

**TRANSFORM! EUROPE**

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*E.U. and the Left in times of crisis*

*Left Strategy between the Scylla of National and the  
Charybdis of International Political Arenas*

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**Questionnaire**

## 1. What was the strategy of the Left parties in your country **vis-à-vis** the Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of the Eurozone?

The Left Party in Germany – despite all differences in its concrete positions on the European Union – has consistently rejected the European Treaties of Maastricht and above all Lisbon. This applies also to the former PDS. Even if there were some differences of opinion on the European integration process and a degree of controversy on the draft of the European constitution, the party's stance was unmistakable.

The PDS had always combined its fundamental criticism of the European treaties with criticism of the political course taken by the German government. The Maastricht Treaty was accompanied in Germany with a shift to the right on the part of the government – as seen in the asylum compromise of 1992, which abolished the individual basic right to asylum enshrined in the Basic Law. This combined criticism was also important because the Maastricht Treaty bolstered Germany's pre-eminent role in Europe and, in the view of the PDS, was not aimed at achieving an equal union of European states. Thus the PDS was against Germany supremacy right from the start while also objecting to the treaty for the following reasons.

1. After Maastricht the next step towards European unification – as before in the case of German unification – was monetary union. It was not a question of economic union, and care was taken to exclude the prospect of a social union. Such a course would inevitably lead – as it had in the case of German unification – to social and economic polarization within the EU. As there was no social union, there were no common, all-European standards to be aspired to in the fields of social welfare, industrial safety or health care.<sup>1</sup>
2. The criticism concerned the foreign and security-policy tenor of the treaty, according to which the EU was to be built up into a European military alliance alongside NATO, a global actor with a European rapid deployment force.
3. Criticism was levelled at the treaty's asylum policy, which amounted to sealing the EU off from Eastern Europe and the so-called Third World countries.
4. Criticism was also levelled at the common policing policy, which was not aimed at ensuring the rule of law, but at undermining data protection and the restriction of individual rights and liberties under the pretext of fighting crime.
5. Criticism was levelled at the absence in the treaty of democratic institutions and transparent decision-making processes. The powers surrendered to the European level did not go to the European Parliament, but to the Executive in Brussels. This meant a weakening of democracy at European level, as the Parliament has but limited rights.

Instead of the Maastricht Treaty the then PDS called for the draft of a law on **holding a referendum** on the Federal Republic's membership of a European Union and the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty on a European Union (European Referendum Law). This is always to be found in the European election platform of the PDS for 2004 and later of the Left Party for

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by Gregor Gysi in the Maastricht debate in the Bundestag on 8.10.1992.  
<http://www.glasnost.de/db/Europa/92maastgysi.html>

2009 which states that: “Europe needs a treaty on which all citizens in the Union can vote on the same day.”<sup>2</sup>

The PDS was the only party in the German Bundestag which rejected the monetary union with the demand: “Euro yes – but not like this!”, combining this with its demand for a social union and an ecological union and above all for an active and effective European employment policy.

The draft European Constitution, known as the Treaty of Lisbon, was also consistently rejected by the PDS in 2005. The criticism referred to

1. the continuing militarization of the EU by giving it a global military capability and the arms build-up that has now become a constitutional requirement;
2. giving neoliberal principles constitutional status by including a commitment to principles of an open market economy with free competition, thus subordinating employment policy to the overall economic policy;
3. the renewed restrictions in the charter of basic rights which, although included in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, was again undermined by the updated explanations of the Presidium of the Convention on Basic Rights, which explanations were to be part of the constitution;
4. the absence of any right to take initiatives on the part of the Parliament. Thus the treaty, despite enhanced participatory rights, guarantees no real democratization of the decision-making processes at EU level.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Has the crisis of the euro-zone affected/changed the strategy of the Left in your country regarding European integration and the EU, and if so, in what way?**

In its Bundestag election platform for 1998 the then PDS, as a “European socialist party” declared itself in favour of European integration and “ supported it”.<sup>4</sup> Almost the same wording was used for its European election platform for 1999: “As a European socialist party the PDS is in favour of European integration and supports it”.<sup>5</sup> In the European election platform of the PDS for 2004 this sentence is supplemented to include the characterization of a Europe “based on equal rights, solidarity, civil society and democracy”, reinforced with the words: “Therefore it (the PDS) emphatically supports a change in integration policy.”<sup>6</sup>

The European election platform of the Left Party for 2009 no longer contains a statement of unconditional support for European integration. The Left Party stands for European integration if this is combined with a new foundation: “We want another, better EU!”<sup>7</sup> This foundation would include a peaceful Europe, a Europe without poverty or exclusion, with an economic policy that promoted social progress and ecological structural change, in which the financial markets were subject to strict control, a Europe with a strong Parliament and

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<sup>2</sup> DIE LINKE 2009. Solidarität, Demokratie, Frieden - Gemeinsam für den Wechsel in Europa!, <http://www.linke-kek.net/images/stories/Beitrage/LAG%20Europapolitik/europawahlprogramm2009.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Linkspartei.PDS. 2004. Für einen anderen Verfassungsvertrag – für ein friedliches, soziales und demokratisches Europa. Beschluss der 1. Tagung des 9. Parteitags der PDS.

