of education system. They suggest a public educational system without class barriers or social and gender inequality, which is based on special education needs and promote the environmental awareness, human rights and the value of peace in order to create not only efficient pupils and students but also conscientious citizens.

Employment Policy

Currently, Greece faces the biggest percentage of unemployment since the last thirty years. As Eurostat (table 2) indicates, unemployment is now 15% and this percentage is growing because of the growing deflation that Greece faces. For SYRIZA mass unemployment and underemployment in the neoliberal conditions can not be eliminated because there are inherent with it. Otherwords, unemployment is a result of neoliberal capitalism that will not be eliminated as long as this system functions and devalues human resources, causing serious personal, familial, social, political and public security problems.
For SYRIZA the growth that is promoted goes without job creation, the pressure on labor costs continues with deregulation (flexibility of labor relation) and with catastrophic consequences for the environment in order to increase corporate profitability. The goal of fiscal and monetary stability in the European Union is preceded against any other economic and social objective. The reasons of high unemployment rates in Greece are the reduction of the purchasing power of labor incomes of workers and the non-support of small grangers and small industries. Also, because of austerity measures that increase deflation, unemployment rates are growing daily and for this the government and supranational interests are responsible.

SYRIZA is against the measures that PASOK and ND have taken all these years because they expand the part-time and temporary employment and subsidies organizations in order to create a revolving job. SYRIZA believes that the drastic reduction of unemployment and full and stable employment are intertwined with the promotion of an alternative policy to the implemented neoliberal policies, to a socialist direction. The sustained growth must concentrate to the human and social interest, quality of life and environmental protection. That gives priority to the development of research, technology, innovation, product quality and work.

Therefore, SYRIZA is against the policies of the European Union because believe that these policies underpin the promotion of a new european agreement on sustainable development, social protection and employment (SYRIZA, 2006).

The main objectives to tackle unemployment are:

1. The institutionalization of the constitutional obligation of the state to ensure full employment for all citizens, which is the central proposal in the next revision of the Constitution.
2. The radical reduction of working hours without reducing salaries, first by the immediate introduction of 35-hour week in firms with more than 20 employees.
3. The significant increase in public investment.

4. The promotion of mass recruitment in the fields of social, green labor and civil protection (health, education, social care and welfare, environmental protection, quality of life etc).

5. The direct promotion of emergency measures to enhance the employability of young people, older long-term unemployed and women and the elimination of discrimination between 'old' and 'new' workers in employment. Such emergency measures could be: the promotion of special programs to enhance the employability of young unemployed and effective vocational training that leads to employment, the inclusion in early-retirement scheme for long-term unemployed aged 50 years or alternatively ensure their employment through special programs in social services, environment, quality of life, government, the municipalities and prefectures. The costs for these two cases are going to be covered by revenue from the end of 6/1000 on loans from the capital gains tax 10% on sales of shares and community resources. Special programs to create new jobs, training or self-employment for women. Abolition of existed quotas for those in certain occupations. Promote measures to reconcile family life and work (support network for children and nursery, parental leave, children's creative centers, infrastructure and social care for the elderly, children and people with disabilities etc), design and implementation of medium term development of specialized regional projects through the public investment program in areas facing acute problems of unemployment.

6. Instantly measures of economic and social support for unemployed people, such as: Provide guaranteed income for the unemployed to increase and prolong the period for unemployment benefits. The unemployment benefit is 75% of final salary before dismissal and granted for two years. It has to be given for another two years at the rate of 60% of final salary before redundancy, if one remains unemployed. Establishment of minimum income guarantee decent living. Granting of special unemployment assistance in the amount of OGA (agrarian pensions) pension for young unemployed within six months of enrollment in the employment, if not find acceptable employment. Granting season ticket in public transport for the unemployed and cultural discount card for their entertainment. Suspension of installments of mortgage loans, rent subsidies to the unemployed and exeption of accounts of common utility. Substantial increase in public
spending to promote policies in order to increase employment and to protect the unemployed from revenues generated by the fair tax reform and the reduction of military expenditure. The state financing to OAED (Workforce Employment Agency) must reach 1% of the GDP.

SYRIZA’s argues that it must be state’s priority to support and develop the movement of unemployed people in cooperation with unions in order to promote their demands for job creation and relief measures for them. It has criticised government’s policies about shop opening hours and labor relations because they believe that these are neo-liberal policies and do not promote the interests of workers and lower classes of the society. About industrial relations, SYRIZA’s view is that they do not need deragulation, in contrast they need to be upgraded in order to protect the institutionalized democracy, labor and social security rights of workers and to foster stable and full employment. Finally, the basic thesis of SYRIZA about employment policy is that the only way to achieve social justice is to reduce flexible forms of employment and promote full employment with high levels of social insurance. The way to achieve this goal is to improve the function of public industries, to implement collective bargaining agreements and create a fair tax system.

