



Greece and the European Union: One Year after Syriza's Victory and Six Months after the Coup

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One year after the victory and six months after the coup, we shouldn't fool ourselves: This was a defeat, of the Greek government. But it's not only Syriza that has failed (for now). The whole left has failed in Greece - and in the rest of Europe, indeed. Europe is no longer what it was. It's impossible to defend this project of European unification from the left without falling into pure illusions.

Ever since the last European Parliament elections, the minimal demand is: 'No further transfer of powers from the national to this EU.' This is certainly right, but then what?

Some hope that now they can score points with alternatives to the current EU. But already before the crisis there was the question: What's the concrete strategy we could use to carry out these alternatives? The social union was our model for 20 years and it's turned into an illusion. The greater the defeat - the submission of the Greek government - the more radical the left's defiance becomes, whether this means that we support a 'LExit' (left exit), a radical democratization of the EU or for instance an unemployment insurance for all. None of this is realistic if it is disconnected from a strategy of how to get there. It's all a politics that amounts to nothing more than proclamations and intellectual games far from the seats of power. There's no subject for carrying it out. As a world view for organizing and a political orientation, these desperate attempts at self-assertion are good for nothing. I, for one, am uncertain about how we can go forward with a view to social transformation.

Shifting the Balance of Power?

The left in Europe, hasn't been able to do anything to shift the balance of power. Our solidarity with Greece was symbolically important, but demonstrations for healthy food, for example, reach many more participants than demonstrations for solidarity and protests against the German government's austerity policies.

And now a divisive debate has broken out that's felt not just in Greece. It is, so to speak, [Wolfgang Schäuble](#)'s second victory: the left has been split. In Germany it's not so dramatic, but it's serious enough to distract from our own problems and mistakes. But in France, for instance, there is a real danger of a split of the Front de Gauche about anti- or pro-European position, a possible split in times of an increasing radical right becoming *the* major force.

Lesson 1: Become More

What would a strategic position be - not only a programmatic one - that would actually

change the relation of forces? This puts the question of organization back on the agenda. And here there is a lot to learn from the post-2011 experiences in Greece and Spain. With our solidarity we haven't managed to make a difference because we are too small, have nowhere near enough anchoring among subaltern groups, and have not developed anywhere near enough connective praxis. This of course also goes for the left in Portugal, Ireland, France, Italy and elsewhere. Here's where we could begin: a strategy that is more strongly oriented toward intervention in concrete everyday social relations through civil-society organizing. And with this a combination of building some kind of connective practices between different movements, parties and/or new platforms that link this to the changed practices within a left mosaic (see Candeias/Völpel 2014).

Let's call it a change from the discursive (arguments transmitted by programs and by media) to the material (interventions in concrete social relations). This is how, in Spain and Greece, the base could be broadened far beyond the usual milieus of the left and the already active. Their constituent parts are local units in which members do not just talk about politics but also take part in everyday practice by preventing forced evictions, organizing tenants, supporting labour struggles, doing refugee work, etc. These are solidarity networks that draw more people into political organizing. In this way it was possible to also reach the precariat, often of immigrant background, that no longer expect anything from elections and democracy. What could be promising in the long term are pilot projects for Transformative Organizing in so-called social flash points. Solidarity practices in the 'middle and bottom' of society laid the bases for successes of Syriza, the Spanish municipal movements in Barcelona, Madrid (and we have figures on this), and many other cities (Podemos still has its litmus test ahead of it). To be able to 'fail' like Syriza, we might have to be as successful as it was, we would have to come as far as it did.

This is perhaps the first lesson to learn from the failure.

Lesson 2: Successful failure has to be organized

This also applies to those who see their politics as confirmed by Syriza's defeat. Stathis Kouvelakis, a proponent of a left Grexit and former member of Syriza's party executive and leading member of the Left Platform, which has split off under the name 'Unity', says:

"Our position is the typical 'I always said it from the beginning' strategy. But if no motivating force can be developed out of this position it means political failure - for if we are powerless and have proven incapable of translating our position into a course of action for the masses, then our position obviously has not been validated" (in: MARX21, 21 July 2015).

