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What is Left for the Radical Left?

A Comparative Examination of the Policies of Radical Left Parties in
Western Europe before and after 1989

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What is Left for the Radical Left?

A Comparative Examination of the Policies of Radical Left Parties in Western Europe before and after 1989

Abstract: The fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe was a shattering event for the Western European radical left, causing many parties to change their names and strategies. Despite prophecies pointing to the death of radical anti-capitalist politics, radical left parties (RLPs) still exist in all parts of Europe, and in many countries they have even been able to increase their influence. This paper seeks to provide a comparative mapping of the policies and policy positions of Western European RLPs before and after the fall of communism. The results of the examination indicate that although leftward trends can be observed in many RLPs in the early 2010s, the general, long-time, trend shows that the radical left family – and especially democratic socialist parties – have become less radical with regards to the core left–right dimension. Moreover, the study also shows that many RLPs – and, again, especially democratic socialist parties – have become more interested in other, non-socioeconomic, issues. Despite the rise of new left issues, the radical left is, however, still distinguishable from other parties mainly through their comparatively strong emphasis on old, traditional, left issues.

Keywords: issues, policy positions, political parties, radical left, socialism

Introduction

The fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–1991 is often considered as one of the major upheavals of the twentieth century. As the Cold War now came to an end, many observers regarded the conflict between socialism and capitalism as obsolete and the western form of democracy, based on economic and political liberalism, as the only feasible alternative. Communist and other radical left parties (RLPs) – in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the western parts of the continent – were seen as things of the past, deemed to disappear into the dustbin of history.

Today, we know that a few RLPs did indeed disappear, and that many others changed their names, their strategies, and sometimes also their policy profiles (cf. e.g. Bozóki and Ishiyama 2002; March and Mudde 2005; Moreau, Lazar, and Hirscher 1998). The prophecies pointing to a terminal demise of radical anti-capitalist politics were, however, largely premature: RLPs still exist in all parts of Europe, and in many countries they have – especially during the last few years – even been able to increase their electoral support as well as their *Koalitionsfähigkeit* (cf. Hudson 2012; March 2012).¹

Despite their increasing electoral and political relevance, the research on contemporary RLPs is – compared to, for example, the voluminous scholarship on the (populist) radical right – still in its infant shoes. As pointed out by March (2012, p. 4), most previous works on RLPs are either in-depth studies of one or a few cases² or, alternatively, comparative examinations of the (in most cases deeply reformed and hence no longer *radical* left) successor parties in Central and Eastern Europe.³ Although recent publications also include more wide-ranging studies on the electoral support and success (March and Rommerkirchen 2015; Ramiro 2014), government participation (Bale and Dunphy 2011; Dunphy and Bale 2011; Olsen, Koß, and Hough 2010a), transnational cooperation (Dunphy and March 2013), and Euroscepticism (Charalambous 2011) of European RLPs, there is still a lack of comparative knowledge on many important aspects of the radical left.

This paper seeks to contribute to filling this gap. More specifically, the study provides the, to my knowledge, first comparative mapping of the policies of RLPs before and, perhaps more important, after the fall of communism. The focus of the paper is exclusively on Western Europe, defined as the part of Europe located to the west of the Iron Curtain between 1945 and 1989. The reason for excluding RLPs in Central and Eastern Europe is twofold. First, and most important, there is no available data on the pre-1989 policies of RLPs in Central and Eastern European countries. Second, and following the definitions by March (2012, p. 19), only a few of the electorally significant parties in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe – the Czech *Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, the Moldovian *Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova*, the Russian *Kommunisticheskaya*

Partiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii, and the Ukrainian *Komunistychna Partiya Ukrayiny* – are ‘consistently anti-capitalist or even radical’, and most of the Central and Eastern European radical left parties ‘cannot [therefore] be regarded as stable or universally recognized part[s] of the radical left party family’.

The research questions asked in the present study are rather straightforward. Utilizing quantitative data on party positions and using comparisons of mean values and line charts in order to test a number of descriptive hypotheses, I examine, first, RLPs changing attitudes towards the conventional left–right dimension and, second and somewhat more in detail, the specific policy issues emphasized by existing RLPs. By this, I hope to provide relevant information on what left really means for the contemporary radical left. The paper is divided into five parts. The subsequent section includes a framework, the third section presents the data, the cases, and the measurement strategies, and the fourth section reports the empirical results. The fifth section, lastly, concludes the paper.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study is presented in two subsections, one of which is conceptual and the other one theoretical. In the first subsection I lay out a definition of the radical left. Utilizing insights from different literatures, the second subsection presents a number of elementary (descriptive) hypotheses about the expected development of Western European RLPs after the fall of communism.