[http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/partei/parteitag/pt0901/view\\_html?zid=28650&bs=1&n=7](http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/partei/parteitag/pt0901/view_html?zid=28650&bs=1&n=7)

<sup>44</sup> PDS (1998). Bundestagswahlprogramm. p. 53

<sup>5</sup> PDS 1999 Europawahlprogramm. p.

<sup>6</sup> PDS 2004. Europawahlprogramm. p. 2

<sup>7</sup> DIE LINKE 2009. Ibid., p. 4.

transparent decision-making processes, with equal rights for men and women, with the rule of law and in solidarity with the world economy. The Left Party calls not for the Lisbon strategy but an “integrated EU strategy for solidarity, sustainable development, and social integration”.<sup>8</sup>

This is also contained in the party platform of the Left Party adopted in 2011, which points to the necessity of a new start for the European Union on the grounds of the unsuitability of the present treaties for a social and democratic development, which treaties must be terminated for such a new start to take place. Only on such a basis can European integration be aspired to.

Behind this formulation of the 2011 party platform is an increasing rejection of the EU’s general orientation at present, an increasingly Eurosceptic mood in the party in which – despite a common, unifying line – there are two fundamentally different attitudes to the EU.

Whereas a section of the party, including a majority of the MEPs in the German delegation to the European Parliament, strives to conduct European policy under the present conditions of the Lisbon Treaty, using the available European political instruments, including the Parliament, this is dismissed by others as illusionary. The EU treaty does not permit a democratic and welfare-oriented structuring of the EU. “Since the Uniform European Act of 1985 at the latest European integration has no longer been a response to globalization, but its accelerator ... the EU, as it exists at present, is a radical competition community which by means of a concerted attack on democracy is going to become the ‘competitive empire’ of the original member states.”<sup>9</sup>

The Left Party, as its Chairman, Bernd Riexinger, explained on 11 June 2012, combines its concrete criticism with a rejection of the fiscal pact, because the latter is ultimately going to destroy the European integration process, which would result in a Europe-wide dismantling of democracy and social standards. The Left Party therefore demands an immediate halt to the policy of budget cuts. “The financing of the public budgets in the Eurozone must be ensured by a public European bank which would receive low-interest loans from the ECB. Such a measure would free the financing of the public budgets from the tyranny of the financial markets. National debts must be drastically reduced by introducing a Europe-wide wealth tax for millionaires. Germany must also take suitable measures, such as the introduction of a general legal minimum wage of 10 euros, to strengthen domestic demand.”

An almost identical formulation was used by Sahra Wagenknecht at the beginning of June 2012: “The Left Party demands an immediate stop to the cutback policy. The financing of the government budgets in the Eurozone has to be secured by a public European bank, receiving in turn by the European Central Bank credit at reduced rates of interest. This measure would release the financing of the government budget from the dictatorship of the financial markets. National debts have to be reduced by a rigorous haircut and a Europe-wide millionaires’ tax. Private high street banks have to be socialised and the whole financial sector must be strictly regulated. Germany has to adopt appropriate measures to strengthen domestic demand.”

The Left Party is also in agreement with other social movements – such as the alliance forged as a result of the crisis in Germany under the slogan “We won’t pay for your crisis” – in saying that those who caused the crisis should be made to pay for it. Europe’s millionaires must finally be made to pay an appropriate wealth tax. Only when the economy revives and

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<sup>8</sup> DIE LINKE (2009). Europawahlprogramm, p. 6, Berlin.

<sup>9</sup> Fabio de Masi/Ralf Krämer (2012). Der Traum ist aus. Die Linke und die europäische Union. Zeitschrift LuXemburg. Gesellschaftsanalyse und linke Praxis. 2, 2012, p. 47f.

such a wealth tax is introduced, as consistently demanded by the Left Party, can the consolidation of the budgets again become a realistic project.