The discourse of 'none of it meant anything in the end' was already dominant after the dying down of Occupy and the indignad@s and turned out to be of little use, premature, and above all wrong. Admittedly, the defeat this time is especially heavy (at least for the short history of the left since the beginning of the recent major crisis). But defeats were always also important moments of reappraisal, learning, and reorganization. Viewed in this way, failure has always been the left's most important form of motion.[\[1\]](#) Such learning effects are of course not automatic. In order for lost struggles not to lead to disorganization and splits, there also has to be a connective practice in evaluating and reorganizing - especially if the struggle has not even ended, as in the case of Greece and the European austerity regime. Reducing everything to the question of Grexit or not is detrimental to such a

strategic reorientation.

A moment of catharsis – if it is used.

The decisive strategic questions are organized around the perspectives and the praxis of the left in Europe and especially Germany. But even then, we cannot duck down to formulate a solidary critique of the first Tsipras government as a point of crystallization of left aspirations. Such a balance must start from the real and concrete situation, not from left projections and exaggerated hopes (a problematic with every inspiring project like the movements and left governments in Latin America or [Rifondazione Comunista](#) in Italy). Greece was about finding a way out of crisis and austerity. “It was about reinventing reformism after the neoliberalization of the European social democracy and opening up space for new opportunities for movements, which could not be ‘represented’ by the government” (Mezzadra 2016). In any case, accusations of betrayal or anything else of the kind are out of the question.

In what follows there will, therefore, be no good advice ‘to the Greeks’. I will only formulate three more general problematics and conclusions for future left projects. We should keep in mind that civil-society solidarity structures and unifying practices (see Candeias/Völpel 2014) were what made it possible for Syriza to come to power and for us to even argue about it now. Whatever our differences about the first Tsipras government, none of us should ever fall back below the level of this experience of practice.

Lesson 3: Use the historical moment

We have repeatedly seen how important it is not to pause at the moment of an (electoral) victory. The enemy is weakened, and the momentum of mobilization is still at a high point. The carrying out of decisive projects is more probable at this point, as long as the political enemy has not yet recovered his strength, coordinated with others, and been able to develop a new strategy. Obama, who, whatever his faults, as still the first African-American president of the U.S., provides an example. After enormous mobilization, he was able to win amidst the most serious economic crisis since 1929. But instead of using the moment and curbing the power of Wall Street, taxing the rich, and carrying out a kind of public New Deal, he pursued the false idea of a ‘balanced policy’ and negotiated for a long time with the Republicans – until the Democratic Party lost its majority in the mid-term elections. The rest is history.

But Syriza, too, was unable to use the historical moment. Although before the election a clear immediate-action program and a strategy for the first steps definitely had been drawn up, some of the people closest to Tsipras feared it would lead to failure. The decision was made against the ratified program, and without any further consultation with the party, to negotiate with the creditors without preconditions. Confrontation with the creditors (which perhaps would have created a better starting point) was to be avoided.

The original plan was to declare insolvency right after taking office in order to make a new attempt at debt cancellation within the Eurozone. The insolvency was indeed real and not caused by Syriza. Declaring it unilaterally would have been a calculated breaking of the rules, including the introduction of capital controls. Greece could have credibly said to the European public that the preceding corrupt governments and the Troika’s policy had for years covered up, exacerbated, and protracted the country’s insolvency. Everyone who cared to know it knew that Greece had long been bankrupt. The Troika and the European

'caste' still had not agreed on a strategy for dealing with the newly elected left government. There were many within the power bloc – not just the IMF – who had long thought that Greece was bankrupt and that debts would have to be written off. Insolvency would have put the creditors under strong pressure to offer an immediate solution. Success would by no means have been certain. But the moment fizzled out without being used.