Defining the Radical Left

Although challenged by new conflicts, the left–right dimension is still widely considered as a (or, perhaps, *the*) major political division in the western world. According to Bobbio (1996, ch. 6), equality is the most frequently used criterion when distinguishing between left and right. In Bobbio’s (1996, p. 68) view, the left promotes equality while the right legitimizes inequality, either on the grounds that ‘men are born equal but [...] made unequal by civil society’ or, alternatively, because ‘men are by nature born unequal’. Following an astute and frequently quoted delineation by Seliger (1976, pp. 214–216), the left can be said to – traditionally, at least – promote (economic) equality by advocating collective ownership, economic planning, and redistribution, while the right’s acceptance of (economic) inequalities is expressed in its support for private ownership, free markets, and wealth and status differences.

The term radicalism, originating from the Latin word for root (*radix*), is, in the field of politics, generally understood as the pursuit of a ‘root-and-branch’ transformation of society. Following an authoritative definition by March and Mudde (2005, p. 25), RLPs are radical in the sense that they tend to reject ‘the underlying socio-

economic structure of contemporary capitalism’ and advocate ‘alternative economic and power structures’. Hence, and more generally, RLPs can be distinguished from non-radical (centre-)left parties by their belittlement of *liberal* democracy (but not democracy *per se*) and, moreover, by their critique of economic elites.

The radical left family is, however, not a monolithic family. Following March (2012, pp. 16–19), it can be loosely divided into five subgroups.⁴ Here, *conservative communist* parties are old-style Marxist-Leninist parties that ‘attempt to “conserve” Soviet revolutionary traditions’, while *reform communists* are more eclectic parties that have ‘adopted, or at least given lip service to, elements of the post-1968 “new left” agenda’. *Democratic socialist*⁵ and *populist socialist* parties both favor democratic, non-dogmatic, and sometimes also non-Marxist socialism. In addition, the parties within the latter group also include an ‘anti-elite, anti-establishment appeal’ in their ideologies. *Social populist* parties, finally, are signified by an ‘incoherent ideology’ that ‘fuses left-wing and right-wing themes’ and are, hence, only rarely recognized as genuine left-wing parties.

With this said, the radical left can be defined as a party family consisting of conservative and reform communist, democratic and populist socialist, and – with great reservation – social populist parties that are left in the sense that they tend to (i) promote (economic) equality by fighting for collective ownership, economic planning, and redistribution, and radical in the sense that they (ii) oppose the current order (i.e., capitalism) and advocate an alternative economic and political system.⁶

The Radical Left and the Fall of Communism

From the perspective of the Western European radical left, the fall of the communist regimes implied an abrupt end of ‘actually existing socialism’ and ‘the logic of the blocks’. Although all RLPs did not enjoy support from the Soviet Union – several parties even tried to distance themselves from the Soviet model –, few were able to escape ‘guilt by association’ in the eyes of the public (cf. March 2012, pp. 39–41). Hence, the fall of communism was a serious shock for most RLPs, a shock that was further strengthened by the climate of opinion in the 1990s, when radical left politics in general, and communism in particular, was viewed as more abominable than perhaps ever before and when many of the policy goals traditionally pursued by RLPs – including nationalization, a centrally planned economy, and proletarian internationalism – were viewed with great suspicion by the political mainstream. Accordingly, the fall of communism is habitually⁷ seen as a critical juncture, forcing the Western European RLPs to deeply reconsider their left–right policy positions and their preferred policy issues.

RLPs and the Left-Right Dimension

As noted above, the left–right dimension is generally considered as the most important political dimension in the western world – as a ‘super-issue’ that summarize ‘citizens’ and parties’ positions on the issues of the day’ (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, p. 82). Although the specific content of left and right is considered to vary between different settings, there is a fairly broad consensus concerning the (spatial and temporal) traveling capacity of a limited number of core subjects related mainly to socioeconomic issues such as ownership and (re)distribution (cf. the definition of left and right above).

Concerning the parties’ left–right *positions*, firstly, it has long been argued that parties are pulled towards the centre. The most explicit theoretical argument in this vein has probably been delivered by Downs (1957; see Hotelling (1929) for the original contention) in his well-known spatial theory of party competition. The expectation here is that parties in two-party systems seek to maximize their votes by locating themselves close to one another, in the centre of the political space. Later, a similar pattern has been expected also in multi-party contexts (Sjöblom 1968) where vote-seeking parties are believed to de-emphasize their core ideologies in order to attract more voters (Kirchheimer 1966).

These theoretical predictions have received mixed support in empirical research. First, and more generally, it has been recognized that the vote-seeking strategy does not tell the whole story: parties also have office- and policy-seeking motives and hence need to compromise between different and partly conflicting strategies (cf. Müller and Strøm 1999). Second, the evidence of a centripetal trend towards catch-all politics is somewhat ambiguous. While some scholars find clear signs of long-term convergence (cf. e.g. Caul and Gray 2000; Thomas 1979), others dispute this argument and claim that parties’ policy positions remain distinct and fairly stable over time (cf. e.g. Dalton and McAllister 2015; Shamir 1984). These controversies notwithstanding, studies utilizing various different data sources – including party manifestos (Volkens and Klingemann 2002), expert surveys (Knutsen 1998b), and opinion surveys (Knutsen 1998a, 1998c) – are reasonably unanimous in observing a general trend of convergence in the 1980s and 1990s – a trend that probably was caused mainly by the stepwise deradicalization of left wing, and particularly social democratic (cf. e.g. Fagerholm 2013; Pennings 1999; Volkens 2004), parties that took place during the late 20th and early 21st century (Krouwel 2012, ch. 5).