Furthermore the Left Party in Germany considers it a matter of urgency to break the dependence of the national budgets on the financial markets. The Left Party therefore supports the direct granting of loans to governments via a bank with the status of a public corporation, which in turn would be granted loans by the ECB. Finally, a common currency also requires the coordination of economic and social policy if the development of the various national economies is to be steered in the direction of shared prosperity. The big private banks must be downsized and regulated by public law.

### **3. Has the European crisis affected the feelings of the general public or of political forces in your country regarding other countries? How has the Left reacted to this development?**

In Germany – unlike in most EU countries – the present crises are only beginning to make themselves felt in everyday life. Although in May 2012 64% of the population saw the general economic situation in Germany as good, by July 2012 85% were assuming that the worst part of the debt crisis was still to come (13% did not agree), while 56% feared for their savings, two thirds feared rises in taxes and prices, and more than 70% a lesser provision for old age. Anxiety is spreading to the middle classes, even if in June almost 70% claimed they were hardly or not at all affected by the debt crisis.<sup>10</sup>

This includes those who live under the conditions of permanent crisis – namely the conditions created by the Hartz laws. For Germany these neoliberal labour market laws meant the flexibilization and deregulation of the labour market and the development of a low-wage sector, which contributes decisively to the low-wage strategy of the German economy.

This strategy affects not just the low-wage earners, but also the whole wage structure of the country. Germany is the only EU country in Europe in which real wages fell between 2000 and 2008, namely by 0.8%. By 2010 about 15% of Germany's population were in danger of slipping below the poverty line. Even if this figure has been stagnating “at a high level” since 2005, 65% of those affected are permanently in the low income bracket.<sup>11</sup>

This low-wage strategy is one of the reasons for Germany's role in Europe and its place as the “world export champion”. But if we look at the firms that employ the most temporary workers, these are mainly large corporations, especially those that produce for export.

In Germany the worst affected are the long-term unemployed. According to OECD data for 2011, they account for 3.9% of Germany's 7.48% unemployed. Germany has, after Slovakia, the highest proportion of long-term unemployed.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background it seems paradoxical that the dramatic declines in Germany occurred during the “non-crisis” periods, whereas in the financial market-driven crisis years 2008 and 2009 social stabilization proved possible and social escalations preventable.

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<sup>10</sup> Infratest Dimap. Deutschlandtrend, July 2012. <http://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/2012/juli/>

<sup>11</sup> Baurmann, Jana Gioia (2011). Einmal arm immer arm. Der neue Sozialbericht für Deutschland zeigt, dass sozial Schwache weniger Aufstiegschancen haben als früher. Handelsblatt vom 12.10.2011. p. 17

<sup>12</sup> Arbeitslosigkeit und Langzeitarbeitslosigkeit. In: Soziale Gerechtigkeit in der OECD – Wo steht Deutschland. Sustainable Governance Indicators 2011. Bertelsmann Stiftung. p. 24f.

#### **4. To what extent has the current crisis modified the relations of political representation between the social classes, protest movements and the party system in your country? What is the position of the Left in the new political landscape? Did it manage to broaden its social base?**

The “hot” autumns of 2010 and 2011 did not see any massive protests against the unfair distribution of the burdens caused by the crisis. The “enragés” of 2010 protested not against the unfair sharing of burdens, but against right-wing extremism and neo-fascism, against the nuclear policy of the German government, against postponing the shutdown of the nuclear reactors, against transports of nuclear waste, and against such large-scale projects as the Stuttgart 21 railway scheme.

Thousands of young people were excited by the Arab Spring, by the vehemence of the protests of the Indignaos movement in Spain, and by the general strikes in Italy, Spain and Portugal, seeing their Assemblies as new forums of joint protest. People in Germany were impressed by the American Occupy movement, which in 2011 spread to Germany. In May 2012 the Blockupy demonstration in Frankfurt’s financial centre drew almost 30,000 participants, sending a clear signal from the very country which was supposed to have gained from the crisis. The Left Party took part in these protests right from the start.

In the trade unions too, which had been integrated in the German “crisis corporatism”, things seem to be stirring. Starting in 2010 there has been increasing resistance to contract work. The IG Metall union has demanded equal pay for contract workers.

In March 2012 the public service trade unions organized warning strikes ahead of collective bargaining, bringing traffic in Dortmund and Stuttgart to a standstill. They demanded an official pay rise of 6.5%. On 1 May 2012 the trade unions demanded a minimum wage of 8.50 euros, a wealth tax, assertion of authority over the banks, and better working conditions. The meetings were attended by over 400,000 people. The more than 420 demonstrations and meetings were held under the slogan “Decent Employment in Europe – Fair Wages, Social Security”.