After months of the Greek government's desperate negotiations, defeat was palpable. In this moment of hardship, the referendum was a good chess move for a possible exit from the messy situation. The party rank and file and civil society organizations mobilized in a showing of remarkable strength for the OXI vote against submission to a third Memorandum. The referendum was supposed to improve the negotiating position. Whether the moment was consciously unused is unknown.

On the other hand, what was successful to an extent was the notably rapid implementation of the measures to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Greece. Despite the lack of experience with administrative apparatuses, important measures were carried out in the areas of refugee policy, the reintroduction of the minimum wage, food stamps for the poorest, reconnection and free basic electricity provision, easements for over-indebtedness, reintroduction of basic pensions, reintroduction of unemployment and health insurance for low income earners, recruiting of doctors and free access to healthcare also for the non-insured, the recognition of same-sex partnerships, etc. (see Bussemer 2015).

Except for smaller reforms in the taxation of businesses and the slow-moving detection of tax evasion and money laundering, a direct attack on the Greek oligarchy and its corrupt connections within the state, the economy, and the media was avoided. "Outrageous is the fact, that it was not possible to pass our tax legislation through the parliament, providing us the exit to the resources necessary for survival in this struggle. Outrageous that we were not able to reintroduce collective bargaining laws, providing working people with the means for their struggle for democracy and dignity at their workplace" (Iliopoulos 2015).

"Schäuble is not to blame for not passing an institutional reform, able to contain police violence, to reform education... to shut down the gold mine at Skouries, to bring forward a solidarity economy... to tax the wealth of the church... This was what Syriza announced and what was not in the focus of the Troika. The government did not implement these reforms," said Yannis Albanis (2015), member of the Syriza's central committee.

A twofold strategy seemed too dangerous to the government. Still, perhaps it was exactly what would have been necessary. The propaganda in the creditor states said that the corrupt classes of the super-rich in Greece should not be called on to help service the debt because it was the fault of the Greeks themselves, which is hypocritical, but effective. "We did not fight the struggles, able to strengthen and encourage us, but those weakening us... Our biggest error was not committed in the negotiations" with an over-powerful combatant, "but not to push forward the social processes and struggles in the country," sums up Tasos Koronakis (2015b), the former General Secretary of Syriza. But even less confrontative democratic changes were not resolutely advanced: "with regard to transparency, corruption, revaluation of municipal and regional governments, democratization of public administration" (Spourdalakis 2015).

Another reflection: "Our opponents took us seriously. They thought we were dangerous for the system, not economically, but in terms of politics. They took us as a threat for the hegemony of the neoliberal paradigm... We didn't take ourselves so seriously. We never

prepared for an actual battle” (Iliopoulos 2015).

Could have, should have, would have... What can we learn from all this? To never engage the struggle ‘below the level of the current relations of force’ (Luxemburg, GW 1.2, 433) and never let the brief moments of historical possibilities go unused.

Lesson 4: Hegemony in civil-society before taking office is not enough...

From Gramsci we learn that “there has to be ‘political hegemony’ already before taking office, and in exercising political leadership or hegemony one ought not to count solely on the power and material strength it confers.” This advice was heeded. Syriza was a point of condensation that translates civil-society self-organization and protest into the perspectives of taking governmental power.

But it is not enough to have won hegemony in civil society before taking office. Government and civil society have to be rethought:

“It was clear that the room for manoeuvre inside the given institutions was going to be ‘more than narrow: Neither the clutch of the Troika nor that of the international financial markets would be loosened – on the contrary. ... A left government would be wedged between authoritarian European constitutionalism and a bureaucratic apparatus occupied clientelistically by PASOK and ND. It would also have to expect an economic crisis aggravated by measures taken on the capitalist side. Rejection and renegotiation of the Memorandums ... will not be enough” (Candeias 2013).

At any rate, it was equally clear that Syriza had no choice. After the electoral victory it would have been impossible to not take office and leave it to a ‘grand’ coalition of the corrupt ‘system parties’ that shared responsibility with the Troika for the country’s catastrophic condition. “There was a kind of mobilization from the lower classes, expecting Syriza to take government” (Spourdalakis 2015). Nevertheless, one should have been able to know – and many did know it – that the government’s expectation of being able to govern in the usual way was not viable. The initially swiftly implemented humanitarian emergency program needed to be accompanied “by a rupture that would involve large parts of the population in a process of collective reorganization and refounding of democracy” (Candeias 2013).