Based on these observations, a march towards the centre of the socioeconomic left–right dimension can be expected among most radical left parties during the decades around the turn of the millennium. More specifically, the majority of Western European RLPs are seen as flexible actors that are not solely, or even primarily, interested policies – they also care about votes and are ready to revise their core policies in order to increase their chances of winning votes and gaining

office (cf. Bale and Dunphy 2011). Motivations for a shift towards the centre may be provided by the parallel turn of social democratic parties and by the decreasing popularity and, above all, legitimacy of radical socialist and anti-capitalist politics. Put differently, the centrist trend among social democratic parties may pull the radical left in a similar direction in search for votes, and the declining tolerability of (left wing) radicalism may push the radical left away from intemperate and increasingly unpopular standpoints. With the exception of highly orthodox conservative communist parties (see Cunha 2008; Marantzidis 2008; cf. also March 2012), a general *centripetal shift* can thus be expected among Western European RLPs:

Hypothesis 1: After the fall of communism, most Western European RLPs have been taking more centrist positions on the socioeconomic left–right dimension.

Regarding the *importance* of the left–right dimension, secondly, four key arguments can be distinguished (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990, pp. 213–215). The transformation theory, most famously associated with Inglehart (see, especially, Inglehart 1984), claims that economy and social class are gradually being replaced by postmaterialism and new politics as the strongest indicators of left and right. This theory has been challenged by theoretical claims arguing that the left–right dimension lose all its meaning (irrelevance theory) or, alternatively, that the dimension remains important and essentially socioeconomic in nature (persistence theory). Finally, there is also a pluralization theory that claims that the distinction between socioeconomic left and right persists, but is increasingly supplemented by other, non-socioeconomic, issues.

Empirical research provides most support for the pluralization theory. In a comparative study of eight West European countries, Knutsen (1995, p. 87; cf. also Caul and Gray 2000, p. 219) found evidence indicating that the left–right semantics ‘remain highly correlated with the dominant industrial value orientations’, but he also observed that the left–right dimension is ‘increasingly associated with the new set of materialist/post-materialist value orientations’. These claims are also supported in more recent empirical research: today, Western European voters consider cultural attitudes as being ‘nearly as strongly’ related to left–right positions as economic attitudes, and most contemporary Western European parties treat some non-socioeconomic topic (e.g. environment, immigration, foreign policy, or European integration) as almost equally important as traditional socioeconomic matters (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, pp. 95, 125–128).

Regarding RLPs, it is expected that the majority of the members of the radical left party family – in addition to more centrist positions on the socioeconomic left–right dimension – also have been taking a greater interest in other, non-socioeconomic, left–right issues after the fall of communism. The main motivation for RLPs to increase their interest in non-socioeconomic subjects is the – during

the 1990s and 2000s – increasing electoral appeal of left-leaning green parties with a strong emphasis on new, postmaterialist, themes related to the environment, multiculturalism, peace, and liberal morality (on the political and electoral development of green parties see Carter 2007, ch. 4). Hence, in an environment characterized by a decreasing attractiveness of industrial value orientations and class conflict, the electoral threat from the greens motivate RLPs to increase their emphasis on non-socioeconomic themes in order to attract new left-leaning voters. Hence, with the exception of, on the one hand, ‘old’ democratic socialist and ‘red-green’ parties that strongly emphasized environmental and identity politics already in the 1970s and 1980s (see Christensen 2010; Olsen 2010; cf. also March 2012) and, on the other hand, conservative communist parties that have focused strongly on (not explicitly socioeconomic) Marxist rhetoric (e.g. anti-imperialism) throughout the years (see Cunha 2008; Marantzidis 2008; cf. also March 2012) – Western European RLPs were now forced to *extend their conception of left and right* beyond core socioeconomic themes:

Hypothesis 2: Non-socioeconomic values related to the left–right dimension have become more important for most Western European RLPs after the fall of communism.

RLPs and Issue Competition

Another strand of literature argues that parties, instead of taking different positions in relation to some pre-given policy dimension, compete with each other by selectively emphasizing issues which they find particularly important or ‘own’ (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Robertson 1976). The rise of issue competition has recently been acknowledged by Green-Pedersen (2007), who argues and empirically shows that parties in Western Europe have, since the 1970s, become more interested in specific issues related to, for example, the environment and law and order. Party competition is thus, he concludes, increasingly about which issues should dominate the political agenda and less about conventional left–right positioning.

