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Politicisation of the EU during European crises – Example of the German post-communist left

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This article deals with the reaction of the party Die Linke on the increased politicisation of the EU. The three recent crisis – the Euro crisis, the Ukraine crisis and the refugee crisis – are examined. The aim is to show how the party developed on these issues and how it connected the crises to the national level.

Key words: Euro crisis, Ukraine crisis, refugee crisis, politicisation, Die Linke.

The Euro crisis and the Ukraine crisis were two recent events which also interacted deeply into the national political discourse. Especially the Greek bailout was discussed controversially in Germany. An indirect consequence of the government's policy and the Greek bailout was the foundation of the populist, right wing, eurosceptic *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). It seems that the pro-European consensus has been broken up. Also the Ukraine crisis created various feedback loops on the national level and started a discussion about Germany's alignment towards Russia. The most recent and third crisis is the refugee crisis in Germany. This issue gave the right wing in Germany another push. Additionally the governmental parties seem to be disunited in giving solutions for the crisis. Recently a third crisis – the refugee crisis – dominated the national discourse. With a clear anti-migration policy the AfD was able to achieve election results above 10 %. As one can expect other parties saw the need to react.

The politicisation of these three crisis is from interest here. But not the overall political scene is observed, only one party will be examined. In this context it is from great interest how the party picks up the EU as a connected topic. Politicisation – or the politicisation of the EU – means in this context that European policies become a subject of importance in the national political discourse. One could say that the “EU matters” within the competition of national parties. The reason of a possible politicisation is the increased influence of “Brussel”. Along with EU's increased powers the question of legitimacy might be raised in the member states. In the course of the Euro crisis the influence of technocratic institutions like the European Central Bank increased.

The change here is the change of importance and politicisation of certain issues in the national political scene. So one can say this work belongs to the wide field of party change. Therefore it is important to raise the question: Why do parties change? Harmel and Janda pointed out that changes in parties follow different logic if a party is office/vote seeking or policy seeking. For an office seeking party an electoral defeat results in fundamental changes. For the second party type this is rather irrelevant. “Policy-related stimuli”¹ (Harmel & Janda, 1994, pp. 265-266) take for them the function as an external shock. One can take these crisis as a strong external stimuli, the EU is in a different way an external stimuli however it is more a contextual stimuli. But also the party needs to cope with electoral losses in the last national elections and in some state elections. The question if the party is policy or office seeking is not from interest here. The question is rather how the party reacted on the three European crises. What kind of intellectual response were given and how the party connected the response to their image and vision of the EU.

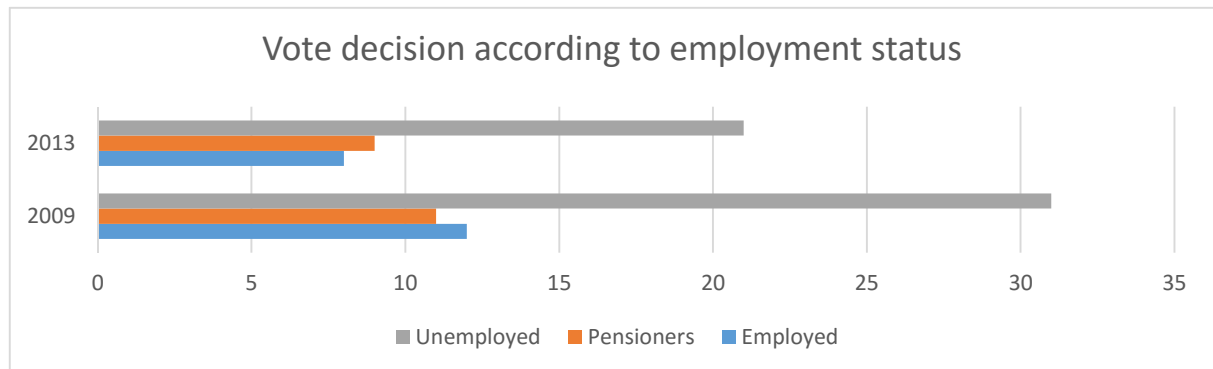
The nature and origin of the party

This paper deals with the responses of the party *Die Linke (The Left)*. As the communist successor party it still manoeuvres in the left political spectrum and didn't “social-democratized” in its transition. The party is mostly characterized as a soft-eurosceptic one and shows strong criticism on western integration. It is from interest how the party politicized the three recent crisis because the politicisation of these issues seems to be driven by the populist right. While Die Linke was able to take fundamentally different standpoints with the Euro crisis and the Ukraine crisis, the party chose in the third one a different – “refugee friendly” – approach. The key interest is how the party is using and politicizing Europe – or to be more specific European crisis – on the national level.

