Left-wing Populism in Spain: Discursive Formations on the European Union

Juan Roch González

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.33.2

Juan Roch González is a Phd candidate in political science at Freie Universität Berlin who spends most of his time these days conducting research on populism, the emergence of new political parties in Europe and their links to Europeanization processes. He studied his Bachelor's Degree in Sociology in Madrid and his Master's Degree in Barcelona, Spain. In his prior research work, he analysed the new social movements in Spain and Europe and the role of the traditional media and the new Information and Communication Technologies in these movements. His most recent publications is "Podemos und die neuen Medien", an article focused on the use of digital media by the political party Podemos.

Abstract

This article examines the discursive appeal of Podemos, an allegedly left-wing "populist party" in Spain, to European Union (EU) issues. It analyses the political discourse of this party on the EU focusing on specific points of rupture of the hegemonic discourses in the Spanish political system. Literature on party politics and populism offers empirical evidence about the emergence of traditional right-wing populist parties and new left-wing populist parties in Europe; scholars have also studied the Eurosceptic tendency of right-wing populist parties. However, little attention has been paid to the discursive approach of left-wing populist parties to the EU. Using discourse analysis, this study illuminates the points of rupture of the hegemonic discursive formations in Spain and identifies the articulatory practices of Podemos on EU issues. The results indicate that the EU is integrated in an ambivalent way in the dichotomist discourse of Podemos and its antagonist view of society.

Keywords

Podemos, EU issues, left-wing populism, hegemonic discourse, articulatory practices

Introduction

The last three decades have been times of disturbance for the stability of the two-party system in Europe. New parties – environmental focused, far right-wing or left-wing, *niche* parties – have emerged challenging the usual political discourses and the distribution of electoral opportunities (Meguid, 2005: 347; Dahlström and Sundell, 2012: 353-354). The Eurocrisis and its political management at the European and domestic level have generated additional opportunities for new political agents, especially in Southern Europe (Eder, 2014; Deutschmann, 2014)

This paper focuses on the emergence of the political party Podemos in Spain and its discursive appeal toward EU issues. This party is analysed under the lens of the concept of populism and prior studies on populist parties. Populism is defined in this paper as a type of political discourse and it is fundamentally understood as a two-dimensional phenomenon with a rhetorical and social – the object of the appeal – component[12]. Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in populism due to the rise of parties such as *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, the *UKIP* in the United Kingdom, *Syriza* in Greece or *Podemos* in Spain. There is extensive literature on right-wing populist parties and their appeal against the European Union; these studies connect with research focused on Euroscepticism although in occasions the last is separated from the specific analysis of populist phenomena (see Ford, Goodwin and Cutts, 2012; Bertoncini and Delors, 2014). However, few studies have studied the discourse of left-wing populist parties on the EU and its historical formation in a systematic way (apart from Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). In this vein, the present study aims at empirically substantiating the discursive formation of the party Podemos on the EU.

The analysis is threefold: (1) first, crucial points of rupture of the hegemonic discourse towards the EU in the Spanish political system are identified and analysed (2) second, the impact of these points of rupture on key political structures in the country is discussed and (3) finally, the discourse of Podemos on the EU is substantiated in its rhetorical and discursive dimension. The study of the case of Podemos may contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of populism, particularly left-wing populism, and its discursive approach to the EU. The discourse analysis conducted in this research is based on the theoretical and empirical developments of the Essex School of discourse analysis,[13] departing from the seminal work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau "Hegemony and socialist strategy" in 1985. This paper uses the analytical tools provided to understand a populist discourse and identify the different articulatory practices constituting the central categories of a populist appeal.[14]

[12] For a full discussion and definition of populism see the section below "A populist challenger in Spain?"
[13] In addition to Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, other significant scholars of the Essex School are Aletta Norval, David Howarth, Jason Glynos or Yannis Stavrakakis.
[14] Some useful manuals for this purpose have been edited. The more elaborated are "Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods" of Jason Glynos, David Howarth, Aletta Norval, Ewen Speed (2009) and Yannis Stavrakakis et.al (2014) "Methodological orientation internal technical report".