Traditionally, the radical left has been linked with issues related to Marxist political philosophy, the ownership of the means of production, and the improvement of the social and economic well-being of the working class. With the rise of new postmaterialist values (cf e.g. Inglehart 1977; Inglehart and Rabier 1986), the essentially materialist ‘old’ left became, however, increasingly challenged by a rising ‘new’ and postmaterialist left, distinguished by its strong focus on issues related to gender equality, feminism, the rights of sexual minorities, cultural diversity and anti-racism, and environmental protection and anti-growth politics.⁸

Accordingly, we can expect that the majority of Western European RLPs – again with a few exceptions, namely the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties that had a clear new left agenda already before 1990 (see Christensen 2010; Olsen 2010) and

the conservative communist parties that still adhere to old-style Marxism-Leninism (see Cunha 2008; Marantzidis 2008) – have been shifting focus from old towards new left issues. More specifically, it is expected that the fall of communism, and the associated crisis of radical left politics, forced vote-seeking RLPs to emphasize rising issues related to gender and sexuality, multiculturalism, and environment, and to de-emphasize increasingly unpopular issues related to socialist economics, Marxist philosophy, and working class interests. As a consequence, the majority of the Western European RLPs is today distinguished from other parties through new left issues rather than through old left themes:

Hypothesis 3a: After the fall of communism, the majority of Western European RLPs have increased their emphasis on new left issues and, conversely, paid less attention to the values of the old left.

Hypothesis 3b: After the fall of communism, the majority of Western European RLPs can be distinguished from parties belonging to other families by their emphasis on new rather than old left issues.

Data, Cases, and Measurement

The most well-known dataset on party policies is arguably the one currently distributed by MARPOR (Manifesto Research on Political Representation) and previously associated with the Manifesto Research Group (1979–83) and the Comparative Manifestos Project (1983–2009), respectively (see Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2013). By means of content analysis, these projects have analyzed post-war electoral manifestos by assigning the ‘quasi-sentences’ in each manifesto into one of 56 predefined issue categories, thus producing cross-sectional time-series data on how parties relate to each of these issue categories. Despite substantial criticism (for a review, see Gemenis 2013), MPD has remained widely popular, not least because of its unrivalled coverage in both time and space. Its validity and reliability has also been demonstrated on several occasions, most recently by Volkens et al. (2013; for a comparison with other techniques see Volkens 2007).

Several policy scales have been developed from the MPD. The most popular of these is arguably the comprehensive left–right scale (RILE), generated by the manifesto project team several decades ago. Here, the summed percentages of thirteen left categories is subtracted from the summed percentages of thirteen right categories. Although popular, this scale has several significant drawbacks, and a number of modifications and scaling techniques have been suggested throughout the years (cf. e.g. Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Gabel and Huber 2000; Jahn 2011; Kim and Fording 1998; König, Marbach, and Osnabrügge 2013; Lowe et al. 2011; Prosser 2014).⁹ For my purposes, the most serious of the shortcomings

of RILE is its comprehensiveness: the scale subsumes a great number of different categories into the left–right dimension and holds that these policy categories are all (core) elements of left and right, irrespective of spatial and temporal aspects. In the famous words of Sartori (1970, pp. 1041, 1044), RILE aims for large, nearly maximal, spatial and temporal extension without sticking to a minimal intension of the concept.

A more sound approach has recently been proposed by Jahn (2011). Building on Bobbio’s (1996) seminal work on the significance of left and right and using the data provided by MARPOR, Jahn first creates a scale consisting of core left–right issues. This scale, labeled LR_core (see table A1 in the online appendix), grasp the most general, mainly socioeconomic, aspects of left (socialism) and right (liberalism and conservatism) and is thus assumed to be able to travel. Second, he uses regression analysis in order to identify additional country- and time-specific left–right statements (LR_plus) and, finally, sum up LR_core and LR_plus into a new left–right scale (LR). In addition to these positional indices, Jahn also provide measures of the importance of left and right (LR_core_imp, LR_plus_imp, and LR_imp). These measures are created by summing up the percentages of left and right statements and dividing this by all statements.

The data provided by Jahn (see Jahn et al. 2014) appear particularly suitable for the purposes of this paper: it provides theoretically and conceptually informed and valid (Jahn 2011; cf. also Jahn 2014) measures of left–right positions as well as of the importance of left and right by separating core (mainly socioeconomic) left–right themes from additional statements proved to be related to the left–right dimension. Hence, it is the main source of data for testing H1 and H2. H3a and H3b, moreover, are scrutinized by focusing on the importance of the 56 single categories (per101–per706) in MPD (see Volkens et al. 2014).