The case of Portugal – Bloco de Ezquerda (Left Block)

The Portugese parliamentary democracy was established by the constitution of 1976. According to the Portugal’s Constitution, Portugal is a democratic State based on the rule of law, the sovereignty of people, the pluralism of democratic expression and the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens. This democratic political organization is based upon the principle of sepeation and interdepedence of the sovereign bodies: The President of the Republic, the Assembly of the Republic, the Government and the Courts (Jesus Maria Sousa, 2000).

Until now the two major parties (Socialist Party and Social Democratic Party) alternate in power with some cases of governmental coalitions with parties which have lower percentage of representation in the national parliament. Bloco de Ezquerda is a radical left party with representative in the Portuguese parliament that founded in 1999 and in the
national elections of June 2011 elected 8 representatives. It is supported by independents and a number of left-wing political groups such as the People's Democratic Union (União Democrática Popular, UDP), Revolutionary Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, PSR (ex-LCI), and Politics XXI (Política XXI, PXXI). It is part of the European Anticapitalistic Left and participates in the Party of the European Left. Currently, Bloco de Ezquerda’s views concentrate on the criticism of the recent governmental measures, which are supported by IMF and EU aiming to encounter the debt crisis.

*Health Policy*

Health care in Portugal is provided by a heavily regulated public system and the role of gate-keeping is important (OECD, 2009). The Portuguese health care system is characterized by three systems: the NHS; special public and private insurance schemes for certain professions (health subsystems); and private voluntary health insurance (VHI). The health system in Portugal is combined by public and private health care providers, each of them connected to the Ministry of Health and to the patients. Most of the population can choose between (or can use both) the two health care insurers: NHS and VHI. Part of the population, approximately 20–25%, is also covered by a third health subsystem (Baros & Simoes, 2007).
Since the mid-1990s, despite of some reform attempts aiming to reduce the costs, the overall hospital spending continue to increase. As Baros and Simoes (2007:148) support “the main challenges in this area are the reducing waste of resources, without harming quality of care and redefinition of hospitals’ role in the health system, according to the recent developments in primary care and in long-term care”. As it is known, long-term care has experienced little public sector involvement diachronically.
Despite the considerable number of reforms that have been designed from policy makers, the necessary for the improvement of health care system challenges remain in the field of implementation and consist the main reasons for political controversy.

Left Block supports the public funding of NHS as a way to enforce the development and modernization through a new health policy which ensures better care conditions to all citizens equally. Specifically, the main points of Left Block proposals are:

- Refocusing health policy in the National Health Plan. They suggest that the National Health Plan should focus on improving its efficiency, to ensure the effective implementation for both the prevention and the treatment (oncology, AIDS, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, drug addiction, mental health etc.).

- Public funding of the NHS. Their proposal focus on the assessment of health budget (recurrent and investment) programmed according to the needs of operation, modernization and expansion of the NHS, the contractual framework law as an instrument of financing of health care facilities program contracts, abolishing user fees and reduction of deductions for insurance and health costs.

- Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). They propose the termination of contracts and redirect them under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.

- Management of the units in the NHS. Left Block suggests the selection of managers by tender and technical directors in order to elect the respective professional bodies (doctors, nurses) and the participatory management by users and local authorities, subject to periodic evaluation.

- Local Health Systems as a model and functional organization of the NHS. They believe that there is a necessity of combination between great care units and participatory management by the state (central and local).
• Human Resources. They support the review of technical and professional careers in health system and their approval in the public and private boards.

• Health Centres / Primary Care. They suggest a decentralization policy in order to achieve technical autonomy, administrative and financial.

• Hospitals and referral networks. They focus on renovation and modernization of equipment and technologies through a programme new hospitals according to the available resources and needs, respecting priorities (oncology, pediatrics, etc.).

• Installation of Emergency Basic. Specifically, they recommend the modernization of the emergency structure with the Medical-Surgical retrain, technical resources, experts in emergencies and the professionalization of the rescue teams.

• Continuing Care Network. Through this measure they propose the improvement of quality of elderly’s people life.

