

Plan B for Europe: The Birth of ‘Disobedient Euroscepticism’?

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Abstract

Despite attempts in the broader literature to go beyond a binary classification of party-based Euroscepticism, Eurosceptic radical left parties are still generally divided into those advocating reform of the EU and those calling for an exit from the EU. The most notable exception is the classification proposed by Keith (2017), who distinguishes between Rejectionist, Conditional and Expansionist Euroscepticism. However, this article argues that a new form of left-wing Euroscepticism has emerged since 2016, which does not fit with any of the existing classifications. It is the position put forward by ‘Plan B for Europe’, a transnational initiative of radical left parties, which advocates a disobedient approach towards the EU that simultaneously aims for the reformation of the latter while preparing for a break from it. This is a novel type of party-based Euroscepticism that should supplement Keith’s classification.

Keywords: left-wing Euroscepticism; disobedient Euroscepticism; Plan B

Introduction

Party-based Euroscepticism was first classified by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003), who distinguished between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism, where the former entirely opposes European integration and the latter only some aspects of it. There have since been several attempts that go beyond this binary conceptualization and reflect better the diversity of Eurosceptic positions across different party families and often even within the same party family (Rovny, 2004; Weßels, 2007; Vasilopoulou, 2011; De Wilde and Trenz, 2012; Colodro *et al.*, 2018). This diversity has also been noted in the case of radical left parties (RLPs from here on) (Dunphy, 2004; Keith, 2017; Dunphy and March, 2019; Fagerholm, 2019).

However, RLPs’ Euroscepticism tends to be discussed in terms of the broad ‘hard’ vs ‘soft’ dichotomy (for example Charalambous, 2011; Braun *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, some scholars place it in the close proximity of the Euroscepticism of the nationalist right (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002; Halikiopoulou *et al.*, 2012), although that association is not always justified. Against this background, arguably the most nuanced attempt so far to classify the RLP Euroscepticism belongs to Keith (2017), who does acknowledge the existence of a hard, or ‘Rejectionist’, and a soft Euroscepticism. At the same time, he divides the latter between ‘Conditional Eurosceptics’, who favour a reformation of the EU through the return of prerogatives to the nation-state, and ‘Expansionist Eurosceptics’, who see that reform conversely, by transferring further prerogatives to the supranational level. According to him, the Expansionist position is displayed by most prominent RLPs today, such as SYRIZA (Greece), *Podemos* (Spain), *Bloco de Esquerda* (Portugal) or *Die Linke* (Germany).

Keith's study is one of the few, so far, to deal with the potential changes in parties' attitudes towards the EU in the light of the multiple crises that engulfed the latter throughout the 2010s (see also De Sio *et al.*, 2016; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2016; Braun *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, Keith's study appears to be the only one specifically interested in whether those crises might have also led to changes in how we understand and classify party-based Euroscepticism. Building on a review of the relevant literature and qualitative content analysis of political documents, this article aims to show that in the last five years or so a new type of Euroscepticism emerged, which does not fit any of the categories identified by Keith, or other scholars for that matter. It came in the context of the Eurozone crisis, under the form of *Plan B for Europe* (Plan B) – a transnational initiative created in 2016 by several RLPs, including Podemos, La France Insoumise and Bloco, as a direct reaction to the 2015 U-turn by the SYRIZA government on its anti-austerity pledges (see Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016). The political statements of Plan B summits put forward a new position towards the EU that can be best described as 'Disobedient Euroscepticism' and ought to supplement the classification proposed by Keith.

The significance of this development is two-fold. Conceptually, Disobedient Euroscepticism challenges the broad 'reform vs exit' dichotomy that is still largely employed to make sense of the approach towards the EU of RLPs (and political parties in general). It also challenges the aforementioned tendency among some scholars to virtually conflate RLPs' variegated opposition to the EU to that of the far or populist right. Politically, Disobedient Euroscepticism is displayed by some of the most important RLPs in the EU today, such as Bloco and La France Insoumise. At the same time, it has contributed to the RLP's divergence over the question of Europe, widely acknowledged as a key factor in this party family's rather weak transnational coordination (Holmes and Lightfoot, 2016; Keith, 2017; Dunphy and March, 2019). And while it has yet to become government policy in any country, Disobedient Euroscepticism arguably has the potential to become a strategic choice for Eurosceptic governments regardless of their ideological orientation, particularly in the likely perspective of a COVID-19-related economic crisis or when clashing with the EU over issues such as the rights of minorities or the rule of law.