“Syriza originally started with a different approach. The party wanted to ‘put society back into the center’. She promised to realize this practically, to approach to and learn from the movements, without behaving like a paternalistic Avantgarde or typical representative... Her practice and program were designed to realize an active social participation in the institutions... From this practice she formulated a ‘right’ to govern and execute power” (Spourdalakis 2015).

A true transformation cannot be a transformation via the state. As Nicos Poulantzas said:

“A transformation of the state apparatus in the sense of a withering away of the state can only rest on an increased intervention of the masses in the state – certainly with the help of the trade-union and political representatives of the masses but also through the unfolding of their own initiatives within the state. ... (it will) not be able to limit itself to a mere democratization of the state. ... This transformation must be accompanied by the development of new forms of

direct grassroots democracy and the spread of networks and centers of self-governance," (1978, 289f).

Andreas Karitzis puts it like this:

"Escalation by the elites requires a counter strategy, empowering people to take over fundamental socio-economic functions in an alternative way... We cannot free ourselves from our oppressors as long as we do not develop the power to provide the necessary goods and practices independently" (Karitzis 2015).

And Hilary Wainwright observes: "Solidarity initiatives can be important points of departure for struggles around/for the welfare state." In these struggles, as organizational nodes, "people's self-conception of what they can achieve" can change, "Together with [these struggles] the sense of their own capacity for power" can develop (2012, 122). These initiatives are therefore potentially not only an effective remedy against (right-wing) populism but can also reduce dependency on (left) governments and prevent clientelism. They do not limit themselves to 'civic engagement' that compensates for the thinning out of the welfare state but aim, through civil disobedience and direct appropriation, at its reconstruction and its democratic remodelling. From this perspective, the expansion and democratization of the welfare state should redirect funds and decision-making power toward civil society. 'In and against the state', to recall an old slogan.

No one can be mobilized by asking five people to cross their fingers in negotiating with the Troika, just as no one can be mobilized to exit the euro. In both cases there is no role for movements or for individuals, no perspective for taking action. To concretely reclaim the state at the point where people experience it in their daily lives - in healthcare, education, media, in workplaces, and organizing the necessary financial means - that is what could have mobilized and connected with an existing praxis. "This requires rethinking governmental and administrative practices as well as movements... which have to overcome their narrow corporatist mentality," insofar as state recourse and decision making is transferred to these new actors (Karitzis 2015).

An example: The movement of solidarity clinics with their knowledge and engagement of doctors, healthcare workers, patients, relatives, and activists could have been a basis for a reform of the public healthcare system that aims at participation and transparency and opens up the administrations to the masses, uses their knowledge, and anchors their power there. Some steps in this direction were made, but extremely carefully.

Councils could have been formed everywhere. This could push forward the reconstruction of the state more powerfully than a single left minister at the head of an apparatus shot through with clientelism and corruption (especially in the tax administration).

This twofold strategy of negotiations and rupture was not taken up. The wish was to avoid a 'war on two fronts' and so not risk a conflict with the Greek bourgeoisie within the country. And so there was no turning to the very mobilization that could have bolstered the government - not only at the European level but also in the struggle against corruption and tax evasion, for cutting the horrendous arms expenditures, and the introduction of a wealth tax. These were precisely the points used by the anti-Greek propaganda in the creditor countries to continually accuse the government - incredible hypocrisy as we know since the

Troika itself prevented these measures from being taken.

Moreover, a mobilization of civil society could have also been an important corrective for the government (every trade-unionist knows how helpful such pressure can be for negotiations). Forgoing it tended to render civil society passive. “Syriza as a whole – despite the mass presence of single members in the movements – evoked mass participation more than really developing it. Contrary to their communiques the government did not ‘open’ institutional procedures and did not even think about broader negotiations and participatory democracy” (Albanis 2015).