The today's party is the result of a merge of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), the successor party of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), and the WASG (Election Alternative for Social Justice). The WASG was a protest party against the reform package “AGENDA 2010” and the labour market reforms “Hartz IV” which were pushed through by the coalition government of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) and Bündnis90/ Die Grünen (The Greens).

The new party was formally founded in July 2007, however the history of the PDS roots back to 1990 and Germany's reunification. The PDS is often seen as an Eastern-German party which was mainly addressing the losers of the reunification. After 2007 the party partly lost its regional character. In a strategy paper the bureau formulated that the party is a new and successful party.² The party presents itself as party for the losers of capitalism and the economic globalization. In this sense they state that, “Die Linke is the party of social justice,

the one for the ordinary people”³. One other important topic is gender equality. Therefore the party has one chairwoman and one chairman. The Bundestag fraction has also a double leadership. On the national level the party remains isolated and SPD ruled out a possible governmental coalition with Die Linke. However on the *Bundesland* (state) level the picture looks different. The party is part of several governments as a coalition partner of the SPD. Since 2015 Bodo Rammelow is the party’s first Minister-President of a German state. The electorate of the party consists mainly out of blue-collar workers and unemployed people (see Table 1).



Die Linke is a multi-stream party. The positions differ from various state associations. Additionally working groups are very important in the party. Their range is from communist, Marxist, socialist to pragmatist. The party has therefore different veto players, e.g. working groups, the fraction of the Bundestag or influential characters like Oskar Lafontaine. This fact is acknowledged here. However this paper is focusing on the national level and leaving the state associations out. In this paper the fraction, the national bureau and decisions of the party congress are taken into account. The party’s think tank is the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS).

In the programmatic documents the party do not reject the EU as such but labels its current form as “militaristic, undemocratic, neoliberal”⁴. Right now the party criticizes that the EU and European Integration is strengthening the global capitalism and the strong influence of lobby groups. The party’s general attitude towards Europe is defined within the Erfurt program. The section about European related issues is headed as followed: “How do we want to radically remodel the European Union? Democracy, the welfare state, ecology and peace”⁵. Today’s parliamentary party leader and former member of the EP Sarah Wagenknecht goes even further and heads her section about the EU “for a socialist Europe”.

The Euro crisis and the party – “We start from Greece. We change Europe.”

According to the program the party is not fundamentally eurosceptic. The EU is seen as “an indispensable political activity level”. To summarize: The party is generally in favour of the European idea but opposes the current treaty bases and sees the need to reform the EU as such. Because of this the party is often categorized as soft eurosceptic one.

The Euro crisis and the Greek bailout were picked up by the party in election campaigning. In a strategy paper for the elections in 2013 the bureau states that in both state elections and in federal elections the Euro and the crisis are from high importance for the campaigning.⁶ The crises was picked up in election manifestos and in many different statements. In the election manifesto for the national elections 2013 the party devoted an own chapter to the crisis (out of six). In the program for the 2009 elections no own chapter was devoted to the EU. One can already take this as an evidence for the high importance of this issue for the party.