The paper is divided in four sections. The first one sets out the theoretical framework by providing a summary of the main taxonomies of party-based Euroscepticism in the current literature and then presenting the limited work done so far to classify RLP Euroscepticism, with a focus on the typology proposed by Keith, which this paper intends to expand. The second section briefly describes the methodology that has been used. The third section presents the Plan B initiative and focuses on its stance towards the EU, as reflected in the joint political declarations that have concluded its summits. The last section argues that this Eurosceptic position does not fit any of the breeds of Euroscepticism identified by the current academic literature and that it requires, therefore, a distinct conceptualization, which fits with Keith's typology. The conclusion sums up the key points of the article and suggests potentially fruitful avenues for further research.

Theoretical Framework

RLPs were united in their opposition to European integration in the early stages of the process. They believed it was intrinsically biased in favour of market forces and that

the European Economic Community was little more than the economic arm of NATO (Castellina, 1988; Butler, 1995). The crack in that anti-integrationist consensus came about with the Eurocommunist turn of the Italian Communist Party in the late 1960s, which enabled them to become the first communist party represented in the European Parliament (EP) (Murray, 2004, p. 112). Its new independent line from Moscow entailed an active engagement with European integration, which was to be reoriented in a direction propitious for socialist policies (Dunphy, 2004, pp. 24–6). A similar stance was adopted by other Eurocommunist parties such as the Communist Party of Spain and Greek Communist Party – Interior (the forerunner of today's SYRIZA), both coming from post-dictatorship countries where European integration was largely seen as the main path to democratisation and economic development (Hudson, 2000, pp. 30–1).

On the background of their post-1989 weakness and de-radicalisation (March, 2011), most of the other RLPs also softened their position on European integration, with only few of them retaining a staunch anti-integrationist stance, mainly the so-called orthodox communist parties (Almeida, 2012). The two main pan-European structures of this party family today, the EP group European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) and the Party of the European Left (PEL), also broadly display a fundamental, albeit critical, commitment to European integration (see GUE/NGL, n.d.; Party of European Left, 2012). Despite different nuances from party to party, this prevailing position is based on a call to reform rather than abandon the EU, although this position has been significantly challenged over the last few years, as developed further below.

It is widely acknowledged that the label 'Euroscepticism' does not designate a unitary, coherent position, and covers different types of party attitudes to European integration (Taggart, 1998; Sitter, 2001; Verney, 2011; Kaiser, 2022). Hence, Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003) have coined the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism. The former refers to 'principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU' (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003, p. 12), being displayed by parties that oppose their countries joining or remaining part of the EU. Soft Euroscepticism, on the other hand, merely entails 'opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory' rather than a 'principled objection to the European integration project or transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU' (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003, p. 12). Another important distinction in the literature is between 'political' and 'instrumental' Euroscepticism, first formalised by Lubbers and Scheepers (2005). While political Euroscepticism entails a preference for national over EU prerogatives in certain, if not all, key policy areas, instrumental Euroscepticism is framed in cost–benefit terms, with its adepts emphasising the negative consequences of EU membership. In other words, the former is primarily concerned with the process of European integration, whereas the latter with its outcomes (for a further elaboration of this distinction, see Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011).

Kopecky and Mudde (2002) propose a broader classification that distinguishes, more generally, between four types of attitudes towards the EU, depending on how parties deem both the idea and practice of European integration. Thus, 'Euroenthusiasts' support both the idea and practice of European integration; 'Eurosceptics' support the idea but oppose the practice; 'Europragmatists' oppose the idea but support the practice; and 'Eurorejects' oppose both the idea and the practice.

Finally, Vasilopoulou (2011) identifies three types of opposition to European integration. The first one, ‘rejectionist Euroscepticism’, overlaps with the aforementioned categories of hard Euroscepticism and Eurorejectionism, and implies outright opposition to a country’s membership of the EU. The second type is ‘conditional Euroscepticism’, which amounts to ‘an approval of the principle of European co-operation but hostility to the current policy practice as well as the future building of a European polity’ (Vasilopoulou, 2011, p. 232). That entails the desire to (re)assign most decision-making powers to individual nation-states and to inter-governmental co-operation. The third type is ‘compromising Euroscepticism’, which amounts to ‘support for the principle and the practice of integration but opposition to the future building of a European polity’ (Vasilopoulou, 2011, p. 232). Integration is seen as necessary from an economic point of view but any further transfer of prerogatives to supranational institutions is opposed. Vasilopoulou designed this typology for radical right parties but argues that it could also be applied to other party families.