Incidentally, the Left Platform also had no such strategy and with its program focused on a Grexit pursued a purely parliamentary and *etatist* tactic. They seemed uninterested in mobilization. Panagiotis Sotiris, ex-Antarsya member and now member of Popular Unity sums up self-critically: “The forces building the new ‘Unity’, they “acted like a variation of Syriza, that credibly upheld its principles but not as a new front that organically grew out of the movements and social conflicts... Our party did not succeed in ... opening itself to the experiences of the movement” (Sotiris 2015). “Unity as well as the government obviously did not share principles and experiences of the radical left: neither to be broadly anchored in class, nor thick ties to solidarity networks and social movements were considered as particularly important. They refused to actively take part in the latter” (Spourdalakis 2015).

That the movements had already waned by the time Syriza came to power, as we so often hear, is an erroneous analysis (Sablowski, JW 18 July 2015; Strohschneider ND 5 August 2015). What does one mean by ‘movement’? The relatively ineffective general strikes and other spectacular demonstrations? Or the spread of organizing through the solidary structures in the whole country and the development of a connective party (socially as well as through parliament)? The former had indeed long since died down. After the occupation of Syntagma Square there was the laborious everyday work of organizing in the neighborhoods and of a multi-faceted solidary economy (Candeias/Völpel 2014). The latter is less visible and involves enormous wear and tear but also continual engagement and effect. In fact, with the refugee crisis that has been coming to a head already for a long time, the solidary structures have lost nothing of their dynamic but have grown in terms of activists, engagement, and dynamic, as Eleni Chatzmichali of the Network of Solidarity Clinics reports.

And after the big defeat in July, it became clear for everyone, in this situation solidarity structures will not become dispensable, because even a left government is not able to reestablish and expand the welfare state. You can’t rely on the government for your everyday survival. So, for instance in cooperatives or “markets without middlemen” numbers and engagement of activist are growing. We have to do it ourselves. In doing so, “we have to care about not eroding the political kernel of solidarity structures,” to reduce them to mere structures of help. “Antagonistic movements like anti-privatization or anti-eviction initiatives however were demobilized much more, but not the solidarity structures” (ibid.).

The notion of the demobilization of civil society is also refuted by the OXI. The mobilization surprised the participants (especially the government) perhaps even more than the outcome of the referendum. Although months had been thrown away, the OXI could have been used. But “there was no careful consideration how to mobilize the social forces, which demonstrated their willingness with 61 per cent at the referendum, and there was no careful consideration either how to strengthen the solidarity and parallel structures, that emerged out of the crisis” (Panagiotakis 2015).

Although the indispensable role of movements is recognized widely in the left, there is a dominant understanding of a linear ascending process of political organization: in the beginning there are protests and movements, then follows the building up of new or rebuilding of old left party structures, then there is the electoral process and campaigning to win the majority and assume (governmental) power to implement the “right” policies. Movements have their – more or less – important role, but the understanding of taking power remains the same old stylish, office-seeking, and *etatist* one, centered around parliamentary and administrative procedures – “We do it for you.” But this traditional relation toward government “is not sound anymore. The state is not able to provide what people need” (Karitzis 2015). Instead, it should be clear, that the moment of seizing governmental power is not the moment of replacing the moment of movements and social mobilization. Taking office should be understood as the moment of strengthening mobilization and self-organization of the subaltern classes in all fields of society. New connective practices between the different functions – government, party, movement, social self-organization in the neighborhoods and on the shop floor – must be developed – instead of acting in the name of movements and voters or the invocation of movements as the cases arise to mobilize people for the government.

Repeated mobilization in individual cases – like for the referendum – without giving people a real voice, a real possibility to decide, however, leads to disillusion. Not only has the Left Platform split off; still more serious is the loss of the base, which is leaving the party in droves, with many of the most active liaison people in civil society and the movements among them. The “connective party” failed.