First of all the party connects the crisis with a general capitalism critique. As a source of the crisis the party sees the global unregulated capitalism. The deregulation of the past decades led to a decrease of social security and standards. Investment banks and the unregulated financial markets are mainly responsible for the international debt crisis. As party states in the election manifesto for the 2013’s election campaigning the crisis is not a “government debt crisis” it is a “financial market crisis”⁷. Therefore they refuse austerity measures in European governments. Additionally the party uses statements on this topic to attack the AGENDA 2010 reform package and the HARTZ IV regulations. Here one can see a connection of an international event or international policies with a clearly domestic issue. If one considers that the origin of the party is from the protest against the named reform this reaction is no surprise. Also as above shown the biggest potential electorate of the party is in the segment of the socially disadvantaged. One can see this as a strategical link. But the core topic of the party is also picked up in a different manner. These reforms were not only harmful for Germany but for the whole Euro zone. Schlecht – economic spokesperson of the BT fraction – declares: “The real cause of the Euro crisis lies in a German economic policy, which bears the imperial trains.”⁸ He develops that the reforms under the Schröder

government led to wage dumping in Germany and “increased the pressure”⁹ on the other member states. The austerity mandate of the EU made Greece a “protectorate of Brussel”¹⁰

In comparison to the AfD or other populist right parties Die Linke does not refuse the EU as a political union. The main critiques are the neoliberal character of the Maastricht treaty and the lack of harmonization in tax policies¹¹. In many documents or statements the peace-making or peace-keeping nature of the EU is pronounced. The measurements taken are “accompanied by a serious restriction of democracy”¹². So the party does not only criticize the wrong measurements. In a much politicized way the party demands for more transparency and democracy. The first level of criticism can be seen in the tradition of anticapitalistic left thoughts. The second layer of critics – aiming for more democratic legitimacy – picks up a party’s general standpoint. Interestingly the party as well calls up for more European solidarity and a restart of the EU. However the vision of the party for European solidarity and unity are standing in a left tradition. In a party conference resolution they explain for what kind of Europe they stand for: “A new internationalism, a new political International and a socialist Europe from below.”¹³

Sarah Wagenknecht (vice chairman of Die Linke and chairman of the Bundestag (BT) fraction) for example demands a coordinated tax policy for the Euro zone¹⁴. Surprisingly the party refers as well very often to the youth unemployment in different European states. Additionally the party picks up the social situation in Greece repeatedly. The TROIKA’s austerity measures as unsocial and undemocratic. Regarding Greece they support the current Syriza left government.

Especially the Euro as a common currency is difficult topic within the party. Sarah Wagenknecht suggests an exit of Greece under certain conditions. She also sees the Euro as a failed construction. Firstly she argues that a Euro exit would help the Greek economy and would lead to economic growth. Secondly she argues that due to the Euro and due to measurements taken during the economic crises the EU gained too much influence on the national budget. Therefore she is afraid that “budget and even wage policies”¹⁵ will be decided in a technocratic manner at EU level. The consequence is that elections loose relevance. She argues that this just happened to Greece because of influence of the EU and TROIKA.

Others like Axel Troost (vice chairman of Die Linke and financial spokesman of the BT fraction) take a different standpoint. Economically and socially the dissolution of the fiscal union would have negative consequences. He states that we need “more Europe” instead of less. However he demands for a Europe breaking with the “neoliberal logic of the Maastricht treaty”¹⁶. Also the lack of democracy is of importance for him. He demands a “Euro zone parliament”¹⁷. Worried about the technocratic institutions and the distance to the citizens he sees the need for referendums on this level.

The chairwoman of Die Linke Katja Kipping positions herself clearly in favour of the common currency. She strongly highlights that “a common currency requires a common economic, social and financial policy”¹⁸. Further she develops that the party “say(s) yes to Euro but no to savings and austerity measures in Germany and in Europe”¹⁹. Also Bernd Riexinger, the second chairman of the party, is clearly in favour of the Euro.

This two positions are exemplary for the party’s internal dispute in this question. This internal disagreements are certainly caused because Die Linke is a multi-stream party, however it should be also seen as a sign of politicisation. Kipping and Riexinger are positioning themselves clearly supportive towards the Euro and distinguish themselves from right wing anti-Euro parties. With this they try a difficult balancing act of opposing the rescue strategy of the government/ EU and a general support for the Euro.

In this sense the party voted against measurements like the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). A point of criticism was that tax payer’s money will be used for saving banks. Furthermore the party is afraid that member states will be forced to implement further cuts on social benefits.²⁰ The party names certain actions to be taken. Banks should be rescued by their owners, the European Central Bank (ECB) should be turned in a bank which gives direct loans to member states²¹ and on a domestic level the party picks up its old demand for a millionaire tax²². In the party’s demands a general distrust against the banking sector and the approach to burden the well-to-do more can be seen.