When it comes to the Euroscepticism of RLPs, there have been rather few attempts at conceptualizing its different strains. Such a gap exists despite the fact that the divisions within and among these parties over the question of the EU have both deepened and widened during the Eurozone crisis (Chiocchetti, 2014; Holmes and Lightfoot, 2016; Keith, 2017), which saw levels of Euroscepticism increase particularly in the most affected member states (Serricchio *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, it is not uncommon that left-wing Euroscepticism is conflated with that of the nationalist or populist right (e.g. Hooghe *et al.*, 2002; Halikiopoulou *et al.*, 2012). For example, while noting that, unlike RLPs, ‘radical right-wing parties express nationalism by stressing its ethnic and cultural elements’ (p. 532), Halikiopoulou *et al.* (2012) nevertheless argue that RLPs and radical right parties ‘share elements of nationalist ideology leading to a common Eurosceptic stance’ (p. 505). However, this fails to take into account the internationalist vision that – as illustrated by the case of Plan B discussed below – accompanies the Euroscepticism of some important RLPs. Dunphy and March (2019, p. 10) have also criticised this kind of association between radical left and right Euroscepticism ‘as inadequate and misleading’, pointing out that some if not most of the RLPs opposing the EU today are not fuelled by nationalism but by what they perceive as a structural incompatibility between left-wing policies and the EU’s institutional design (for example Matias & Gusmão, 2018). Thus, Dunphy and March refer to this position as ‘EU-scepticism’ or even ‘actually existing EU-scepticism’; they do not explore, though, how this category might fit in existing typologies or whether it requires a new one altogether. Most recently, Brack (2020) has shown, after analysing the electoral manifestos of 19 radical left and right parties, that these two political families do not share a common Eurosceptic narrative or objective.

The two main attempts to classify RLP Euroscepticism come from Charalambous (2011) and Keith (2017). Charalambous applies the first two analytical frameworks mentioned above to classify the attitudes of eleven RLPs. When using the typology proposed by Szczerbiak and Taggart, Charalambous (2011, p. 311) shows that most parties, such as SYRIZA (Greece) or Die Linke (Germany), are soft Eurosceptic, opposing the EU’s current neoliberal institutional design and policies but aiming to change them from within. Only three parties are identified as hard Eurosceptic, explicitly advocating the withdrawal of their countries from the EU and the restoration of full national sovereignty: the Communist Party of Greece, the Portuguese Communist Party and the Left Party in Sweden. When

applying the framework coined by Kopecky and Mudde, Charalambous (2011, p. 312) concludes that none of the parties is Euroenthusiast. Instead, most parties are Eurosceptics, three are Eurorejects (same three seen as ‘hard’) and only one is Europragmatist, the French Communist Party, which still displays a vague ideological opposition to EU membership in principle but accepts it has certain benefits (Charalambous, 2011, p. 306).

Thus, apart from the one case of Europragmatism, the implication of Charalambous’ analysis is that, at least in the case of left-wing Euroscepticism, the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ strains conceptualized by Szczerbiak and Taggart overlap with the ‘Eurosceptic’ and ‘Euroreject’ types respectively identified by Kopecky and Mudde. Therefore, it would appear that, by and large, we are dealing with two main types of left-wing Euroscepticism: either for or against EU membership, either reform or exit.

However, Keith (2017) provides a slightly more complex, and up-to-date, classification of left-wing Euroscepticism by adapting to this party family the framework proposed by Vasilopoulou (2011). He focuses on the eighteen parties represented in GUE/NGL following the 2014 European elections. Thus, he identifies four parties as ‘Rejectionist’, openly calling for a withdrawal from the EU, which they consider to be an imperialist and capitalist project that is inherently incompatible with these parties’ vision of social transformation (Keith, 2017, p. 91). There are five ‘Conditional’ Eurosceptic RLPs, who ‘seek to regain powers for nation states while they accept the need for some forms of European decision making ... largely at intergovernmental level’ (Keith, 2017, p. 92). However, Keith, replaces Vasilopoulou’s third category of Compromising Euroscepticism with ‘Expansionist/Integrationist Euroscepticism’, as he sees more differences than Vasilopoulou between RLPs’ Euroscepticism and that of the radical right. Expansionist Euroscepticism is displayed by half of the parties and at a transnational level by the PEL (Keith, 2017, p. 93). They oppose what they deem as the neoliberalism of the actually-existing EU, but their solution is not as much a return to the nation-state as further integration in order to achieve the ideal of ‘a social Europe’. Such integration would entail ‘EU-level taxes, an expansion of the EU budget to fund initiatives to boost employment, a minimum wage, regulations on capital and reforms to hold the ECB to account by elected institutions’ (Keith, 2017, p. 93).