Each of these actions is important, but they are not enough to bring about a change in direction in German social policy.

#### **5. In what way did the European crisis affect the political relations between the key players of the Left (parties, trade unions, movements) in your country? Has there been a shift in the relations between the Left, Social Democracy and the Greens? If so, in what direction?**

Against the background of an EU crisis whose effects are not felt in people’s day-to-day lives the party landscape in Germany has hardly changed – with one exception: The last Berlin regional elections saw the emergence of the Pirates as a new up-and-coming party with ambitions to enter the Bundestag in 2013. Seen mainly as a social libertarian party, they currently score between 7 and 10 percent in the polls. They are already represented in four regional parliaments and draw their voters from almost all political constituencies, especially that of the Left Party.

The CDU currently lies between 34 and 36 percent and can rely on its Chancellor – who is currently supported by 66% of the population – as the author and saviour of German prosperity. The SPD lies between 28 and 30 percent and combines left-wing slogans of social justice with references to its earlier reforms (the Hartz laws) – the foundation of today’s “robust German economy” (Steinmeier) – as an achievement of the SPD. Furthermore the

debt ceiling was written into the Basic Law – under an SPD finance minister! Meantime the SPD knows that this is not enough on its own and is therefore demanding a growth pact and Eurobonds. These demands of the SPD have been cleared with the Hollande government and his Italian and Spanish partners. In this way the SPD can increase its influence via the “European pressure”.

The Greens lie between 12 and 14 percent and attempt to combine ecological with social issues. Thus a very lengthy passage on the restructuring of the European Union into a “community of solidarity” with strong minimum standards and bottom-up “regulatory corridors” was inserted in a draft resolution on Europe. The demands are comprehensive, extending from a Europe-wide minimum wage (related to the given national average wage), minimum rates for the unemployed and social transfers as well as for pensions and health insurance. The benefits are to be transferable via a supplementary European scheme.

Like all other parties in the Bundestag with the exception of the Left Party, the Greens have given their consent to the fiscal pact, although they were unable to gain acceptance for their demand for an Old Debt Repayment Fund. They regard the financial transaction tax and growth subsidies as their successes legitimizing their assent.

The Left Party was the only party to vote against the fiscal pact and challenge its legitimacy before the Federal Constitutional Court. It is the only party to reject the fiscal pact and warn against the consequences of such a development. It was the Left that anticipated the crisis in its analysis long before it happened.

Nevertheless at present it is hardly gaining in political and social influence. It is faced with the problem of stopping its downward trend. Its return to the Bundestag in 2013 is not assured.

Since 2010 the Left Party has been losing both social and political acceptance. This process took place largely independently of the crisis. Whereas in 2011 there was an intense exchange of voters between the Left on the one hand and the SPD and Greens on the other, in the 2012 elections there were dramatic desertions to join the ranks of the non-voters, the SPD (mainly in the case of trade unionists) and the Pirates. In the 2012 elections in North Rhine-Westphalia only 115 out of 1,000 eligible voters were of the opinion that the Left Party should be represented again in the regional parliament, but only 15 out of 1,000 actually voted for it. This left it with a result below the 2005 level.

The voter potential of the Left Party has shrunk from 25% in 2009 to 16% in 2012. At present it is between 3 and 4% in the West German, and between 15 and 17% in the East German Federal states. In the coming months it must develop in a credible and down-to-earth manner its utility value as a left-wing party in favour of a political change of direction towards social security and democracy in Germany and Europe.

## **6. Faced with the European Crisis what kind of national strategy is the Left in your country favouring along with other political forces, trade-unions and social movements at the national level? Is this national strategy related, and if so in what way, to a strategy for the transformation of Europe?**

In its new party platform the Left declares its opposition to any kind of war-mongering, anti-Semitism, racism, or national arrogance.

For the Left Party in Germany the national level is the most important political level for defending social and democratic standards. It must, however – especially in view of the fiscal pact, the direct access to national budgetary policies and hence also to the social policies of

the EU countries – be directly linked to the European level. Thus for the Left Party the EU is “an indispensable political operational level”.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time the Left Party pursues a double strategy: it calls for European taxes, such as the financial transaction tax, and it calls for the coordination of the national tax policies “in order to put an end to tax dumping within the EU”.<sup>14</sup> At European level it calls for the expansion and strengthening of regulatory and supervisory structures and the further promotion of the EU structural development aid. The Left Party demands an independent right of initiative for the EU Parliament and, in view of the EU’s extensive and increasingly complex decision-making powers, “expanded rights of control and action for the Bundestag and the regional parliaments in the process of European legislation”.<sup>15</sup>