Regarding case selection, I include relevant Western European RLPs with ‘governmental relevance in the coalition-forming arena’ or, alternatively, with blackmail potential in the ‘oppositional arena’ (Sartori 1976, p. 123). In practice, this means that the main focus of the study is on RLPs represented in the (lower house of the) national legislature both before and after the fall of communism. Currently (as of early October 2015), there are 21 RLPs represented in seventeen Western European national legislatures (cf. also March 2012). In addition, there are two parties without national representation but with representation in the European Parliament. Seven of these (in total 23) parties – *Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú* in Cyprus, *Déi Lénk* in Luxembourg, *Partij van de Arbeid van België-Parti du Travail de Belgique* in Belgium, *Podemos* in Spain (only represented in the European Parliament), *Sinistra Ecologia Libertà* in Italy, *Sinistra Unita* in San Marino, and Socialist Party in the Republic of Ireland – are excluded from the present analysis due to the small number (≤ 2 per party) of manifestos covered in the datasets by Jahn and MARPOR, respectively. Four additional parties – *Partei des Demokratischen*

Sozialismus (PDS)/*Die Linke* in Germany, *Sinn Féin* in the Republic of Ireland, *Socialistische Partij* (SP) in the Netherlands, and *Synaspismós* (SYN)/*Syriza* in Greece – cannot be fully scrutinized due to lack of data for the pre-1989 period. I do, however, provide some elementary illustrations of their development after 1989.

The remaining twelve parties, listed in table A2 in the online appendix, can be fully included in the study. Following the classifications by March, two of these are conservative communist parties – *Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas* (KKE) in Greece and *Partido Comunista Português* (PCP) in Portugal. Three more parties are classified as being reform communist: the French *Parti communiste français* (PCF), the Spanish *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE), and the Italian *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC). Today, PCF and PCE are leading members of the electoral coalitions *Front de gauche* (FG, founded in 2009) and *Izquierda Unida* (IU, founded in 1986), respectively. PRC, currently represented only in the European Parliament, was founded in 1991 by members of the dissolved *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) who did not accept its dissolution and considered the post-communist *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* as being too reformist.

Seven parties adhere to democratic socialist values. Five of these are ‘new’ democratic socialist parties that emerged after the fall of communism. The Swedish *Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna* (VPK) became *Vänsterpartiet* (V) in 1990, and in the same year the Finnish communists’ electoral alliance *Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto* (SKDL) was replaced by *Vasemmistoliitto* (VAS). The Portuguese *Bloco de Esquerda* (BE) and the Danish *Enhedslisten – De Rød-Grønne* (EL) also emerged from communist movements: BE was the result of a 1999 merger of *União Democrática Popular* (UDP) and a few other minor RLPs, and EL was founded in 1989 by *Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti* (DKP) and *Venstresocialisterne* (VS), among others. The Icelandic *Vinstrihreyfingin – grænt framboð* (VG) was founded in 1999 by former members of the dissolved *Alþýðubandalagið* (A). Finally, the study includes the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties *Socialistisk Folkeparti* (SF) in Denmark and *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* (SV) in Norway, both of which had a distinct democratic socialist profile already in the 1970s and the 1980s.

In order to test the hypotheses, I proceed as follows. First, I compare the mean values of LR_core for the pre-1989 period with the mean values for the same variable during the post-1989 period. This gives a rough indication of the overall positional shifts with regards to core left–right statements (H1). Similarly, the mean values of LR_plus_imp before and after 1989 are compared to provide a general mapping of the importance of additional left–right statements (H2). To detect more detailed patterns and trends, the ideological trajectories are also illustrated by means of line charts. Secondly, I examine the 56 categories in the MPD. Following the definition of old and new politics presented above (see also endnote 8), the main focus is on six categories related to old left issues concerning the ownership of the means of production, Marxist ideology, and the manual working class, and six categories that

represent new left values such as environmental protection, a critique of traditional morals, and support for diversity (see table A3 in the online appendix). To test H3a, I, once again, compare the mean values for the pre- and post-1989 periods and present line charts to illustrate detailed patterns. H3b, finally, is scrutinized by comparing the mean value for the RLP with the mean for the set of other parties in the respective party system. Throughout the empirical analysis, I focus on the period after 1970, or, put differently, after ‘the golden age of capitalism’ (Sassoon 1996). The somewhat distant immediate post-war period (1945–1969) is, hence, not included in the study.¹⁰

Empirical Results

This section presents the empirical results. The first subsection examines RLPs’ attitudes towards the left–right dimension (H1 and H2), while the second subsection focuses on how RLPs relate to specific policy issues (H3a and H3b).

RLPs and the Left-Right Dimension

The first hypothesis proposes that RLPs, with the exception of the conservative communist parties KKE and PCP, have taken more centrist positions on the core left–right dimension (LR_core) after the fall of communism. As shown in table 1, seven of the ten RLPs that were expected to turn towards the centre do indeed demonstrate a more centrist position after the fall of communism. This reorientation seems to be particularly clear among parties with a strongly leftist position on core socioeconomic issues in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the former communist, but from the early 1990s democratic socialist, parties in Finland (VAS) and Sweden (V), the reform communist party in France (FG), and the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties in Denmark (SF) and Norway (SV). As further illustrated in figure 1, several RLPs – especially SF, SV, V, and VG in the Nordic countries – seem to have turned rightwards already in the 1980s. EL, furthermore, took a more centrist position than its predecessors in the early 1990s, while FG and VAS both turned to the socioeconomic left immediately after the fall of communism. On the whole, however, both FG and VAS have been taking more centrist positions after 1990 as compared to the decades before. It is also worth noting that all of the seven above-mentioned parties – and especially the Danish EL and SF – show signs of a turn back leftwards during the late 2000s and early 2010s.