While Keith’s classification – summed up in the non-grey area of Table 1 below – is more nuanced in making sense of the variegated Euroscepticism of RLPs today, it still fails to capture the kind of left Euroscepticism that has emerged since 2016 under the

Table 1: Revision of Keith’s (2017, p. 91) classification, signalled in grey

	<i>Rejectionist</i>	<i>Conditional</i>	<i>Expansionist</i>	<i>Disobedient</i>
Principle of European Integration/cooperation	Against	In favour	In favour	In favour
Practice of European Cooperation	Against	Against	Against	Against
Future of European integration/cooperation	Against	Against	In favour	Qualified support
Compliance with current rules of European integration	Against	In favour	In favour	Against

form of the Plan B for Europe initiative and its spin-off ‘Now, the people!’ movement. This omission is largely explained by the fact that these initiatives were launched around the same time when Keith wrote his text. However, nothing in the literature has since specifically dealt with this development, most likely due to Plan B’s relatively limited activity and impact (Agustín, 2017).

As developed further below, this new type of Euroscepticism has two important new characteristics that distinguish it from the other types identified by Keith. First, while all these types are against the current practice of European integration, the new type is the only one to advocate a reform of that practice and, *simultaneously*, a strategy of disobedience towards its rules. Thus, as shown in Table 1, this new type – best described as Disobedient Euroscepticism – adds an additional, strategy-related, attribute to Keith’s framework that captures where each type of Euroscepticism stands in terms of complying with current rules of European integration while pursuing its Eurosceptic agenda.

Second, while it shares with Expansionist Euroscepticism the support for the principle of European integration and the opposition to the practice of integration, Disobedient Euroscepticism supports future integration *only* provided that the practice changes. Otherwise, it openly defends the idea of an exit from the EU, which fundamentally separates it from the Expansionists and brings it closer to the Rejectionist camp. In this way, Disobedient Euroscepticism transcends the long-standing dichotomy among Eurosceptic RLPs of *either* calling for a reformation of the EU, *or* for breaking away from it – it does call for the former but also prepares for the latter.

Methodology

The main objective of this article is to bring a conceptual contribution to the literature by identifying in an inductive way (see Sartori, 1970) a new type of left-wing Euroscepticism that arguably fits with an existing typology. The main research method consists of qualitative text analysis, which is better suited to unfold the Plan B initiative’s stance on the EU and, in particular, the key features that make this stance a new type of Euroscepticism. While the standard practice when classifying parties’ Eurosceptic position is to analyse national electoral manifestos (for example Vasilopoulou, 2011; Keith, 2017), that was not deemed essential to the central aim of the paper, which is to identify a new type of party-based Euroscepticism rather than identify which parties display it. Thus, the analysis is centred around the political statements that concluded the five summits of Plan B, which took place between January 2016 and November 2017, and the founding statement of the ‘Now, the people!’ movement from April 2018. These are the only political documents produced by this transnational initiative and, therefore, the best source for identifying its key arguments in relation to the EU. Since these rather brief documents are entirely about the position adopted by Plan B in relation to the EU, virtually all information is relevant for the purposes of the present analysis. Especially relevant though are those parts of text indicating Plan B’s willingness to disobey what it perceives as the current neoliberal rules of the EU (the Eurozone in particular) and its willingness to break with the Eurozone and the EU altogether if the reformation of those rules proves impossible – the two defining features of Disobedient Euroscepticism. Finally, all documents are available online and in English, apart from one, only available in French.

Plan B's Euroscepticism

As Agustín (2017, p. 326) puts it in the only academic paper dealing with the Plan B initiative, the latter 'emerged as a consequence of the 'failure' of SYRIZA in its negotiations with the EU and what is understood as the imposition of neoliberalism as the only economic model and the exclusion of progressive political projects'. In other words, Plan B emerged as an attempt of some sections of the European left to reassess their position and strategy towards the EU after the only radical left government in a member state ended up accepting further austerity measures within six months from winning elections on the basis of an anti-austerity programme (for a succinct account of those events, see Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016).

Plan B started as a call for an international summit of 'willing citizens, organisations and intellectuals' (Plan B, 2015) and was signed by leading members of a wide range of RLPs: *Parti de Gauche* (France), *Die Linke* (Germany), Red-Green Alliance (Denmark), *Izquierda Unida* (Spain), Popular Unity (Greece), Socialist Party (Ireland), *Bloco de Esquerda* (Portugal), Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Slovenia), and *Rifondazione Comunista* (Italy). Deeming the deal signed by SYRIZA with the Troika as a 'financial coup' (Plan B, 2015), the statement called on the left to devise a 'plan A' and a 'plan B' in relation to the EU. For the 'majority of governments representing Europe's oligarchy' (Plan B, 2015) had already proven when dealing with Greece to have a plan A and a plan B of their own – to refuse any concessions to SYRIZA's anti-austerity demands and to force Greece out of the Eurozone in case its government does not comply respectively.

