

Left-wing parties in Europe since the new millennium: dilemmas and development prospects

Jiang Changhong

Country School of Public Administration, Hunan Normal University, Changsha, China

Abstract: *The left-wing parties in Europe are at the core of leading the world's left-wing movement. After the end of the Cold War, the European left-wing parties, as the front line against neoliberalism, faced severe challenges. The decline of party identity, the continuous decline of party governance performance, the rise of right-wing populist forces, and the continuous division of left-wing parties have affected the development trend of the European left-wing movement. This article analyses the current policy propositions of contemporary European left-wing parties, reveals the current challenges faced by European left-wing parties, analyses the future development trends of European left-wing parties, and provides path support for the vigorous development of the European left-wing movement.*

Keywords: *Europe; left-wing parties; dilemma; development prospects*

1. Introduction

A political party is a political organization that represents the interests of certain social strata and the masses, has an independent ideological line and policy program, and acts as a bridge and supporting role for the communication between the government and the society. From the perspective of the concept of political parties, Marxist theory believes that in its essence, political parties are the ultimate representatives of the fundamental interests of a particular social class, which embodies strong class attributes. According to the division of ideology, political parties can be divided into left-wing parties and right-wing parties. The left-wing party is a more radical force for change, while the right-wing party is relatively conservative and emphasizes the maintenance of the existing order. At the beginning of the 21st century, 13 of the 15 EU member states were governed by center-left parties. By 2018, of the 28 EU member states, only Spain was the center-left party in power. Populism has spread globally and is in power in many countries.

Any political force has its own social foundation. The supporters of European left-wing parties mainly come from the middle and lower classes of capitalist society. There are three main types of left-wing parties in Europe. The first type is moderate left-wing parties, which mainly refers to social democratic parties. Typical representatives are the German Social Democratic Party, the British Labor Party, the French Socialist Party, and the Italian Left-wing Democratic Party. The second category is the radical left-wing parties, which mainly refer to the working class and marginalized groups that have failed to adapt to social changes, including the Spanish Communist Party, the Greek Communist Party, and the Portuguese Communist Party. The third category is extreme left-wing political parties, which mainly refer to new social movement political parties including Trotskyist and Maoist organizations, as well as the Green Party. Although these parties are all left-wing forces ideologically, there are still big differences. The social democratic party is a reformed party between capitalist and socialist parties. It regards the struggle for democracy and freedom as the party's program of action and strives continuously for it. The communist party takes the development of Marxism as its guiding ideology and advocates social struggles to oppose capitalist exploitation and oppression. Compared with social democratic parties, communist parties are more radical, but because they belong to the left-wing camp, they cooperate with each other. Greater than disagreement. The new social movement political parties are more manifested in pursuing the liberation of personal nature and the harmonious development of society through the green movement, feminist movement and other forms. The goals pursued will also show different manifestations according to the age and region.

Since the new era, affected by the overall international environment, the left-wing movement in Europe has gradually entered a low state. The performance of European left-wing parties represented by the Greek Radical Left Alliance and the Italian Five-Star Movement Party has not been as good as before (see Table 1), Europe Most Communist Parties in various countries are in the position of opposition or

opposition parties. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, the ruling Greek radical left-wing coalition was more than 10% in power by the opposition parties and was forced to announce that the country's general elections would be held ahead of schedule, but ultimately ended in failure. The Italian Five-Star Movement Party became the country's ruling party with 32.68% of the votes in the 2018 parliamentary elections, but its performance in the European Parliament elections was not satisfactory. Similarly, the Spanish "We Can" party, which was once expected by the public, has gradually declined. Left-wing parties in France, Germany, the Netherlands and other countries are also facing the same dilemma in the fierce election competition. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and analyze the current relevant propositions of the European left-wing parties, reveal the problems of the European left-wing movement, and promote the vigorous development of the European left-wing movement.

Table 1: Changes in the power of the main left-wing parties in Western Europe in the European Parliament

Political Party	Voting rate		Number of seats		Established Year
	2014	2019	2014	2019	
Greek Radical Left Alliance	26.6%	23.8%	6	6	2004
Italian Five Star Sports Party	21.2%	17.1%	17	14	2009
Spanish "We Can" Party	8%	10.1%	5	6	2014
Unyielding France	-	6.3%	-	5	2016
German Left Party	7.6%	5.5%	7	5	2007
Sinn Fein Party	19.5%	11.7%	3	1	1905
Dutch Socialist Party	9.6%	3.4%	2	-	1971