[Table 1 about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

Another expected pattern is that the conservative communist parties in Greece (KKE) and Portugal (PCP) do *not* shift to the right after 1989. Both parties take

– possibly due to a relatively strong emphasis on conservative issues such as, for example, social harmony or traditional morality – comparatively moderate leftist positions in the 1970s and 1980s and shift slightly (KKE) or clearly (PCP) to the left from the 1990s onwards. Against my expectations, a leftward shift is also evident in the moderate communist parties in Italy (PRC) and Spain (IU) and in the democratic socialist party in Portugal (BE). Keeping in mind that PRC represents the more radical elements of the old Italian communist movement, a leftward shift of PRC is, however, intelligible. It is also worth noting that PRC as well as IU turned back towards the centre in the early 2000s. Finally, I note that three of the four parties for which there is no data for the pre-1989 period – Die Linke, SP, and Syriza – demonstrate moderate leftward turns from the early 2000s onwards.

The second hypothesis proposes that RLPs, with the exception of the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties SF and SV and the conservative communist parties KKE and PCP, have taken a greater interest in left–right issues beyond core, mainly socio-economic, themes (LR_plus_imp) after the fall of communism. The data provides some support for this general hypothesis. As shown in table 2 and figure 2, eight out of twelve RLPs follow the expected pattern. An increasing importance of non-core left–right issues can thus be found in V, VG, and – to a lesser extent – VAS in the Nordic countries and in the Southern European reform communist parties PRC and IU. Against my expectations, additional left–right issues have not become more important for the democratic socialist parties BE and EL, and neither for the reform communist party FG. BE demonstrates a much weaker emphasis on non-core left–right issues than its predecessor UDP, while EL and FG demonstrate zigzagging and slightly decreasing trends.

[Table 2 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

The conservative communist parties KKE and PCP and the democratic socialist party SV do not – as expected – increase their (already strong) emphasis on additional left–right issues. KKE and especially PCP seem, quite the contrary, to clearly de-emphasize non-core left–right issues in the wake of the fall of communism. The democratic socialist party SF, finally, demonstrates a comparatively stable pattern throughout the period.

To conclude, it appears that *the majority of the Western European RLPs locate themselves* – as expected in H1 – *closer to the centre of the core left–right dimension after the fall of communism*, as compared to their left–right locations in the 1970s and 1980s. This change is particularly clear among ‘new’ and ‘old’ democratic socialist parties in the Nordic countries, where a rightward shift emerged in the early 1990s or, in several cases, already in the 1980s. Conservative communist parties, in turn, did – again as expected – not turn towards the centre after the fall

of communism. Reform communist parties or, more generally, RLPs in Southern Europe, finally, demonstrate less clear movements. Here, an immediate shift to the left is followed by a move towards the centre. It is also worth noting that many of the parties included in the study, irrespective of their first reaction to the fall of communism, demonstrate a *turn towards the socioeconomic left during the late 2000s and early 2010s*.

In addition to a centripetal shift along the core left–right dimension, it also appears that these issues are – somewhat surprisingly – of decreasing importance for most RLPs (see table A4 in the online appendix). In several cases, *particularly in ‘new’ democratic socialist parties* in the Nordic countries, but also in some reform communist parties in Southern Europe, *a decreasing importance of the core left–right dimension has* – much in line with the expectations in H2 – been replaced by an *increasing importance of additional left–right issues*.

RLPs and Issue Competition

Moving on to specific policy issues, H3a holds that RLPs – again with the exception of the old democratic socialist parties SF and SV and the conservative communist parties KKE and PCP – have increased (decreased) their emphasis on new (old) left issues after the fall of communism. Table 3 provides mixed support for this expectation. First, it is evident that issues related to the environment (per416 and per501 in MPD) and – to a lesser extent – to different dimensions of diversity (per602, per607, and per705 in MPD) are increasingly important for the contemporary radical left. This is the case for reform communist parties in the south and for ‘new’ democratic socialist parties in the north and in Portugal (BE), but – somewhat unexpectedly – also for the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties SF and SV and for the conservative communist party PCP. The parties’ emphasis on liberal morality (per604 in MPD), finally, show no clear pattern. Overall, the expected increase in the importance of new left issues can be found within most RLPs, with FG, KKE, and PCP as the major exceptions (see figure 3).

[Table 3 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

Regarding old left issues, second, the movements are less clear. It appears that socialist economics (per403, per404, per412, and per413 in MPD) is of decreasing importance for RLPs from the Nordic countries and for FG in France, but remain at least as important as before for RLPs in other parts of Europe (see table 3). Moreover, the majority of RLPs have, as expected, also decreased their emphasis on the working class (per701 in MPD) but, surprisingly, somewhat increased their emphasis on Marxism (per415 in MPD). More generally, old left issues seem to be of decreasing importance especially within the democratic socialist parties V, VAS,

and VG and the reform communist party FG, and of increasing importance within the conservative communists in KKE and PCP, and in the reform communist PRC. In the other RLPs, the importance of old left issues has remained more or less stable (see figure 3).