The diverged opinion in this matter are also very much evident in the BT fraction. Till February 2015 the fraction always voted consistent against the “aid for Greece”. In 2015 after Syriza was in government the majority of the fraction actually voted for the bailout plan. Three MPs voted with No and nine abstained from voting²³. The fraction leader Gregor Gysi (till early 2016) said in the debate that “Syriza shows there are alternatives to the dominant neoliberal policies (...)”²⁴. The party sees in Syriza a kind of role model. The party also started a photo support campaign with the title “I support Syriza”²⁵. One of the images contained the slogan: “We start from Greece. We change Europe.”²⁶

In order to summarize: the crisis is a result of the globally unregulated capitalism. The party sees this as a proof for early criticism on the status quo. This view is accepted broadly within the party and is evident in almost all of the statements and documents. The party develops further that measurements need to have a democratic legitimacy. A major point which they criticize anyways. However this is a point which highlights that the party is not just shallowly criticizing the measurements taken. The party is managing to combine its anticapitalistic approach with its vision for Europe.

Additionally the party demands from Germany solidarity towards the southern European states. Therefore it can be stated that the party does not reject the EU in general. One can see this as well with their support for Syriza. It seems that the party connects the hope for a “socialist Europe” with the electoral success of its sister party. But the split within the party is evident in the question of Euro and the aid programs for Greece. However the “neoliberal” nature and the lack of democracy of the EU is seen as a problem. The linkage to the national level is that deregulation and social cutbacks are worsening the situation. So Die Linke is able to connect its critique on the government’s policy with a critique on the social reforms in the past decade in Germany.

The crisis had a strong impact on the party. The space devoted in the election program and the multiple statements show this quite well. The crisis was an opportunity for the party to connect older programmatic points with it. It is focused on highlighting the “construction mistakes” of the Euro zone and to target also domestic policy domains.

Between pacifism and anti-Americanism – The Ukraine Conflict

“The inclusion of Crimea into the Russian Federation is also contrary to international law.”²⁷

As clear this resolution from the 4th party congress sounds the party’s position is more complicated and diverse. On the one hand side the party categorizes itself as a pacifist one. Die Linke is a radical anti-war party and combines this with a rejection of the military alliance NATO. Additionally the party inherits a strong anti-Americanism. But this attitude makes it also difficult to give an unconditional support to Russia. The party tries to find a way in between and wants to be seen as a neutral one in the conflict. As one can imagine this political balancing act is rather complicated.

General understanding for the Euromaidan protests is expressed by the party. It is stated that the former regime was corrupted so the throw over of the old elite seems to be at least understandable. But the new government in Ukraine is heavily criticized. Especially because of its linkages to oligarchs and its collaboration with far right wing groups.

The annexation of Crimea is seen by the party congress as an illegal act. However the party does not miss to highlight that the USA and the NATO were the first one who broke international law. They mention the Kosovo war and the Iraq war. The chairwoman Katja Kipping tries to keep up neutrality: “We, DIE LINKE, are obliged to a peace oriented policy. That is why, in the case of the Ukraine conflict, our place is neither at the side of the NATO, nor at the side of Russia.”²⁸ But this neutrality is not always evident. The Ukraine conflict is used by the party to promote its anti-NATO opinion. At the same time the party wants a new “eastern policy”. Hence a dialogue with Russia is from great importance for solving the conflict. As a reaction to a speech of the German president the chairman Riexinger states: “Especially the people in the East know that we need to balance with Russia for peace.”²⁹ Even though the earlier mentioned party conference resolution is trying to take a neutral standpoint other statements of party officials seem to have the tendency to be less neutral.