• Statute of chronic disease which defines the responsibilities of the State in supporting people with chronic disease (and disability) and their families;

• Municipalities: formation of local health networks, promotion of local health plans, coordination with the Public Health services, participation in the management of health facilities of the NHS, progressive transfer of skills in conservation and renewal of primary care network.

• Mobility of patients in the European Union. Left Block believes that public services are subject to recurrent moves towards liberalization and privatization.

In conclusion, we could underlie that the Radical Left of Portugal suggests that with the decentralization and infrastructure amelioration will achieve the modernization of the health care system designed for patients’ needs which will provide qualitative services.
Suggested reforms will be achieved by strengthening the role of the State through increased public expenditure and administrative reformation.

Educational Policy

Portugese Constitution proclaims that everyone has the right to education on a platform of equal opportunities to both access and success at school. The State is responsible for the education aiming to minimise economic, social and cultural differences. With the Education Act (Law No. 46/86, 16th of October) was established a new general framework for the Portugese education system. Compulsory schooling was increased to 9 years and the minimum school leaving age to 15. Upper Secondary education is structured in a variety of ways and has courses leading to further studies (scientific-humanistic courses) and for working life (technological courses). Pupils who complete successfully the secondary level of education can entry through an entrance examination, in one of the subsystems of higher education, which is organised into: ensino universitario, concerned mainly with adding theoretical knowledge or ensino politecnico, decidedly geared to the professional life of the pupil (European Commission/Eurydice, 2006/07). It is responsibility of the State to promote and support extracurricular education as part of on-going and lifelong learning.

The main existing problems of the portugese educational system, according to the Left Block, are the lack of equality of opportunities, the early school leaving and the weakness of public policies for childhood. For these reasons they accuse that “this school” recognizes children as subjects (Bloco de Ezquerda, 2010).

In order to create a more effective, democratic, participatory and equal, educational system Block proposes:

- The extension of pre-school education and the length from nine to twelve years of compulsory school attendance
• Free compulsory education. Left Block supports the schooling in respect of the basic conditions of registration, food, textbooks and school supplies.
• The right to information and knowledge must be preserved through a fair and equal system which does not allow discriminations.
• A phased program of acquisition and supply of free textbooks to all pupils of compulsory education, through the creation of loan stock in each school.
• Evaluation of educational areas for priority intervention, in particular in the professional staff.
• Equal opportunities. Left Block believes that discriminatory practices such as classes of level ("good" and "bad" students) must be stopped.

They propose a quality school as a key objective, without inequalities and exclusion. Their basic idea is that the school should be “the borders of a struggle for inclusion” (Bloco de Ezquerda, 2010).

Left Block supports the organization of school as a public space around three central directions: to educate young people and children, support families in their needs and enhance the linkage with the community dynamics and training throughout life. Moreover, the public school should be an educational center for comprehensive social vocation. This involves reorganizing the school in order to provide a quality education, while simultaneously creating space in the same school activities enhancing skills of children and youth, as well as fun activities. According to Portuguese Radical Left this new school model requires a new design of educational background, namely, new staff, new design cycles of education, priority to inclusion and academic achievement, capacity to project in public space through partnerships with other community institutions.

Left Block recommend the creation of multidisciplinary teams by teachers, psychologists, social workers and cultural mediators which will be capable of promoting the personal assistance to students who experience the neglect and school failure and suggest a new curricular reform which takes into consideration the weakness of arts education, effective sexual education in schools, as fundamental and universal right, promotes scientific
projects, stops the dichotomy between “academic knowledge” and “practical knowledge” and finally allows the reorganization of the curriculum in order to reduce the number of disciplines.

About language education Left Block supports that is essential in order to provide the necessary knowledge and multilingualism by training teachers in this area and taking into consideration the special education needs providing non-discrimination.

They also believe that in order to democratize educational system the participation of students to the decision-making bodies of the schools must be increased and the number of students in class must be decreased (20 maximum). The limited number of students ensures better learning conditions and makes learning process more effective.

As Block argues, the new information technologies require an integrated program for accessibility, enhancement of literacy and learning which is able to involve training, time and new forms of organization. On the other hand, they support the enhancement of libraries, particularly in secondary education and give priority to the improvement of working and learning conditions, namely to the higher State financing for facilities and infrastructure.

Furthermore, Left Block requires the implementation of the legislation about students with special education needs, defending their rights for equal opportunities and accessibility in education through the creation of units with expertise in special education needs, ensuring effective protocols between schools, public health establishments, associations and local authorities and other measures in the same direction.