Finally, I examine whether RLPs can be distinguished from other parties through new rather than through old left issues after the fall of communism (H3b). First, I test for the equality of group means by comparing the mean for the RLP with the mean for the set of all other parties in the system. Issues that are significantly (F -test, $p \leq .05$) more popular among RLPs than among parties in general are examined further in a second step where I look at the means and standard deviations for each party individually to detect whether the RLP is the sole ‘owner’ of the issue or whether there is some other party that emphasizes the same issue. By this, I hope to identify policy issues that distinguish RLPs from their competitors.

As shown in tables 4 and 5, no clear support is provided for H3b: a comparatively strong emphasis on old left issues separate RLPs from competing parties before as well as after 1989, and new left issues are only slightly better to distinguish RLPs from their competitors during the post-1989 period, as compared to the decades before. I also note that there are a number of other issues that often separate RLPs from their competitors, such as positive references to anti-imperialism, peace, and democracy, negative perceptions of the military and of European integration, and demands for social justice.

[Table 4 about here]

[Table 5 about here]

A closer look at the tables 4 and 5 reveal that nationalization and a support for labour groups are issues that are clearly owned by RLPs from all subgroups, before as well as after 1989. These issues are owned either alone or, in many cases, together with some other left or centre-left (social democratic or green) party within the same system. Marxist rhetoric is usually of minor importance in the manifestos, but seems to be increasingly able to separate RLPs from other parties.

Regarding new left issues, I note that especially the ‘old’ democratic socialist parties (BE, EL, V, VAS, and VG) are increasingly distinguishable from other parties through their emphasis on new left issues such as the promotion of anti-growth economy or a critique of nationalism and traditional morality. The increased interest in environmental protection, however, is clearly a more general trend, not limited to RLPs. The only RLPs owning this issue are SF (together with liberal parties) and VG, both of which lack significant green competitors. Not surprisingly, I also note that the conservative communists KKE and PCP are the only RLPs with no special interest in new left issues during the period of investigation.

Taken together, it appears that contemporary RLPs still are more red than green, and more materialist than postmaterialist. Although most RLPs have – as

expected in H3a – *increased their emphasis on new left issues related to diversity and, above all, environmental protection*, the parties are, against the expectation in H3b, still *distinguishable from competing (non-left) parties mainly through their comparatively strong emphasis on socialist economics* (i.e., issues related to nationalization and controlled economy) *and working class interests*, and from all other, non-radical left, parties through their *emphasis on Marxism and other issues frequently associated with radical left rhetoric*, such as anti-imperialism, demands for peace, and a critique of European integration and the armed forces.

Conclusions

The purpose with this paper has been to provide a general mapping of how Western European radical left parties have reacted to the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and, by this, to examine what left really means for the contemporary radical left. Four main observations stand out.

First, the majority of Western European RLPs appear, on average, to locate themselves closer to the centre on the core left–right dimension after the fall of communism, as compared to previous decades. This centripetal shift is most obvious among democratic socialist parties, while reform communist and, as expected, conservative communist parties seem to have been less inclined to turn towards the centre.

Secondly, a recent shift back towards the socioeconomic left is clearly observable among several reform communist, democratic socialist, and populist socialist parties during the late 2000s and early 2010s. Whether this recent development implies a permanent break with the overall, long-time, pattern of socioeconomic deradicalization is, however, still unclear.

Third, several RLPs – in particular democratic socialist parties in the Nordic countries – are increasingly prone to emphasize additional, non-socioeconomic, left–right issues. More specifically, the study shows that especially environmental issues have become more popular (also) among most RLPs. An overall change from old to new left issues is observable mainly in the Nordic countries, where the radical left is becoming somewhat less interested in materialist issues related to the economy and, conversely, more interested in new postmaterialist themes in general, and in environmental protection and anti-growth economy in particular.

Despite this development, nearly all of the RLPs included in the study are, fourth, still distinguishable from competing parties mainly through their emphasis on old and ‘classical’ rather than through new left issues. Hence, although many parties within the radical left family have decreased their emphasis on old left issues, they still tend to emphasize these issues more than other parties. Conversely, the increase in the emphasis on new left issues among RLPs has led to only a slight increase in RLP ownership of these same issues.

Taken together, it thus appears that the bulk of the RLPs in Western Europe have become somewhat less radical with regards to the core left–right dimension and, to some extent, also more interested in additional issues, of which at least some are related to new politics. The radical left is, however, still distinguishable from other parties through old and ‘classical’ leftist themes.