Wagenknecht mentions that the USA is more dangerous for global peace than Russia. Consequently the party opposes the EU sanctions for Russia. The party acknowledges that the Crimea’s annexation was not in accordance with international law. In an analysis published on the homepage of Die Linke a section is devoted to Crimea’s annexation: “The historical and cultural connections of Crimea with Russia are extremely close: 60% of the population are Russians (...)”³⁰. In four paragraphs the party explains the Russian origin of Crimea. Only in the last paragraph the violence of international law is acknowledge. Furthermore the geopolitical interest of Russia is recognized. This very same interest is also ascribed to the EU. But in the analysis it is clearly stated that Russia remains almost not defendable without Crimea and the Ukraine³¹. One can see here the try of a balancing act between showing understanding/sympathy for Russia and the aim to promote a foreign policy in accordance with international law. At the end it is concluded that the Putin’s reactions were not legal but under the consideration of all circumstance “comprehensible/understandable”³². Also the vice chairman of the BT fraction Wolfgang Gehrcke mentions that the referendum on the independence of Crimea was like the one in Kosovo violating international law. However in the very same sentence he states that the result needs to be acknowledge³³. Further sanctions for Russia are harmful and will prolong the conflict.

Wolfgang Gehrcke and Andrej Hunko – the spokesperson for European policies of the BT fraction – visited Eastern part of Ukraine via Russia³⁴. At this visit they also met the leader of the separatists Alexander Sachartschenko³⁵. They advocate in their travel report to acknowledge that in the East Ukraine “a new political power has been established”³⁶. It seems that they accept the status quo as an irreversible fact. After their visit the Ukraine imposed a visit ban against the two politicians.

Often in this issue the “West” is seen by the party as the first aggressor. In the party’s vision the Ukraine should be a neutral country which is prohibited to enter NATO or EU. The turn of the Ukraine towards EU is seen as one of the origins of the conflict. Herewith the party criticizes EU’s and USA’s behaviour prior the conflict. Especially the NATO increased its influence too close to the Western boarder of Russia. Hunko names in a parliamentary debate two reasons for the Ukraine conflict: “firstly the NATO’s eastern enlargement and secondly the EU’s Eastern enlargement”³⁷. In his speech he makes clear that his fraction is rejecting the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement as a part of further Eastern enlargement. He argues that there are two dimensions of the agreement: “an economic dimension, but also a security-, military dimension”³⁸. He criticizes that such agreements divide Europe and Russia even stronger. But he is even more attacking the “neoliberal character” of such agreements.

Also Kipping states in an interview with the newspaper “Die Welt” that the EU introduced a “neoliberal shock therapy” in Ukraine³⁹. In her opinion Germany and the EU need to take a neutral standpoint in the conflict. In the interview she tries to highlight that the party is taking this neutral standpoint towards Russia and the Ukraine.

As in the Euro crisis one can see that the party is eager to show its anticapitalistic character. The party’s criticism on the agreement and the reaction to the crisis show three dimensions. First the foreign policy side. The party states that only a dialogue with Russia will improve the situation. Russia is seen as a “global player in defence”⁴⁰ and its actions are not seen purely negative. Out of this the party concludes that sanctions against Russia are harmful because they are increasing the political distance between Russia and the “West”. The chairwoman Kipping tries to highlight that the party is not unreflectingly Russia friendly. According to her the party has taken as the only one a neutral standpoint. In this regards she refers to party conference and board resolution. However this positions seems to be questionable due to actions like the visit of two members of parliament to the Eastern Ukraine.

Secondly one can see here as well a strong anti-Americanism. The annexation of the Crimea is seen as a violation of the international law. At the same time Die Linke is not missing to emphasise that the US and the NATO were breaking international law first, e.g. in Iraq, Yugoslavia or Kosovo. NATO’s and EU’s Eastern enlargement are seen as a source of the crisis. A further act of provocation is the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement. The annexation of the Crimea and the support of the separatists is an ultimate consequence.

Thirdly the anticapitalistic layer of criticism. Here especially the Association Agreement is in the centre of the critiques. This criticism is as before connected with a criticism on the EU treaties which are seen as neoliberal.

The refugee crisis

The so called refugee crisis is in Germany rather connected with mismanagement and organizational chaos at the end of 2015. The very high number of refugees are the trigger for this crisis. The populist right connected a general anti-migration campaign with this organizational crisis. Because of this it is often difficult to divide these two issues. The events at New Year’s in Cologne heated up the political discourse. The government parties reacted on the electoral success of the AfD with a tightening of its asylum and migration policy.