Left Block underlies that Portugal remains one of EU countries with the lowest number of doctorates and masters and supports that Bologna declaration (Portugal signed in 1999) and the legal system of tertiary education damaged higher education and led to the crisis. Block also accuses government that higher education is not one of its priorities. They refuse to accept the current educational policies proposing the necessity of a new
law to recover the autonomy of democratic models of management in order to ensure the operating conditions of the universities.

Block proposes that the solution of free attendance is responding to the lack of training and to the model of the student-consumer. They also suggest the change of the rules about awarding scholarships which causes imbalances, defend the rights of student who work. Additionally, they demand the review of the formula for determining the amount of fees and the establishment of the exemption from payment of tuition for all students who are in the vulnerable social groups.

Therefore, Left Block rejects the government proposal about Status of Polytechnic and requires the assimilation with the universities, in terms of pathways and processes of qualification of teaching staff.

They suggest a program of policies for equality that will necessarily take into account higher education as an essential public service which allows access for all to science and culture and with solidarity will tackle the inequalities and backwardness of the country.

It is therefore necessary for Block to break the mechanisms that have been introduced to universities in the logic of business competition by reorganization of the higher education network. The increase funding for universities and polytechnics operation and the creation of a social support system will allow the access to higher education at all, will promote stable employment for teachers and researchers and will terminate the use of fellows as cheap labor. As they believe, these measures will combat insecurity.

Employment Policy

Portugal currently faces many financial problems due to global and eurozone’s financial crisis and took austerity measures that the new government have to implement, under the pressures from the European Union and the danger of a default. These measures reduce the social benefits as the state finance in crucial factors like education, health and social
provision is going to be reduced. Also, due to increasing deflation the level of unemployment continues to rise (currently 12.4%) and is above the EU average.

Left Block believe that unemployment could be confronted through the creation of new jobs and they propose three strategies to implement these goals; First, the support of the demand in the short term. In this sense, the most important step should be to increase the pensions of the elderly poor. Second, the creation of employment in non-tradable sectors, particularly in social and health policies. Third, the reduction of insecurity, which is higher to the lower classes.

The proposed measures of Left Block for job creation that will fight unemployment are:

• A higher public investment and expansion of social services. Block supports that through the nationalization strategy of energy resources and public investment in sectors such as transport and communications create new jobs and reduce the level of unemployment.
• A program of fiscal support and subsidies for job creation in the most affected districts, through the contracting of support for ten years with the guarantee of employment.
• Vocational training courses with the predominance of medium-term, with equal opportunities between women and men.
• A program for graduates and researchers, a contractual integration in their business and universities.
• Statutory refusal of the relocation of companies with positive results in other countries.
• New bankruptcy law which refuses to hand over power to a committee of creditors that relegates the last priority for unpaid wages and compensation, investigation of the accounts of companies that declare bankruptcy.

Left Block suggests that the revocation of the Labor Law and regulations, starting with standards that respect the right to collective bargaining (in particular the regime of most favorable treatment) and survival of the conventions, should observe the minimum services during strikes, flexibility and mobility imposed by employers.
About training policy, Left Block advocates the development of training, the improvement of job quality and the promotion of innovation and knowledge. In addition, a basic view of Left Block is that social policies can face the crisis recommending changes to the law of unemployment insurance to reduce the warranty period. Furthermore, other proposed measures focus on the equal pay in order to stop wage discrimination against women and reduce the costs of essential goods (water, electricity and gas) for unemployed with low or no income.

The Left Block is against the temporary work and advocates the permanent job through the replacement of the temporary employment agencies for job vacancies with employment centers, fulfilling the legal and worker rights, ensuring that workers have the same requirements for safety, health, hygiene and occupational health, extending the rules that regulate collective bargaining to the business of temporary employment agencies and regulating the type and duration of employment, assuming a ban on the succession of temporary workers in the same job.

For shift work and work accidents Left Block proposes a new regime which reinforce workers’ rights and create faster procedural mechanisms for work accidents. This new regime will ensure the benefits which they are entitled in the form of a pension for “victims”.

Another important point in which Block’s proposals conseentrate on is the reduction of weekly working hours without simultaneous loss of rights or salary.

Block defends the development of a social economy sector and financially supported by the state, which will be inserted in the companies promoted by producers. Moreover, Block supports the promotion of self-organization of producers in nonprofits or co-operatives, whose activity will be regulated by specific laws.
According to Block the new businesses on social economy should be supported by the state technical services, university research centres or NGO’s. The social economy enterprises shall provide the representative bodies of workers under control, which appoint their governing bodies and decide on all key issues, such as pay scales, social and cultural activities and investment of profits reinvested in the companies themselves and solidarity funds.