Thus, according to Plan B's founding statement, the left's 'plan A' would have two dimensions: 'a complete renegotiation of the European Treaties' and 'a campaign of Civil European disobedience toward arbitrary European practices and irrational 'rules' until that renegotiation is achieved' (Plan B, 2015). In case such renegotiation fails, the 'plan B'¹ would entail the exit from the Eurozone and the creation of a new monetary system. However, the exit from the EU itself was not (yet) mentioned as a possible solution. The summit eventually took place in January 2016 in Paris, where the aforementioned position was reiterated in front of over three 300 participants (Patomäki, 2016).

A second summit took place in Madrid only a month later and gathered a much larger and more diverse crowd, including representatives of political parties, activists and social movements, in contrast to the first summit, mostly attended by party representatives (Agustín, 2017, p. 327). The higher plurality of participants resulted in a more moderate declaration (Agustín, 2017, p. 329) that, rather than pointing to the exit from the Eurozone, called only for 'civil disobedience to the European institutions' toxic rules, policies, treaties or any undemocratic dictates and to their arbitrary reinterpretation by the ruling elites' (Plan B, 2016a). The emphasis on 'civil disobedience' at the Madrid summit clearly reflected the legacy of Spain's anti-austerity movements from the early 2010s, for which disobedience had been one of the core methods of action (Fominaya, 2015) and from the ranks of which Podemos had later emerged as a new RLP. Indeed, the idea and practice of disobedience on the radical left has deeper roots than that, especially

¹To avoid confusion with the name of the transnational initiative itself, this alternative scenario is from here on written between inverted commas and without a capital 'p'.

within the broader Trotskyist tradition (see Gibbs, 2016) that partly informs some of Plan B's members, Bloco in particular (Lisi, 2009).

The third Plan B summit, which took place in Copenhagen in November 2016 and was hosted by the Red-Green Alliance, saw a return to the party-based formula from the first summit, with 21 RLPs from nine different countries being represented. That also meant a return to the more confrontational initial position (Sablowski, 2016; Agustín, 2017, p. 330). Thus, according to the concluding statement of the summit, 'Plan B shall pave the way for a fully democratic and inclusive cooperation in Europe and beyond, between peoples and nations, which seeks to solve the multiple crises of today, and which goes far beyond the stifling confinements of the European Union (EU)' (Plan B, 2016b). Indeed, the possibility of an exit was clearly hinted at, since the policies proposed by Plan B 'are not possible within the current framework of the EU and its reactionary treaties', which means that 'we have to break free from those treaties' (Plan B, 2016b).

However, not all the party representatives signed that statement, but only representatives of the Red-Green Alliance, the Swedish Left Party, Parti de Gauche, Podemos, *Sinistra Italiana*, Die Linke, Bloco, and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) from Turkey. It was mainly these parties, therefore, that sent representatives to the subsequent Plan B summit in Rome, in March 2017. This greater degree of convergence arguably allowed for an even more confrontational and also more specific formulation of the Plan B's position. On the one hand, 'plan A' continued to aim for negotiations in the sense of a deep reformation of the Eurozone and the EU, including policies such as ECB-funded job creation through public investment, organising a pan-European audit of national debts, or tackling tax competition and social dumping by introducing, for example, an EU-wide minimum level of corporate tax (see Plan B, 2017a).

On the other hand, the signatories – including, in addition to those from the Copenhagen summit, *Izquierda Unida* from Spain and Popular Unity from Greece – acknowledged that such a 'plan A' to revise existing treaties 'can be blocked by just one Member State and will be met with fierce opposition by the European institutions'. Hence, a 'plan B' to act as '*leverage* in negotiations with the EU' (Plan B, 2017a) was necessary. The formulation of this backup solution was even more explicit than in previous summits: 'an 'amicable divorce' of the euro [sic] or a euro-exit plan for a single country ... a framework for monetary cooperation based on national currencies and a common European accounting unit' (Plan B, 2017a). Indeed, the exit from the EU itself was implicitly taken into consideration as a potential element of the 'plan B': 'If the European Council and the Commission object to our reasonable and concrete solutions, we commit to make them prevail outside the current EU framework' (Plan B, 2017a).

The confrontational dimension of Plan B's position consolidated at the fifth and last summit in November 2017 in Lisbon. While reasserting the key points of 'plan A', the final declaration made it clear that

if our conditions are not fulfilled, we will apply it [sic] unilaterally in each of our countries ... open the way for a breakup with the Eurozone and the EU Treaties and launch a new system of European cooperation based on the restoration of economic, fiscal and monetary sovereignty, the protection of democracy and social rights and social justice. (Plan B, 2017b)

That is arguably the most explicit formulation of Plan B's willingness to consider exit from the both the Eurozone and the EU as a potentially necessary route for implementing the kind of left-wing policies it stands for.