Die Linke as a party of the left spectrum has been before this crisis a migration and asylum friendly party. Already in the election manifesto for the last elections the party is opposing the Dublin II Regulation as the basis for an “inhuman asylum and isolation policy”⁴¹. Accordingly freedom of choice is necessary for refugees in regards of the application of asylum. Even though further short remarks in terms of refugee policies were made in this manifesto, overall asylum- and refugee policies were not of a big concern. As one can also see with this short example, the party is traditionally refugee friendly and pro-asylum one.

However the refugee crisis manoeuvres the party in a difficult position. On the one hand side the AfD gains support because of this issues and also Die Linke is losing voters to the populist right party. On the other hand side the party always benefited from its protest character. However it seems that the party is not willing to align its position with the AfD’s. More than this the party uses the issue to distance itself from its political competitor. Especially the open boarder policy of the government in September 2015 is appreciated by the party. The “refugee friendly” approach can be seen at their homepage where they introduced an entire section with the title “refugees welcome”⁴². In a brochure published by the RLS it is stated: “Maybe it was the best thing this

government has ever done.”⁴³ The party is showing partly support for the government’s policies – but is still trying to attack them from the left spectrum. But also the EU is the target of critiques.

In a party conference resolution the main points of criticism are listed⁴⁴. It is stated that Die Linke wants a “common solidary refugee policy”⁴⁵. A wealthy continent like Europe should be able to welcome a high number of refugees, it is argued further. The reopening of the Balkan route is demanded and an integration of refugees in the European societies. The EU-Turkey deal is “violating human rights”. Not only boarder closings are a danger for the European idea. Moreover the rise of nationalism and the rise of right wing parties are threatening the European societies. However the increase of successful right wing parties is seen as the result of “the authoritarian policies of the tariff reductions, militarization and de-democratization during crisis (Euro crisis)”⁴⁶.

“Upper limits (Obergrenzen)”⁴⁷ for refugees are refused as well as European contingents. Both would harm fundamental rights and limit the freedom of movement. In a position paper of the fraction leaders reasons for the crisis are named. The “Western countries led by the US have destabilized entire regions”⁴⁸. Therefore they are to be blamed for the increased influx of refugees. Germany’s arms export to conflict regions and “NATO intervention wars” are also seen as one of the major reasons. Additionally Germany supported a “Regime-Change” policy in this area and caused further destabilization. On top of this free trade agreements, unfair trade- and economic relationships are made accountable for the situation in Syria and in the whole region. Wagenknecht elaborated on this and sees the USA accountable for this situation in the Middle East to such a degree that the government should “require at least a share of the costs” from the United States.

The connection of the refugee crisis and domestic social policies is often evident. Troost states that Germany and Europe need an investment programme. An increased investment in education, housing and infrastructure etc. is demanded. He states that the “neoliberal streamlining of the state”⁴⁹ makes it impossible to solve the crisis and to integrate the refugees. Therefore he calls up for an end of austerity policies both in Germany and in the EU. In his opinion the states need to take credits to be able to invest in the above mentioned. With this he is also questioning the Stability Pact. Especially the retreat of the state in social housing is heavily criticized. Before the refugee crisis this was already in the centre of critiques. Now the party is connecting this claim with the current political situation⁵⁰. The same Keynesian Economic approach like in the Euro crisis is here promoted. Wagenknecht provides in an interview the explanation that social problems – like the shortage of living space – were evident before the refugee crisis. This crisis just made Germany’s social problems, shortages in the public sector and deregulation visible⁵¹. This view is within the party very common. This is also more than a repetition of older arguments. It is the way how the party wants to attack the AfD. Not with an anti-migration campaign, rather with a socialist approach to strengthen the welfare state.

Different aspects can be seen in the line of argumentations. The party has a very humanitarian approach. A general criticism to older asylum practices are very much evident. The party positions itself as pacifist and an opponent of arms export. This is linked to the earlier mentioned anti-Americanism. The United States are seen as the “main cause of the refugee tragedy”. Additionally the party is not missing to oppose free trade agreements and neoliberal economic policies. The anti-globalization attitude of the party is here strongly evident. Therefore it is argued that the cause of flights of refugees should be targeted. In a domestic political manner the party highlights its criticism as on the AGENDA 2010 and the policy of the recent years. Cutbacks of social benefits, deregulation and privatizations led to a situation of social imbalances not only in Germany. The refugee crisis made this even more visible. Therefore a European investment offensive should be started. Investments should be done in a Keynesian economy way. The party is establishing here a linkage between the current crisis and its anti-AGENDA 2010/ Hartz IV character. More than this the party is adapting the same critique as in the Euro crisis.