In conclusion, Block’s strategy about employment policy is based on ensurance of equality, increase of public investment and expansion of social services promoting the rise of skilled employment and the number of researchers. In all the above measures the role of the State is crucial and fundamental. These are the peaks of opposition with the right-wing parties.

**The case of Spain-Izquierda Unida (United Left)**

The 1978 Constitution stipulated that Spain’s political regime is a parliamentary monarchy and Spain is a state under social and democratic rule of law\(^2\) (European Commission, 2009/2010). From that year until now there were a rotation in the government from the two big parties, Social Democrats (PSOE) and the Right Party (PP). PSOE tried to create a welfare state and started to implement social policies at the ‘80 until PP won the elections in 1996 and implement privatizations and generally, neoliberal policies. At 2004 and 2008 PSOE has won the elections and is in government until now.

The economic crisis that Europe faces hit also Spain and Izquierda Unida\(^3\) supports that the policies which the socialist party implements are far from its ideological roots.

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\(^2\) According to the Spanish Constitution, Article 1, Spain is a state under social and democratic rule of law, with freedom, justice, equality and political pluralism as supreme values of its legal system and the King is the Head of State and the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers. The King is the symbol of the State unity and permanence.

\(^3\) The left party that currently is represented in the Spanish parliament is Izquierda Unida (United Left) which is a coalition that first organized in 1986 and is part of the European Left. The main ideological concept of United Left has its roots in socialism, anticapitalism and euroscepticism.
Economic interests, global financial crisis and the European Union push the government to decrease the expenses for social policies in order to reduce the debt. This is the point from which the criticism of IU to socialists (PSOE) starts. During the current financial crisis United Left contravened against the measures of PSOE’s government because these measures are trying to constrain the welfare state and the welfare policies, does not help to reduce unemployment while at the same time, decrease the financing in health and educational system. United Left underlie that welfare policies must be expanded and government must take measures in order to create more jobs and simultaneously the public expenditure for health and education must increase. But this dissatisfaction for the governmental policies does not mean that the left parties gain considerable power and this consists a matter of consideration and study.

Health Policy

One of the highest priorities of the welfare state in Spain along with education and employment policy is the health care. Health care system transformed at the 1980s and became universal, funded by the Spanish citizens through taxes.

The last reforms have introduced mechanisms “to balance the tension between federalization (regionally driven policy) and a national coherent view guaranteeing Spaniards’ equal rights regardless of their region of residence” (Health System Review, 2010:233). These reforms focused on coordination and cohesion.

Izquierda Unida has been an advocate since its creation, of a universal public health system, which should be characterized by equity, quality and sustainability. The basic ideas in the field of health policy are:

1. The right to health care is a dominant feature of the concept of Spanish citizenship and explicit commitment to Izquierda Unida.
2. The health system is one of the pieces of a welfare state and one of the most effective social and political integration of the society.
3. Health Services of the Autonomous Communities are backbones of each of them; the National Health Service must remain under State control.

4. Within the health system there is a permanent confrontation between the different logics that struggle to be dominant: economic, scientific and technological professional-union, the consumer and politics.

5. Health activity produces economic flows attractive for private capital and today is not being exploited with all the intensity that can be. Therefore the health care market is a target of private equity.

6. As the state apparatus, health system suffers from the tensions of the configuration of powerful bureaucracies (professionals, in this case) which are stresses that limit their social effectiveness.

7. As a part of society, health system suffers the impact of social trends that come from other sectors that adversely affect their effectiveness and sustainability, notably the evolution of the figure of the citizen to the consumer.

8. The Spanish health system suffers from the tensions caused by its fragmentation in 17 health services.


10. The Spanish health system has major problems that can be approached from different perspectives.

11. The great revolutions that could create big changes can be summarized under four fronts: the introduction of ICTs and information systems, updating and improving the legal framework and the construction of a new political and social pact, the major reform of personnel policies and finally, the transformation of organizational culture and society as far as health is concerned.

Objectives of the IU Health Policy

- Improve theoretical, social, trade union and left-wing policies for the future and plan to rebuild a strong health policy thought.
- Propose and support democratic deepening health system.
- Halting the blurring of the state's role in health policy.
- Strengthen the National Health System.
- Terminate the logic of the ‘citizen consumer’.