There is still no open break between movements and Syriza; people are still discussing what the right consistent approach should be. “Movement-oriented people left” the party, so it will become “difficult to negotiate politics to strengthen solidarity structures only with people orientated toward parliamentary procedures,” reassess Chatzimichali (2015). There is ongoing discussion of founding a new civil-society platform that would not exhaust itself working within the government but pursue its own agenda of social organizing and transformation – a platform able to either pressure on, or support of, Syriza, depending on the specific conditions. The relation between party and movements now has to be directed toward a relation of cooperation and conflict, consolidating the autonomy of movements, comparable less to a connective party than to the model of the Brazilian landless movement MST in the time of the Lula government.

Tsipras and Syriza won a second mandate. Learning from our own failures is the duty. Because it will not be enough to socially cushion the Memorandum measures. It became immediately obvious that the European institutions will not tolerate such a tactic. When the Greek government tried to cushion the hardship of the memorandum measures with a parallel program of social measures (health insurance for all, municipal centers of help for the poor, an end to the foreclosure sale of the land of the cooperative Vio.Me etc.), the vote in the parliament had to be suspended because of the pressure from the Eurogroup. Therefore the creditors’ shift from “fiscal blackmail to direct political control... They not only set the legal frame for Greek politics,” but they are binding “the next payments to political compliance of the government, permanently supervised. They will prevent Greece from winning any room for manoeuvre for a new offensive” (Blockupy goes Athens, 12.7.15). So, the strategy to cushion the measures of the Memorandum has failed too.

Indefensible is any strategy “that privileges the ‘representation’ of voters over the organization of the society, with the goal, to struggle against the measures of the

Memorandum today, and to bear a new economic war tomorrow” (Albanis 2015).

Lesson 5: Autonomy of the party from the government and parliament

Syriza has undertaken far-reaching changes in the political structure of its own organization and developed close institutional, indeed organic, ties with the movements. Together with the movements it founded the Solidarity4all network in order to network and strengthen the structures of solidarity countrywide; every deputy gives a significant part of his or her salary to Solidarity4all’s solidarity fund; at least one of each deputy’s staff is made available for work in the movement, etc. And so there were very good connections from the party to the movements. The party provides an infrastructure for the construction of the solidarity movements, that was enormously important.

However, there was little ability to guarantee an opposite path of impulses from the movements to the party, as it was still possible in the period of the Syntagma Square occupation. “We did not build an active relation to the society,” in this sense of lacking openness “there was no real difference to ND and PASOK” (Koronakis 2015b).

Furthermore, from the very start Syriza was threatened by “the danger of being completely absorbed by government duties,” as Elena Papadopoulou put it (2015). Situations are repeatedly arising “in which party cadre are absorbed into the state apparatus” and a left party “only still exists as a government party,” or as a parliamentary party, which describes Syriza with some exceptions. Against this, Papadopoulou recommends, it is necessary to “hold on to our own presence in the social field and even to expand it.” This did not succeed. The party was marginalized in relation to the government and parliament. It no longer played an independent role. “And the members were never consulted about any question, not at any time” (Panagiotakis 2015). A classic mistake.

“Since 2012, action of the party was too strongly oriented toward ‘governing’. ...Syriza privileged the parliamentary game, social practices degenerated into compulsory exercise. They stopped making initiatives in society and lost ingenuity, they still had in 2010 and 2011. This became clear at the founding party convention of Syriza. The questions debated there were mostly of procedural nature, nearly exclusively on inner-organizational structures - with it the party seemed disconnected from the societal field. Without creativity, the organization was not able to correspond to its own strategy” (Spourdalakis 2015).

In contrast inner-party conflicts between the different political currents dominated the debate, without representing or organizing a majority in the party. No entity within the party was dedicated to connective practices, bridging the differences.

“The ‘federal’ character of the currents, functioning as networks or even parties within the party, was not useful. It prevented a real connection between the currents... Connecting the pieces is hard work. And a working and lively party debate is a precondition, supporting the Syriza strategy in all its organs, representing the new. It hasn’t worked. Division is due to these deficits, and it costs strength, effectiveness and votes.”