The closure of the so called Balkan route and the EU-Turkey deal are therefore the wrong approach.

Conclusion

The three crisis were from importance for the party. Due to the upcoming AfD new incentives were brought into the political competition. In the Euro crisis Die Linke didn’t adapt a radical anti-EU or anti-Euro course. The line of argumentation circles mostly around the neoliberal character of the common currency, the bailout plans and the EU. The vision of a “socialist Europe from below” is often presented. The Syriza government seems to be for the party a first step towards this EU. Even though the party presents certain reforms for particular institutions it misses to elaborate further how the EU should be reshaped.

The common sense in the party is that the crisis resulted out of a global unregulated capitalism. Public debts are not hold responsible for the crisis. So the party agrees on opposing the austerity measures and a big social investment program European wide. In other questions the party is disunited. The leaders of the party are clearly in favour of the Euro and against Grexit. Other influential members like Wagenknecht or Lafontaine are not reluctant towards Grexit. This quarrel can be also seen with the voting in the Bundestag. The fraction missed to find a common line in terms of the Greek bailout plan.

A further sign of politicisation is the critique on the “undemocratic” character of the taken measurements. Here the ESM is for example attacked. In the end the party failed to gain political capital out of the Euro crisis. Even though the party established the linkage to the domestic level new points are not brought up. Rather the old system critique is repeated.

In terms of the Ukraine crisis the party chose a standpoint which was fundamentally different than the government’s one. The chairwoman tries to highlight the formally neutral standpoint of the party. This is contradicted by official actions of some MPs and by some of the official statements. Moreover the party comes back to old anti-American resentments. The explanation that the eastern enlargement of NATO and EU brought Putin to the point that he intervenes at Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine can be seen in this light. A further intellectual examination of the conflict is not evident. Criticism that the annexation of Crimea was against international law is expressed in the party. This critiques are restricted with the reference to the Russian tradition of Crimea, the Western “aggressions” and the comparison to Kosovo. As in the other crisis the restart of a “new eastern policy” is not explained in much detail.

The “neoliberal structures” of the EU are again picked up by the party. Although a different view in comparison to the other parliamentary parties is presented the party is not very convincing with its neutral standpoint.

The latest examined crisis might be for the party the most difficult one. The increasing support for the AfD can be explained also with the fear of migrants. However the party is very eager to keep up the “refugee welcome” image. The appraisal for the government’s open boarder policy is a sign of this. It is analysed that highly increased numbers of refugees are not the problem. Rather “neoliberal” reforms and the “sell-out” of the state since the Schröder government are seen as the main issues. The party comes here again back to its core topic. The anti-AGENDA 2010 character is omni present in the party. One can see that if the party is approaching the topic of the EU, sooner or later the argumentation circles around the “neoliberal” structure and critique of capitalism.

The closure of the Balkan route and the EU-Turkey deal are viewed as humanitarian catastrophes. The party comes here back to the well-known anti-Americanism. The West and the United States destabilized the Middle-East and supported terrorist groups. Germany is also indirectly accountable for the situation because of its arms export. The clear positioning as a pro-migrant party will likely lead to electoral loses. The party tries to counter the AfD rather from the left and is able to pick up its social agenda. Nevertheless it is not surprising that the party is not shifting to a right wing course.

A similar line of argumentation like in the Ukraine crisis can be seen. In the end the capitalist West under the American leadership is held responsible for the destabilization of the region. This way of seeing international relations was already prior the crisis very much evident in the party. However the party offers the voters a different foreign policy approach.

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⁴Die Linke 2011.

⁵Die Linke. 2011. P.68.

⁶Die Linke 2012.

⁷Die Linke. 2013. p. 46.

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⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Schlecht, Michael. 2015a.

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⁴⁶ Ibid.
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