Izquierda Unida has the goal to take responsibility to promote a profound change in the Spanish health system, to defend it from attacks and possible disfunctions and to strengthen it as an essential part of Spanish welfare state model.

The modification of the system mean that it responds to the interests of all citizens, there is a necessity of making changes to the model of decision making and to redress the balance between private and general interests. Izquierda Unida believes that citizens must gain power and the state must regain decisional capacity. Through the basic role of the state, IU argues that citizens will gain the power. The triple alliance between the state, autonomy and citizens can put a stop to a model of decision making that favors the least objectively and hurts more.

Izquierda Unida wants to promote a new government leadership in the health policy area. The proposals concentrate both in the level of competence (possible revision of certain laws), as in the organic (a ministry redesign outdated organizationally) and cultural level (culture of the school is no longer valid, must be replaced by the hierarchical leadership moral leadership).

Moreover, Izquierda Unida suggests that a new general surgeon law is necessary in order to reflect the new level of social dialogue. Briefly the proposals of IU are:

1. Maintaining and strengthening the Ministry of Health.
2. Changing the model of leadership of the Ministry of Health.
4. Increased state funding designed primarily to research, equity and funding of strategic projects of integration of National Health System.
5. Establishment of a general agreement to try to schedule during the first year of the legislature with stakeholders on: Participation in the first year of the legislature, Human Resources Policy, Professional Development Policy, Medicines Policy, Technology and ICT.

6. New General Law of Health in the last two years of the legislature.

7. New model of international cooperation program jointly with the ACs.


The main ideas of IU’s proposals about health policy are based on the promotion of equality and equity through a revised health system. Also, the system must be reformed in a way that it will not face the citizen as a consumer but as an equal citizen that has the right to public health. The key is to create a system with increased public funding, research and services. State is the main mechanism that will implement this plan in which private investment will be limited.

**Educational Policy**

According to the Spanish Constitution, education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia*), although the 17 autonomous regions have some responsibility for their own education system (including higher education). The last reforms⁴ determined the framework and the main points of the organization of Spanish education system:

1. Basic education is compulsory and free of charge, and it is extended up to the age of 16.

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⁴ The educational law of 1990, the Ley Organica de Ordenacion General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE) (Law on the General Organization of the Educational System), established a new system which started in 1991-92 school-year. The 2002 Ley Organica de Calidad de la Educacion, LOCE (Act on the Quality of Education), the 2006 Ley Organica de Educacion, LOE (Education Act) and the 2007 Ley Organica de Modificacion de la LOU, LOMLOU (Act modifying the Act on Universities) came to complete and cover the main points of organisation of the educational system of Spain.
2. The educational system includes general and special education (the different levels of education are adapted to suit students with special needs).

3. All students have basic vocational training, which is given in secondary education. Specific vocational training is organized at two levels, the first at the end of compulsory secondary education, and the higher level at the end of the 'Baccalaureate'.

4. Improvement in the quality of teaching via the renewal of the contents of the courses, improvement in human resources and material resources and better use of the various instruments of the educational system.

5. Religious instruction is available but optional.

6. Higher education is provided by both public and private Institutes.

The current governmental measures in combination with the last recent data cause the reaction and intense criticism of radical left. Specifically, the total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP at 2007 was at 4.62%, less than the average of EU countries (5.07%). In addition, other data show the problem at the participation/enrollment in education (Eurostat, Education Statistics). In Spain was 70% in 2009, while the average of EU-27 is 80.1%. The high percentage amount of school leavers is essential for Spain. At 2007, the percentage was 30.1%, almost double from EU-27 average, 14% (European Commission Yearbook, 2009).

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5 The Spanish baccalaureate (bachillerato or bachiller) programme consists of two years academic training to prepare pupils for higher education or high-grade vocational training or to start a career.

6 The Ministry of Education with the departments of higher education in the universities coordinates the activities of state and private institutions and proposes the main lines of educational policy. As it is known, the Ministry of Education signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and under this line, the 2001 law, Ley Organica de Universidades, LOU (Act on Universities), regulates the university system with the aim of improving the quality and excellence of university education. In addition, the 2007 Ley Organica de modificacion de la Ley Organica de Universidades, LOMLOU (Act modifying the Act on Universities) grants more autonomy to universities, greater university’s accountability and evaluation of university functions. In addition, the adaptation of the university education to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has led to the establishment of a new structure of official university studies and degrees.
IU accuses the government for an organized attempt along with religious fundamentalists and authoritarian to preserve their privileges at all costs and return to the educational model of the Franco dictatorship.