That declaration also called for developing the Plan B project into an actual political alternative for the 2019 European elections. The most visible step in that direction came in April 2018, when the leaders of Bloco, *La France Insoumise* (LFI) and Podemos met in Lisbon and signed a declaration entitled 'Now, the people! For a citizens' revolution in Europe' (La France Insoumise, 2018). It announced the creation of a new European political movement that, among other things, aims to 'break from the straitjacket of EU treaties that impose austerity and promote fiscal and social dumping' (La France Insoumise, 2018). The idea of a European construction alternative to the EU was expressed even more clearly than in the previous statements of Plan B: 'We are working hard to build a new organisational project for Europe. A democratic, fair and equitable organisation that respects the sovereignty of peoples' (La France Insoumise, 2018).

While the link with Plan B is not made explicit, that link is nevertheless conspicuous, as the same ideas and actors are at the centre of the new project, which shortly afterwards was baptised as '*Maintenant le peuple!*' ['Now, the people!'] at a meeting in Brussels in June 2018. Indeed, on that occasion, most of the other parties that had been consistently involved in the previous Plan B summits officially joined the new movement – the Red-Green Alliance from Denmark, the Swedish Left Party, and the Finnish Left Alliance (Now the people, 2019). In other words, 'Now, the people!' largely replaced Plan B. The movement's six member parties gained a combined number of 14 seats in the 2019 European elections.

However, at the time of writing (July 2021), there has been no clear sign of any activity ever since the 2019 European elections, be it inside or outside the EP, with the last update on the official website going back to July 2019 (Now the people, 2019). More importantly, none of the parties comprising the movement is currently in power in their country, with the (partial) exception of Podemos, which is a junior partner in the social democratic-led government of Spain. Interestingly, Podemos' now-former leader, Pablo Iglesias, lauded the EU's economic recovery plan meant to tackle the socio-economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic (Morel, 2020), thus indicating a softening of his party's Eurosceptic stance.

This lack of political power on behalf of Plan B/Now the people project(s) raises significant doubts regarding the political relevance of its combative position towards the EU. Perhaps the two-fold character of this position, which might even seem contradictory by simultaneously considering both reform and exit as options, can only have limited electoral appeal given how polarized public attitudes towards the EU seem to have become in recent years (Conti *et al.*, 2020; Goldberg *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, it is questionable to what extent the participating parties are themselves committed to disobeying EU treaties and preparing for an eventual exit from the euro – something which may often depend on the balance of forces between a party's internal factions. For instance, to refer again to the case of Podemos, the party's more radical current, *Anticapitalistas*, that was pushing the most for this Eurosceptic position, split in the spring of 2020 (Riveiro, 2020). Nevertheless, as argued below, this position is a novel brand of Euroscepticism that eschews the categories in the current literature and which is still displayed by some of the most important RLPs in the EU today.

Discussion: ‘Disobedient Euroscepticism’

How does Plan B’s Eurosceptic position fit with the typologies of left-wing Euroscepticism currently identified in the literature, in particular the one developed by Keith? As shown earlier, this is not a straightforward but a two-folded position, involving a ‘plan A’ and a ‘plan B’. The former has some common features with the prevalent position today among Eurosceptic RLPs, which belong to what Keith calls the Expansionist sub-family: attempt to negotiate the reformation of European treaties in ways that would give the EU further prerogatives to facilitate the promotion of left-wing policies (for example EU-wide minimum level of corporate tax). At the same time, this starting position has certain elements akin to Conditional Eurosceptic parties, as one of Plan B’s (2017b) statements calls explicitly for ‘the restoration of economic, fiscal and monetary sovereignty’.

However, the biggest novelty of this ‘plan A’ is the idea of *disobedience* towards EU treaties during the attempt to renegotiate them. Such disobedience would entail the unilateral application by a left government of policies contrary to those treaties, in the hope that this would add to the pressure on the powers to be to accept the revision of EU treaties. As stated in the Rome summit declaration, ‘Plan A is a question of balance of power. We must disobey the Treaties in order to make a reconstruction of Europe possible.’ (Plan B, 2017a) This is a new approach that no other Eurosceptic party, whether on the left or the right, has put forward before.

At the same time, according to Plan B, the likely resistance from the EU institutions to such disobedience means that any potential left government has to be prepared for an exit in order to avoid the fate of the SYRIZA government – hence, the need for a ‘plan B’ that would see the creation of a new monetary system, ‘a fair trading system (‘solidarity protectionism’)' (Plan B, 2017a) and, more generally, ‘a new system of European cooperation’ (Plan B, 2017b). Thus, Plan B explicitly considers the creation of alternative frameworks of European co-operation, outside of the EU, which brings it closer to Rejectionist Euroscepticism. Therefore, while disobedience aims to reform the EU, it also consciously opens the door for a potential break with the EU.