Along with this, those who had been important in organizing the close connection between the party and the movements, who had built vital relationships in civil society and were, precisely, for the twofold strategy of negotiation with the creditors and rupture in the sense

of mobilization within the country, were ground down or made invisible within the clash of the government and its negotiating strategy, on the one hand, and the Left Platform, with its never developed exit option, on the other. Among other groups, I am thinking here of the "[Group of 53](#)," a group within Syriza that advocated Syriza's cohesion, its democratic functioning, and its radical left, movement-oriented direction. Central figures, such as the party's General Secretary, Tasos Koronakis, or Christos Giovanopoulos, the coordinator of Solidarity4all, have since left the party.

For the sake of future left projects we would have to ask: How can the relation of those in government, of the parliamentary group and the party be shaped so that the necessarily emerging contradictions can be cooperatively worked through? How can one guarantee that the party is neither subordinated to the government nor pitted against it? What concrete conflicts can be foreseen? How are conflicts to be managed and democratic inner-party decisions made? To develop a connective praxis that cross the fault lines within the party and the social left should be a task of all parts of the left but, at a minimum, of its leadership groups.

What Does Defeat Mean Now for Us in Europe?

It was more than clear and repeatedly said, also by Tsipras, that one country alone actually cannot carry it off. They tried the impossible, bought time, and politicized the question of democracy in Europe. But what does this mean for us?

As I said: we haven't made a difference. The Left - parties and movements, intellectuals and trade unions - which altogether is not all that little - have at no point managed to create a common initiative in order, beyond all trench warfare, to come nearer to the shared goal of the end to austerity and of Europe's authoritarian-neoliberal regime.

As in a burning glass, Greece and the politics of all of the left in Germany for instance shows that the forms of politics that have been pursued, whether movement, trade-union, or party politics, are not good enough. Therefore we need a different strategy of organizing and becoming more, as I said, based on organizing in the everyday struggles, in the neighborhoods, etc., bringing more people to take their interest into their own hands.

Even if we in Germany do not have a dynamic like that of Greece or Spain, what needs to be done now is to develop capacities, prepare things, reinforce organizing processes - in order both to be effective (despite the lack of a dynamic) and to be prepared for the coming dynamic. "To be active within a fundamental temporal discontinuity means, on the one hand, to gather forces and develop and, on the other, to be open for the unforeseen, for the 'untimely'. In the language of the 'politics of the event' this means an attitude that is ready to 'grasp the opportunity', to intervene in those temporary openings that allow a leap forward and the creation of more favorable relations of forces" (Caccia/Mezzadra 2015).

Of course, alongside this priority of popular anchoring in solidarity praxis, there also needs to be a programmatic position and discursive strategies that can convey the connection of these everyday hardships to the European crisis - a left populism, so to say, that clearly names the perpetrator and addresses the anxiety - anxiety in the face of a feeling of 'external' threat (Greece and the euro crisis, Ukraine/Putin, refugees, surveillance/NSA, terrorism) - that is predominantly related to the situation here and couples it to solidarity praxis.

Lesson 6: A common 'Oxi' camp

Europe no longer represents hope. In fact, we should consider whether certain powers ought to be transferred 'back' from the European to other levels. This would involve a new connection of decentralization but with transnational mediations. In terms of municipal concerns, it is at this level that decisions should be made. On what has effects beyond one municipality and region should be decided on higher levels: on a supra-regional or national basis with the participation of those effected – and of course there are questions that can only be approached on a European level. Which matters these should be would be clarified within a constitutive process aimed at a fundamental refoundation of the European project.

The means and end of a refounding of Europe would have to be the strengthening of the sovereign, that is, of the population. In this way, the impulse toward re-nationalization could be remodelled into an impulse toward decentralization and Europeanization. For a broad political debate on the prospects, Europe-wide assemblies should be called – a constituent process of consultation and organizing of a European civil society. It should not involve an abstract Europe discourse but would be close to the everyday worries and desires of people. This is the perspective. How to get there is the issue.