Data source: Rosa Balfour et al., "Divide and Obstruct: Populist Parties and EU Foreign Policy", GMF Policy Papers, No.13, May 2019, p.8

In terms of party self-building, European left-wing parties have keenly captured the importance of absorbing the middle class. With the continuous development of productive forces, the division of labor in society has been continuously refined, leading to the continuous expansion of the gap between the rich and the poor in society. Only a small part of the working class can transform into the big bourgeoisie and big landlords, and most of the working class gradually transformed into the middle class. Therefore, absorbing more middle class can greatly promote the development and growth of European left-wing parties. But at the same time, we should also note that the middle class is also a group that right-wing parties are vying for. The squeeze of right-wing populism will inevitably further aggravate the antagonism of the parties and the tearing of the entire society. In terms of internal policies, European left-wing parties oppose exploitation and oppression, and advocate protecting the interests of disadvantaged groups through the existing social security system and relying on the high-welfare system. This promotes social fairness and justice and wins the support of the lower-level voters. In terms of foreign policy, European left-wing parties emphasize the importance of nation-states and question the construction of the European Union. It is believed that the European Union restricts the powers of the sovereign states. The existence of the European Union has not only failed to promote regional peace, but has aggravated regional conflicts, hoping to establish a democratic and peaceful Europe. At the same time, it opposes hegemonism, opposes interference in the internal affairs of other countries, opposes all unjust wars, and advocates equal exchanges between nations. However, with the outbreak of the European debt crisis, the European economy has worsened. The ruling performance of the European left-wing parties has declined significantly, and voters' recognition of the left-wing parties has continued to decline. The European left-wing parties are facing severe practical challenges.

2. Realistic challenges faced by left-wing parties in Europe

Since the new era, as the downward pressure on the economy has continued to increase and uncertainties have continued to increase, European left-wing parties have faced important challenges. These challenges mainly include the following aspects. First, they are faced with the risk of declining party identity; secondly, they are faced with the risk of declining governance performance; thirdly, they are faced with the risk of right-wing parties impacting traditional voting areas; fourthly, Facing the risk of split within the party. The emergence of these challenges has put the development of European left-wing parties in a difficult situation.

European left-wing parties face the risk of ruling party identity decline. As a kind of political identity,

party identity is critical to the operation of any political system. Party identity is a sense of belonging of citizens to the political party in social life. It can reflect the interaction between the party itself and the environment, and has an impact on political development that cannot be ignored. In recent years, European countries have been unable to make new progress on economic development, immigration crisis, universal health insurance reform, climate change and other issues that are of high concern to citizens. This has led to a continuous decline in the public's identification with the ruling party, and voters are extremely It is possible to express dissatisfaction with the results of the ruling party through the votes in their own hands. For example, the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement Party, which has been in power for a long time in Greece, became the smallest party in the parliament in the 2015 general election due to its delay in the issues of public concern. It can be seen from this that the decline of voters' identification with political parties will seriously weaken the trust between voters and political parties, which will directly lead to the replacement of political parties.

European left-wing parties face the risk of declining governance performance of the parties. The performance of the ruling party and its accompanying set of operating mechanisms play an important role in the process of a country's people forming an attitude towards their government. That is, the performance of the government in the process of national economic development has a pivotal impact on the formation of people's political trust, which also determines the legitimacy of the government to a large extent. The European sovereign debt crisis that originated in Greece at the end of 2009 has filled Europe with a sentiment of changing governments. The dissatisfaction of the people not only comes from the economic crisis itself, but also from the mistakes made by the government in handling the crisis. With the spread of the debt crisis, the Spanish economy is in a quagmire. In the Spanish parliamentary elections held in November 2011, the Spanish People's Party, the largest opposition party, won an absolute victory with the banner of change, and the ruling Spanish Socialist Workers' Party became the electoral party. The biggest loser, the number of seats it owns has dropped sharply from 169 seats in the previous session to 110 seats.

European left-wing parties face the risk of right-wing parties attacking traditional voting areas. The political situation of the European right-wing populist parties receiving more votes in the European Parliament elections in 2019 is worthy of attention. In terms of votes, right-wing populist parties in countries such as France and the United Kingdom successfully defeated their own ruling party in the European Parliament elections and became the party in which their country received the most seats in the European Parliament. At the same time, as the United States continues to intervene in the Middle East, it has led to the emergence of a large number of refugees. European left-wing political parties actively accept refugees in accordance with humanitarian principles and adhere to an open policy, but at the same time, they indirectly aggravate the instability within European countries. The influx of refugees has severely disrupted the social order of the immigrant countries and also took away a large number of employment opportunities for the bottom workers, which undoubtedly aroused the populist psychology of the people in the immigrant countries. In the May 2014 European Parliament elections, French far-right parties used populist slogans to attract workers' voters. As a result, 83% of workers voted for far-right parties, providing opportunities for the rise of right-wing parties in Europe.