**7. The crisis has fuelled the claim that transformation and emancipation are not possible within the EU. Is this view shared by the parties of the Left in your country? What are the arguments pro and contra and what is your personal view on the matter?**

The Left Party calls for the EU to be a democratic, social, ecological and peaceful union in which social rights take precedence over domestic market freedoms; which has Europe-wide social minimum standards of social and environmental protection; which levies corporate and wealth taxes; and has a democratically controlled central bank and a coordinated economic policy. However, what the way towards implementing these demands should look like, how these demands fit in with the idea of a socio-ecological transformation, has not yet been conceptually worked out. At the same time it realizes that the implementation of economic democracy under present conditions has a national, a European and an international dimension. Given the economic internationalization processes taking place, it is no longer possible within the framework of the nation state. It is an open question whether a political union – which must also be a social union – supported by the Left Party can contribute to the implementation of economic democracy.

**8. Some intellectuals and parties of the Left claim that the crisis has proved that the ruling elites (classes) of Germany and France are imposing an imperialist policy on all EU countries and especially those of the European periphery. Do the parties of the Left in your country agree with this view? What are the arguments pro and contra and what is your personal view?**

The party platform of the Left Party contains a section headed “Imperialism and War”, which states that capitalist countries make sure that their corporations have worldwide access to all resources, while investing and exploiting their capital worldwide, using their economic and military supremacy to do so. What is specific about today’s imperialism is that it relies on economic dependence and indebtedness. If we look at Germany’s economic role as “world export champion” and its increasingly dominant political role in the EU since 1992, the country could be described as imperialist. There are two arguments against this. First, as the last Brussels summit showed, and given the changed political balance of forces within the EU, German supremacy in the EU is impossible in the long term. At the Euro Summit of June

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<sup>13</sup> DIE LINKE (2011). Parteiprogramm. p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> DIE LINKE ibid.. p. 39

<sup>15</sup> DIE LINKE, ibid. p. 46



2012 the German government failed in its attempt to impose its austerity measures – the German model of the Hartz laws, the deregulation of the labour market, the debt ceiling enshrined in the Basic Law and the privatization of public goods – on the EU as a whole.

In view of the collapse of attempts at crisis management so far, the policy of austerity and budget cuts is now no longer feasible, having not only proved to be the starting signal for the spread of poverty across Europe, but also increasingly endangered other economies beside Germany's. The expanding recession threatens both German corporations and those with European interests. In view of these developments contradictions within the ruling block are inevitable. With the cosmetic corrective of the austerity mandate the political readjustment of an EU of the original six becomes visible through the roll-back of Germany's dominant role.

In this sense the failure of the Merkel government represents a relativization of its pre-eminent position. It therefore comes as no surprise that the proposal to implement a political union should come from the CDU in the person of Wolfgang Schäuble himself. It was, after all, the Treaty of Maastricht which legitimized Germany's supremacy in Europe.

The Merkel government is faced with the coordinated actions of the Spanish, Italian and French governments, who for their part are protecting the capital interests of their countries. The question is, in view of the fact that 80% of exports remain within the EU, what capital combinations are behind this.

It is also the case that Germany has no military clout that would enable it to play a dominant role in international relations.

As far as the Left Party in Germany is concerned, the German export model is one of the main causes of the crisis, as it consists in practising wage dumping in one's own country in order to outdistance national competitors, thus creating massive imbalances in the Eurozone in favour of the German export economy. The Left Party therefore calls for a reduction of the economic imbalances and an end to the subsidizing of banks out of public funds. It is high time for governments to stop adopting austerity packages at the expense of the population, introduce common standards for the taxing of corporations, and put a stop to wage and social dumping in Europe.

**9. Is there evidence of an anti-systemic sentiment in the political system of your country? If so, how is it expressed? To what extent does this sentiment fuel the far Right? Analyse the position and strategy of your party towards anti-systemic politics.**

The Left Party does put the system in question. This is what distinguishes it from the Social Democrats. It aspires to change the system by means of a process of socio-economic transformation. However, it still has to develop the projects and strategies necessary for this.

At European level the Left Party calls for a fresh start for a peaceful, democratic, social and political Union. But with this in view it is only beginning to develop its alternative agenda together with its partners in Europe. So far it has only been able to organize resistance and protest against welfare cuts and the dismantling of democracy or to be a part of these protests. There is only one conceivable progressive prospect: The European integration level that is in process of formation requires a constitution. Let us discuss a democratic constitution in Europe that is worthy of the name.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gregor Gysi (6.7.2012). Was für eine Krise ist die Eurokrise. Vortrag an der Universität Saarbrücken.