Conceptually and theoretically, the evidence presented in this paper clearly supports the typology of RLPs presented by March (2012). Although ‘classical’ radical left issues such as, for example, anti-imperialism and peace unite conservative communists and more moderate democratic socialists, there are clear differences in how different RLPs relate to, for example, the left–right dimension and to new left issues: moderate democratic socialist parties in the north seem to be more inclined to shift towards the centre and to embrace new politics issues, while conservative, and partly also reform, communist parties (in the south) tend to hold on to their left–right positions and to a well-tried set of old left themes. Somewhat more generally, the observations from this study also provide some support for theories predicting a long-term centripetal shift among western political parties and, moreover, for the pluralization theory and the theory predicting an increasing importance of issue competition.

Finally, I note that this paper take the fall of communism as the crucial turning point in the development of radical left policies. From a causal perspective, it is, however, worth noting that the specific explanations for the observed reorientations are potentially numerous. Apart from major external shocks, such as the fall of communism in the late 1980s or, as recent trends among RLPs may indicate, the financial crisis in the late 2000s, the policy shifts of RLPs (and, of course, other parties) are likely to be affected by many other factors. The theoretical discussion in the second section of this paper highlight the possible role of social democratic and green parties (cf. Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), but also institutional factors, opinion shifts among party supporters, and internal party dynamics are potential factors causing radical left parties to shift position (for reviews of the literature on party positional change, see Adams 2012; Fagerholm 2015). Moving from descriptive mappings towards explanatory analyses of the observed reorientations among RLPs is, in conclusion, an important theme for the future research on this still vital party family.

Notes

¹A recent (but admittedly somewhat extreme) example of an influential RLP is *Syriza*, who won the plurality of the vote (36.3 and 35.5 percent, respectively) in the Greek legislative elections held in January and September 2015. *Syriza* is currently (in October 2015) the major actor in the Greek coalition government.

²See e.g. Arter (2002); Coffé and Plassa (2010); Dunphy (2007); Dunphy and Bale (2007); Hanley (2001); March (2006, 2007); Sakwa (1998), and the chapters in Backes and Moreau (2008a); Botella and Ramiro (2003a); Olsen, Koß, and Hough (2010b).

³See e.g. Grzymala-Busse (2002); Ishiyama and Bozóki (2001); Kuzio (2008); Ziblatt and Bizziouras (2002).

⁴Another, less comprehensive and less informative, categorization of RLPs is provided by Backes and Moreau (2008b), who divide the family into ‘traditionalist’, ‘reform communist’, and ‘red-green’ parties.

⁵In this paper, I distinguish between ‘old’ democratic socialist parties (i.e., parties with a democratic socialist profile ranging beyond 1989 and with only loose connections to the communist heritage) and ‘new’, formerly (euro)communist, democratic socialist parties.

⁶Following March (2012, p. 18), some of the parties within the broad radical left family are better characterized as extreme. In addition to the definitions in (i) and (ii) above, extreme left parties also (iii) ‘have a [clear] “revolutionary” self-ascription, espouse [great] hostility to liberal democracy, usually denounce all compromise with “bourgeois” political forces including social democracy, emphasize extra-parliamentary struggle and define “anti-capitalism” [...] strictly’. This study includes proper radical left parties as well as parties of a more extreme nature.

⁷As a rule, transnational overviews of Western European RLPs consider the fall of communism as a ‘shattering’ (Bell 1993, p. 1), ‘epoch-making’ (Backes and Moreau 2008c, p. 9), event that threw the Western European RLPs ‘into turmoil’ (Bull 1994, p. 210), made the already ongoing crisis of the radical left ‘even more profound’ (Botella and Ramiro 2003b, p. 11), and forced RLPs to ‘search for a new identity’ (Simon-Ekovich 1998, p. 600).

⁸This distinction between the old and the new left relies heavily on an early definition of old and new politics by Hildebrandt and Dalton (1977). Here, old politics is defined as ‘den Konflikt zwischen Habenden und Nicht-Habenden, und allgemeiner das Problem der Versorgung der Gesellschaft mit ökonomischen Gütern und mit sozialer Sicherheit’. New politics, conversely, focus on ‘Umweltschutz, Gleichberechtigung der Frau, Problemen der Atomenergie oder Schwangerschaftsunterbrechungen und Scheidungsreform’ (Hildebrandt and Dalton 1977, pp. 232, 237). Other authoritative definitions of new politics have been presented by, above all, Poguntke (1987) and Kitschelt (1988). For historical overviews of the rise of the new left, see also Eley (2002, part IV) and Sassoon (1996, chs. 14–15, 22).

⁹A response to these critiques has been delivered by Budge and Meyer (2013, cf. also Meyer 2013, ch. 3). They note that the estimates produced by most of the corrections (e.g. the ones proposed by Kim and Fording and Lowe et al., respectively) correlate highly with the original RILE scores and, consequently, that ‘there is little marginal gain from substituting or altering the [...] measure already in existence, *except for specialized and [...] limited research purposes*’ (Budge and Meyer 2013, p. 101, own italics).

¹⁰A total of 172 manifestos are included in the study. Of these, 167 (97.1 per cent) are either regular, joint, or party bloc programmes. The values for the Icelandic A in 1974 and 1979, the Dutch SP in 1994 and 1998, and the Irish Sinn Féin in 1997 are estimates based on available programmes.

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