European left-wing parties also face the risk of splitting within the party. After the drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, most of the left-wing parties in Europe, the ruling countries of the Communist Party, in order to be able to adapt to the changes in the new environment, canceled the dominant position of Marxism, the political influence of the Communist Party has declined severely, and at the same time promoted ideological diversification in terms of ideological lines. The internal cohesion of the left-wing parties in Europe has been lost, which has severely weakened the internal cohesion of the left-wing parties in Europe. The long-term development of a party depends to a large extent on the cohesion within the party. Taking Germany as an example, there are big differences within the German left-wing party. The head of the East German regional party organization advocates participation in politics through pragmatic channels, hoping to portray the left-wing party into a younger and more effective new party image, while the West German Regional Party The person in charge of the organization resolutely opposed the participation of the Social Democratic Party coalition in power, leading to serious differences within the German Left Party. As a result, the West German leader with rich political experience resigned .

3. An Analysis of the Future Development Prospects of European Left-wing Parties

At present, the overall development of left-wing parties in Europe is at a low level, facing severe challenges such as declining party identity, declining governance performance, the impact of the rise of

right-wing forces, and serious internal differences among parties. Under such circumstances, if the European left-wing parties want to gradually reverse the unfavorable situation and revive the European left-wing movement, they need to proceed from all aspects, cater to the new development of the world today, and make more beneficial changes.

If European left-wing parties want to improve their party identity, they must first define their own position and reshape political trust in elections. The various parties in the European leftist camp have different positions in their respective countries. The understanding of the scope of the left-wing movement is not the same. Some parties believe that the left-wing refers only to the red party led by the Communist Party, while others believe that the pink Social Democratic Party and the new social movement party that advocates the green environmental movement should also be included in the left-wing camp. These cognition differences precisely illustrate the ambiguity of the position of the European left-wing parties, and the European left-wing parties urgently need to clarify their own political attributes. In order to be able to adapt to the environmental changes following the drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, various left-wing parties have made corresponding changes in their ideological lines and policy programs. In order to rebuild political trust and enhance party identity in elections, left-wing parties first need to timely change policy propositions that cannot adapt to the trend of the times, but at the same time they should maintain the core value of the ruling philosophy. Secondly, whether the policy propositions put forward by the European left-wing parties are feasible and whether they are conducive to the development of the national economy has a huge effect on whether the left-wing parties can survive in a diversified society. At the same time, left-wing parties should pay attention to the cultivation of leaders. A good left-wing leader can double the trust of voters, regain political trust, enhance party identity, and lay a solid foundation for the revival of the left-wing movement. For example, in the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Finnish Green Alliance nominated a strong list of candidates headed by Willer Niinisto, making it the second largest party in the country's European Parliament elections.

Second, European left-wing parties should strive to innovate policies, improve governance performance, and guard against the erosion of populism. The economic crisis and social instability will cause voters' mood to fluctuate, and voters prefer to vent their dissatisfaction by choosing a way to punish the ruling party, which increases the possibility of the opposition party winning the election []. The economic recession caused by the European debt crisis has made the already stressed European economy even worse. Any political party, if it wants to win votes and win popular support, in the final analysis is to be able to put forward effective relevant policies to solve practical problems related to the national economy and people's livelihood while promoting rapid economic development. Therefore, European left-wing parties should strive to seek policy innovation and actively solve major issues that voters are concerned about. From the current point of view, under the background of the European debt crisis, the economic development of many European countries has been difficult to maintain the huge expenditure of the high welfare system. The policies advocated by the left-wing parties such as expanding the nationalization of enterprises and improving the social welfare benefits of ordinary people have obviously not been able to adapt to the actual development. Therefore, maintaining economic growth and improving governance performance while improving the social welfare system reflects the policy propositions of the left-wing parties at the specific institutional level. This is the top priority of the European left-wing parties in formulating public policies, and it is also the European left-wing parties avoiding the right. The fundamental way that populism erodes.