With this aim, Varoufakis is proposing the founding of a new [European platform](#). The initiatives around the so-called Plan B (Mélanchon, Lafontaine, et al.) are also pursuing a discussion of the new orientation of the process of European integration and not just a debate about Lexit (Owen Jones). Instead, movements are focusing on diverse processes of intervention in concrete everyday organizing in connection with transnational assemblies and civil disobedience, but they are still going through a process of strategy clarification.

Those forces that can be called movements of a new municipalism have a somewhat different strategic focus. They assume that far-reaching attempts at European organizing are hopeless if not based on the organizing within the everyday life of individuals, in the neighborhoods, at the workplace, and in the municipalities. Within the Spanish state, connective platforms were able to win majorities in most of the country's large cities. Not only in Barcelona and Madrid can the new left municipal governments name the mayor; in the USA, too, the various successes after the defeat of the Occupy movement can mostly be seen at the local and municipal level (for instance, around the minimum wage). In Italy, there is a long left tradition of social centers as places of organizing. The municipality needs to be won back as a locus of politics, of (self-)organizing, and participation. With Syriza we have seen the limits left governments come up against in an authoritarian Europe. This of course, is also true, in another way, for a new municipalism. This also involves jumping scale to translate and connect such politics and organizing with the European level – for a network of cities and regions or, more emphatically, the perspective of a European Commune as the constitutive process for another Europe from below?

We have also seen that European campaigns can serve to establish a new political space from below in Europe. By now there have been several such campaigns: on water, ACTA, seaports, TTIP, and others. The start of a mutual European understanding from below could be an organizing campaign for a European citizens' initiative that would name maybe three still to be defined central goals: perhaps an end of social cuts and privatization, a European debt conference, taxing the rich with a European property levy, investments in a Europe-wide social infrastructure (healthcare, education, housing, energy), and a solidary refugee

policy. It can be formulated better and more concretely, not more than three points. That European campaigns can be successful has recently been shown by the anti-[TTIP](#) campaign. But this new campaign should be more sophisticated.

Anti-democratic hegemonism of the German government and the subjection and impoverishment of Greece also finds its critics even in Germany among a relevant minority of 20 to 30 per cent, up to now within the left-liberal, Green, and bourgeois centre spectrum represented by Jürgen Habermas, Gesine Schwan, Reinhard Bütikofer, and many others. The refugee drama is considerably aggravating this anxiety. "More than ever, we need to go beyond the current limits of protest and create a social bloc that says 'OXI' to the social cuts and destruction of democracy in Europe, that goes beyond the classic left milieu" (Riexinger, ND 11 August 2015). In the rest of Europe, resentment, especially of the German government, has grown enormously. It would not hurt if left parties, social movements, and critical trade-unionists could unite Europe-wide around a few minimal demands in order to get such a campaign started.

The European institutions would certainly reject such a European Citizens Initiative (ECI). However, as was the case with TTIP, this could have a mobilizing effect, if you will, for a bold referendum for a Europe from below, as the beginning of self-empowerment for a constituent process.

These and other strategies are going to be discussed at a European Strategy Conference organized by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) in June 2016 together with the most diverse social initiatives, groups, tendencies, and organizations. Along with the political content, the conference will also deal with what the right political forms could be and their linkages, as well as a strategy for connecting the most diverse levels – local/municipal, national, European – in view of the left's scarce resources: in each case, where is the right level of political intervention and organizing? The aim – despite current differing positions and goals – is to find connective perspectives and praxis that make possible not a unified *modus operandi* but at least a synchronization of politics of resistance for another Europe. This time together!

We have to be aware that we are experiencing a great crisis – things can change rapidly. And when they do, it will be rapid in every direction. Maybe in ours, if we learn from our defeats.

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Notes:

[1.](#) "The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmentary and episodic. In the history of the activity of these groups there is doubtless a tendency to unity, if only at provisional levels, but this tendency is continually broken by the initiative of the ruling groups" (Gramsci, Prison Notebook 9 [German edition p. 2191]).

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