Their proposals, as they support, are based on quality and equity. Specifically, they believe that public school should be in the service of equity and redress inequalities, attention to diversity, democratic participation as a basic principle of mainstreaming in order to improve the education system, training and working conditions of professional education and promote the autonomy of schools and the democratic participation of all sectors of school community.

The main proposed measures are focused on:

1. Extending and enhancing public education, via establishment of effective mechanisms for the different education authorities and through a planned network of schools of public ownership and management. Moreover, they combat against the transfers of municipal land for the creation of private schools ("public land only for public schools").

2. Quality and equity in order to avoid failure and dropout. They demand the creation of a “school for all”, which guarantees equal rights and democratic life of people with different socio-cultural backgrounds. So, the school will contribute to equity and social cohesion. They also suggest the implementation of Early Childhood Education policies and actions to prevent the school failure and promote the personal development and success in school (especially for those children with greater social and personal needs). They argue that the aim of the improvement and assurance of quality will be achieved through:

   - reduction of students per class and per teacher,
   - incorporation of new professional profiles in the school: teachers, social workers, cultural mediators, etc.,
   - establishment of a comprehensive system of scholarships and financial aid to compensate for the unfavourable socioeconomic conditions of the family as well as free books and teaching materials and school canteens and
3. Evaluation, as a strategy for improvement of the entire educational community of schools, with technical support from the administration, allowing them to analyze their strengths and difficulties in the teaching-learning process rather than as an "outcome measure" of students to establish rankings or ratings of schools.

4. Inclusive and intercultural public school that responds to the needs of students. Seeking and promoting excellence of all students and rebuilding the traditional curriculum to be relevant to everyone and more representative.

5. Public schools without religious courses. They support that religious teaching should be beyond the curriculum and school hours and religious beliefs are part of the private sphere and therefore must be outside the school curriculum.

6. Teacher’s support and training. They underline the importance of working conditions improvement in order to cover the education system demands and establish a stable cloisters single body of teachers. Additionally, they suggest an initial training that combines theory and practice supervised by qualified teachers in schools throughout the process and ongoing training during working hours.

7. The promotion of a Public University which services the society. They demand to open the discussion in the university community about the Bologna process and the "University Strategy 2015" for a public university to serve society and not the interests of the market and private businesses. In contrast, they emphasize in the necessity of adequate public funding in order to ensure an equal system of scholarships. They pressure for increase of public funding on education to 7% of GDP in the next six years and particularly for tertiary education to reach 2% of GDP.

8. Higher education policy. IU emphasizes on the tertiary education. The main points of proposed measures relates to the increase of public funding for Universities, the necessity
of innovation, the development of research and the involvement of technology. Furthermore, Spanish Radical Left propose the generalization of training until the age of 18 and opening new training methods that also allow simultaneous study and paid work before the full incorporation to employment.

The main points of IU’s proposals about education are focus on the increase in quality and equity via the increase in public ownership and management. Through the promotion of democratic participation they believe that the quality and equity will increase and through the increase in public funding for education, the levels of innovation and research will raise and this is the key for the development of the country. These measures have as key the State which is the main mechanism that will implement and manage the education system.

Employment Policy

Spain has the biggest percentage of unemployment from all the member states of the European Union as it is currently above the 20% generally and 40% in the ages 18-35 as Eurostat released. Table 2 shows the statistics of unemployment in European Union in May 2011 and Spain seems to have far the biggest unemployment from all the member states. This is a reason for United Left to accuse the government for its policies in fighting unemployment and provide a better future for the youngsters.

Table 2: Unemployment rates in EU. Source: Eurostat
United Left believe that the social democratic solution of the crisis must give priority to the interests of the whole population and not only to the richest. They believe that capitalism creates accumulation of the wealth to the higher classes of the society and because of these the policies that have to be implemented must be redistributive. This will happen with a focus on social justice, workers, small entrepreneurs, youth, women, pensioners and immigrants, otherwords, with a social policy that does not exclude anyone and preserve the lower classes that are mostly affected from the crisis and from the uncertainty of capitalism.

Izquierda Unida proposed a set of measures which consist a program that aims to create jobs, a proposal to combat the underground economy and tax evasion as a determinant for the financing of public expenditure and improvement in the deficit and a proposal to support small businesses and freelancers to overcome its liquidity and credit problems and facilitate their activity, which will create employment (Izquierda Unida, 2011). These politics are clearly trying to preserve the interests of the lower classes and the state plays crucial role to the creation of employment, not the markets or the financial interests.