Thus, while Plan B’s position has similarities with all the three types of Euroscepticism identified by Keith, it is not fully compatible with any of them (and even less so with the broader types proposed by other scholars). On the one hand, the default position (that is, ‘plan A’) borrows elements from both Expansionist and Conditional Euroscepticism, that is, it calls for both additional prerogatives for the EU and the limitation of some of its existing ones. In broader terms, this ‘plan A’ is an example of ‘soft’ Euroscepticism – that is, its starting point is the aim to reform rather than abandon the EU. The novelty is that this aim is pursued in a confrontational way, through disobedience with those elements of EU’s current legislation that are perceived incompatible with the kind of left-wing policies that Plan B supports.

On the other hand, in contrast to both Expansionist and Conditional Euroscepticism, it is highly and openly sceptical of the EU’s reformability, which is why the abandonment of the EU is not excluded, but quite the opposite – it is explicitly acknowledged as a likely scenario that the left needs to prepare for. However, this does not make Plan B’s position a variant of Rejectionist Euroscepticism, since it still takes as a starting point the desire to reform the EU, as unlikely as that may be, rather than calling for an immediate,

unqualified exit from it. Moreover, unlike most Rejectionist parties (those on the right in particular), Plan B does not advocate the return to a fully sovereign nation state but the creation of a new framework for international co-operation.

Therefore, the position put forward by Plan B represents a new type of Euroscepticism that can be best described as ‘Disobedient Euroscepticism’. For it is disobedience to EU treaties – which is mentioned in three of Plan B’s five official statements – that is the main specific difference of this new breed of Euroscepticism. The second difference that fundamentally distinguishes Disobedient Euroscepticism from the other types of Euroscepticism is its openly flexible stance on the key cleavage that has been used in the literature so far to classify Eurosceptic parties: reform or exit. Plan B’s position transcends this clear-cut dichotomy by aiming for the former while preparing for the latter. Thus, Disobedient Euroscepticism represents a novel development of party-based Euroscepticism that needs to be conceptually accounted for by adding it as an additional type to the classification proposed by Keith.

Such a fine-grained classification of RLP Euroscepticism is warranted by the high degree of diversity of Eurosceptic positions on the radical left (see Fagerholm, 2019). It is all the more important to make sense of this diversity since it has been widely acknowledged as one of the key factors in the relatively underwhelming transnational co-operation of this party family (Chiocchetti, 2014; Holmes and Lightfoot, 2016; Keith, 2017; Dunphy and March, 2019). Therefore, Disobedient Euroscepticism is not merely an abstract category but has a concrete political impact, at least at the level of the European radical left.

At the same time, neither Plan B nor its offshoot ‘Now, the people!’ movement has had any significant activity recently. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, none of the participant parties has come into power since the launch of Plan B in 2016 in order to enact this new approach. The one partial exception is Podemos, a junior partner in the current Spanish government who has since softened its confrontational stance towards the EU, perhaps precisely because of its participation in government. Thus, it may be argued that Disobedient Euroscepticism is not much more than a ‘bluffing’ strategy of parties currently in opposition (see De Jongh, 2017).

However, the relatively limited political relevance of Disobedient Euroscepticism has not necessarily entailed its demise. One of the main participants in Plan B, Bloco (Portugal’s main RLP and third political force overall), has consistently maintained this approach towards the EU, as reflected both in party documents (Bloco, 2018, 2019) and statements by prominent party figures (De Jongh, 2017; Matias and Gusmão, 2018). For example, Bloco’s manifesto in the 2019 Portuguese legislative elections states that ‘We thus maintain the project of a Europe of democracy, freedom and solidarity. It is this commitment that makes it necessary to disobey the European Union of the treaties and of the rules of the euro.’ (Bloco, 2019, p. 123). Lisi’s (2020) finding that, in the aftermath of the Eurozone crisis, party-based Euroscepticism in Portugal remains largely driven by programmatic content rather than strategic considerations suggests that Bloco’s Disobedient approach is relatively stable on the long run. La France Insoumise (2019) and the Red-Green Alliance (2019) – their rather low recent electoral scores notwithstanding – have similarly put forward the two-fold strategy of Disobedient Euroscepticism in the 2019 European elections. For example, the former’s manifesto stated that:

Plan B is our indispensable weapon in the balance of power. ... For France, without which the European Union will not survive, it will be a question, in the event of the impossibility to enforce Plan A, of building new European cooperation free of austerity treaties with all the countries that will share this [new] project.