At the same time, the parties should bridge their differences and work hard to build a left-wing alliance. The drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1990s severely impacted the left-wing parties in Europe, weakened the internal cohesion of the left-wing forces, and turned the left-wing forces in Europe into a state of strategic contraction. In order to be able to revive the European left-wing movement, the European left-wing forces have realized that it is necessary to establish a unified left-wing organization covering the whole of Europe, so as to be able to fight against external forces at the regional level, and strive to give full play to the left-wing forces within the framework of the European Parliament. The role of European left-wing political parties to implement joint governance is the general trend. Therefore, in 2004, 15 communist parties and left-wing parties in some European countries announced the establishment of the European Left Party in Rome, the capital of Italy []. This is a reintegration of left-wing forces in Europe after the Cold War, and it is bound to provide new nutrients for the revival of the left-wing movement in Europe. However, we should also note that there are big differences between the left-wing parties in Europe, and even some political differences within the left-wing camp exceed their differences with some right-wing parties. It is difficult for European left-wing parties that lack the backbone to use the same voice. Vocalize. But in any case, this has taken a solid step towards the revival of the left-wing movement, and I believe that in the near future, the left-wing parties

in Europe will certainly be able to do more.

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, although the European left-wing parties are facing severe practical challenges, they are still showing a trend of moving forward. In the past, left-wing parties in Europe united for national independence and national freedom. In the 21st century today, facing the impact of the rise of right-wing populism, if European left-wing parties want to achieve sustainable development, firstly, they need to clarify their own position and rebuild political trust in elections; secondly, European left-wing parties should strive to innovate policies. Improve the party's governance performance; at the same time, left-wing parties should bridge their differences and strive to build a left-wing alliance. Only in this way can the left-wing movement in Europe develop more vigorously, and the left-wing movement in the world can overcome the difficulties and achieve a revival again.

References

- [1] Marx, Engels. *Communist Manifesto* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2014.41-42.
- [2] Yang Yunzhen. *The status quo and reasons of center-left political parties in Europe* [J]. *Party Lessons Reference*, 2019(16): 117-120.
- [3] Lin Deshan. *European left-wing political parties: concept, classification and structure* [N]. *Chinese Journal of Social Sciences*, 2011-09-27 (015).
- [4] Rosa Balfour et al., "Divide and Obstruct: Populist Parties and EU Foreign Policy", *GMF Polic Papers*, No.13, May2019, p.8.
- [5] Wu Huiping. *The new changes and influence of populist parties in Western Europe since the European Parliament elections in 2019* [J]. *Contemporary World*, 2020(02): 40-47.
- [6] Gong Lianbing, Qin Qing. *The motivation and strategy of the coalition of European populist parties* [J]. *Contemporary World and Socialism*, 2020(04): 110-117.
- [7] Chai Baoyong. *On the meaning and elements of party identity*[J]. *Exploration*, 2009(01): 62-68.
- [8] Yuan Ye. *The current dilemma and future prospects of European left-wing parties*[J]. *Party Lessons Reference*, 2018(20): 113-117.
- [9] Zhao Gangyin. *European left-wing parties in the context of the debt crisis: Realistic dilemmas and development prospects*[J]. *Journal of the Party School of Tianjin Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China*, 2013, 15(02): 52-56.
- [10] Fang Lexian, Guan Xin. *Voter demand, policy supply and the election performance of European right-wing populist parties: Based on the analysis of the 2019 European Parliament elections* [J]. *Contemporary World and Socialism*, 2019(06): 115-122 .
- [11] Li Qiqing. *Analysis of "European Radical Left"*[J]. *Contemporary World and Socialism*, 2014(04):81-85.
- [12] Shang Yu. *A review of the research on the European radical left in the academic circles in recent years* [J]. *Social Sciences Trends*, 2020(08): 89-96.
- [13] Zhang Wenhong. *The status quo, predicament and prospects of left-wing forces in Europe*[J]. *Contemporary World*, 2017(04): 43-46.
- [14] Yang Ye, Huang Junhong. *The New Trends of the European Left Wing in the Context of the Financial Crisis and Its Comments* [J]. *Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition)*, 2009, 20(06): 53-60.
- [15] Xuan Chuanshu, Yu Ming. *The performance of the Green Party in the European Parliament elections and the analysis of its causes* [J]. *Issues of Contemporary World Socialism*, 2019 (04): 142-155.
- [16] Yan Xing. *Research on the relationship between the rise of right-wing parties in Europe and refugee policies* [J]. *World Nation*, 2020(02): 72-83.
- [17] Kuai Zhengming, Jiang Miaomiao. *The development of left-wing parties in Europe under the background of the sovereign debt crisis and its comments* [J]. *Journal of Jiangxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2013, 46(06): 26-31.