The proposed measures of the United Left against unemployment are:

1. Transforming support for workers without any benefit by 300,000 jobs in a Training Program / Work in collaboration with the municipalities.
2. Grant 25% of the rehabilitation works and energy efficiency, modernizing the electrical and plumbing installations, improve the accessibility of the first residential housing up to a limit of 5,000 million euros. Such assistance would be combined with any other for the same purpose currently in force.
3. Program strengthening of public employment, amounting to 500 million euros in social services and activities related to improving the production model dependent on the General State Administration.
4. Transfer extraordinary 1,500 million euros to the fund on an Autonomous finalist for job creation within the autonomous powers. The volume of transfers is proportional to the number of unemployed in each autonomous region.
5. Create a program of strengthening public employment in social services managed by the Autonomous Communities, which allows the hiring of workers by total amount in the whole state of 1,800 million euros, financed by the Wealth Tax Recovery.

United Left believe that small businesses must underpinned and supported because it is the only way to encounter unemployment. The ways, for United Left, to accomplish this goal are:

1. To subsidize interest on loans from ICO-liquidity (this will be provided directly by the ICO) based on studies of risk of the Mutual Guarantee Societies.
2. To subsidize the Mutual Guarantee Societies with 1,500 million € for educational expenses and cost of guarantees for credit operations and technical guarantees. This would mobilize around 100,000 million € in productive investment.
3. To include social clauses in contracts and tenders of government prioritizing small businesses and freelancers in order to maintain employment, improve quality and achieve sustainable environmental management.
   a) United Left propose to set aside 20% of the tenders of the amount in staff costs exceed 50% of the total contract value to companies with fewer than 20 workers.
   b) Make provisions for all bids that value the quality and quantity of work assigned to the contract, the job retention and compliance with the obligations laid down in collective agreements.

United Left does not consider the concept of "competitiveness" as a functional term to constitute a positive output shaft of the crisis. It is an idea with a primarily ideological content that eventually tends to materialize only in price competition. Competitiveness does not mean for the United Left, creation of new jobs and as a result they prefer to use the concept of social profitability, referring directly to the amount and quality of employment and work in the differentiated analysis of the different comparative advantages.
United Left is opposed to public-private partnership in all that relates to public services, since a privatization process is currently in use, which increases the cost and lowers the quality of service. They argue that existing experiences in Europe and Spain show that a collaborative public/private financing is more expensive.

About the internationalization of Spanish companies United Left believes that the same elements within the framework of improving the international position of Spanish companies must not be kept for 30 years or more. The internationalization of the poor majority of companies has more to do with problems of business management model and other circumstances.

Concluding, Izquierda Unida is against privatizations and temporary employment. They believe that state must make public investments as a measure that will reduce unemployment. They are against the use of terms as “competitiveness” as they believe that they create inequalities. IU believes that only with state reforms that will enforce small enterprises will lead to the development and will decrease unemployment.

Conclusion

The main point from the proposals of Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe about health, education and employment policies have many similarities and a few differences. The differences are not in the ideological level but because of the differences from country to country. For example, one of the main proposals of SYRIZA about educational policy is the indemnity of the asylum, something that is a particularity of the Greek system.

About health policy the three parties are proposing the increase in public funding and the main and crucial role that the state has to play. This is the way to create an equal system that will offer high quality services to all the citizens. They are against privatizations and they believe that some more funding will offer to the system better level of infrastructure that it is required in order to increase the quality.
In education, despite the small differences because of the differences to the systems, the three parties suggest the increase of state funding and the public character of education, free, catholic and qualitative. The main points are again, the importance of state funding in the offered services and the equity.

For employment, the three radical left paries support the importance of the increase in public investments and the nationalization of basic public enterprises such as those of energy sector. Also, they insist on the promotion of stable employment and they are against part time or other forms of flexible employment.

The existence of such similarities in the proposals of the Radical Left Parties in Greece, Spain and Portugal means that they are facing similar problems, of course there are differences from country to country but the problems have qualitative similarity, and they have similar ideological agenta and roots. They all support a catholic wefare state that will not have inequalities and will offer qiality services to the citizens. These views are against the implementing policies in these three countries and they accuse them as neoliberal policies that create more inflation without giving solutions to the problems that the crisis create and create inequalities and give the wealth to the wealthier classes. The question is if these policies can be implemented and have the expected outcome inside a capitalist system. At ’60s social democrats tried to implement these ideals but afterwards they failed. So, is a reform of the welfare system required or a general reform of a capitalist system?

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