Thus, while further research would be needed to unpack the current stances on the EU of these parties forming the Plan B/Now the people movement, it is clear that Disobedient Euroscepticism is still endorsed by some of the most prominent RLPs in the EU today. And while it is true that it has not yet been tested by any of these parties from a position of government, the same is true for other types of left-wing Euroscepticism identified by Keith, namely the Rejectionist and Conditional ones. At the same time, while these other types of Euroscepticism have proven their longevity, time will tell whether the Disobedient approach will be a lasting form of Euroscepticism. Even so, if the Eurozone crisis of the previous decade laid the basis for its emergence, then the economic crisis that could develop in relation to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic might provide a fertile ground for Disobedient Euroscepticism to become more prominent within and among RLPs. As pointed out earlier, the idea and practice of disobedience has a rich tradition on the radical left, particularly in times of crisis.

More than that though, the strategy advocated by Disobedient Euroscepticism, of non-complying with (certain aspects of) EU treaties and preparing for a potential exit from the EU or at least the Eurozone, needs not be confined to RLPs. As clashes like the one currently unravelling between the Hungarian government and the EU (European Commission, 2021) might very well multiply and escalate in the future, further research could, therefore, explore whether Disobedient Euroscepticism is also a strategy advocated by some of the Eurosceptic parties on the populist or radical right.

Conclusion

Current literature broadly divides Eurosceptic parties between those aiming for a reformation of the EU and those advocating an exit from it. Moving away from that, Keith (2017) adapts the typology devised by Vasilopoulou (2011) to provide the most nuanced attempt to classify Eurosceptic parties on the radical left. Thus, he distinguishes between Rejectionist Eurosceptics, who call for exit, and two sub-types of the reformist camp: Expansionist Eurosceptics, who envisage the reform of the EU through further integration, and Conditional Eurosceptics, who argue for the restoration of certain national prerogatives. This article has shown that a new type of Euroscepticism has emerged with Plan B for Europe – a transnational initiative of RLPs that was launched in 2016 in reaction to the SYRIZA government's U-turn the previous year and which was rebranded in 2018 as the 'Now, the people!' movement.

While not abandoning the goal of reforming the EU along left-wing lines, this new Eurosceptic position advocates disobedience with EU treaties as a leverage to put pressure on EU institutions to accept such a reformation. However, given the likely resistance from those institutions, breaking with the Eurozone and indeed the EU is openly considered as a likely scenario, one deemed as preferable to the kind of U-turn performed by the SYRIZA government in 2015. Thus, the paper has argued that this two-fold approach is distinct from the types of Euroscepticism identified in the existing literature, both by proposing an original, confrontational approach to the current institutional architecture

of the EU and by transcending the long-standing dichotomy between reform (that is, soft Euroscepticism) and exit (that is, hard Euroscepticism). This novel brand of Euroscepticism can be best described as ‘Disobedient Euroscepticism’ and ought to supplement Keith’s classification, to which it therefore adds both a new type and a new attribute.

While Plan B/Now the People has not been very visible in the recent period and one of its prominent members, Podemos, has shown signs of softening its position towards the EU, other members, such as Bloco, La France Insoumise or the Red-Green Alliance, have continued to display this new type of Euroscepticism. Thus, Disobedient Euroscepticism is arguably no less politically relevant than some of the other types identified by Keith (although time will tell how lasting it will be). Nevertheless, a potential avenue for further research would be to see whether Disobedient Euroscepticism is consistently reflected in the agenda of all the parties that constitute Plan B/Now the People and the extent to which that is intertwined with those parties’ internal frictions over programme and strategy, as well as with their transnational co-operation with other RLPs.

Disobedient Euroscepticism might become more relevant as the COVID-19-related economic crisis unfolds and not necessarily confined to the radical left. Thus, future research could also go beyond this party family and assess Disobedient Euroscepticism’s potential similarities and differences with Euroscepticism on the right. Indeed, while Disobedient Euroscepticism as formulated by Plan B is decidedly progressive and internationalist, its strategy of disobedience could also be adopted by populist and radical right parties, particularly those with a rather ambivalent stance towards the EU (see Lorimer, 2020). Perhaps the latter might be in a better position at the moment to employ such a strategy as they currently have better electoral odds in several countries, such as Italy, where the populist right’s increasingly confrontational Euroscepticism contrasts with the left’s long-standing allegiance to European integration. Finally, this article is a contribution to studying how parties cope with an EU whose ‘embedded neoliberalism’ does not, and arguably cannot, promote the kind of policies that they advocate. Perhaps there may be other such ‘coping mechanisms’ that scholars can study, as once again troubled times lie ahead of the EU.

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