1. Populism and the EU

> "...no political movement will be entirely exempt from populism, because none will fail to interpellate to some extent the 'people' against an enemy, through the construction of a social frontier" (Laclau, 2005a: 47).

The literature on European populism is generally devoted to the description of either the populist parties' rhetoric (Albertazzi and Mc Donnel, 2007; Hartleb, 2012, Vasilopaulou, Halikiopoulou and Exadaktylos, 2014) or the facilitating and constraining conditions under which populist political parties may emerge (Hartleb, 2012; Giusto, Kitching & Rizzo, 2013; Malone, 2014, Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). Most of this research focuses exclusively on right-wing populist parties and its main goal is to highlight key features of political discourses or political styles to grasp the nature and characteristics of the populist phenomenon. For instance, Genga analyses the discourse of the *Front National* in France concluding that it is based on the cleavage of clash of civilizations, thus reformulating a postmodern version of nationalism. The contribution of Vasilopaulou and associates shows a sophisticated and detailed methodological approach (framing analysis) in the study of populism within the Greek political system. They distinguish between mainstream populism and fringe populism in Greek politics and conclude that populism is an "embedded ideological feature of Greek politics" (Vasilopaulou et.al., 2014: 400). Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde conduct a comparative analysis between European and Latin-American populist parties in order to determine the ideological differences between them. They also differentiate between right-wing and left-wing populist parties. These authors use crucial dichotomies such as inclusion-exclusion and identity-economy to draw relevant conclusions about the differences and similarities of several European and Latin-American populist parties (Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde, 2011). Scholars more concerned with political opportunities explaining the emergence of populist agents, focus on the role of structural changes and social and political mobilizations (Fella, 2008; Jansen, 2011; Roberts, 2014).

Research on populism and the EU has been mostly restricted to the analysis and classification of Eurosceptic parties and its opposition to European Integration (see Ford, Goodwin and Cutts, 2012; Grabow and Hartleb, 2013; Hillebrand, 2014; Bertoncini and Delors, 2014). In this vein, Senninger and Wagner analyse the Austrian case to determine how parties talk about the EU in national elections, also evaluating the salience of European issues in the political discourses. Contrary to their expectations, they find that Eurosceptic parties do not address more frequently EU issues than mainstream parties (Senninger and Wagner, 2015: 8). So far, however, there has been little discussion about the connections between populism, mostly associated to party politics and comparative politics, and EU dynamics and Europeanization processes, primarily located in the area of International Relations.[15] Few scholars

[15] Some authors underscore the necessity to relax the rigid separation between comparative politics, focused on the domestic contexts, and international relations in which the analysis is usually located at the supranational level (See Jabko and Meuiner, 2003: 2-3, Saurugger and Radaelli, 2008: 214).

explore new left-wing populist parties in relation to the EU, and there is also a striking lack of analysis on the specific political discourses of these parties on EU issues. This study contributes to the development of research on populism and the EU, navigating between the fields of comparative politics and international relations.

2. A populist challenger in Spain?

When exploring a populist phenomenon, the terminological question of whether the adjective populist is adequate for the case or not takes an especial relevance due to the high normative charge of the term. Thus, the characterization of an agent as populist must be supported by solid theoretical foundations and certain empirical substantiation. There are two distinct strategies to fulfil this objective: one consists in analysing the rhetorical attributes of a given political agent to define the populist character of its appeal. Following this path, most of students of populism ground in the minimal definition proposed by Cas Mudde whereby populism is defined as a thin-centred ideology:

> "that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543)

The implications of defining populism as an ideology are not completely clear in the elaboration of Mudde and there are scholars contesting the adequacy of this definition[16]. The empirical analyses based on this conception of populism look generally at the rhetorical features – the most used method is content analysis - of the populist agents to measure the presence of the opposition between elites and the people and further characterizations of the populist appeal.

Another group of students of populism uses a different strategy and rely upon what might be called an historical perspective. One of the major exponents of this stream of research, Ernesto Laclau, conceives populism as a political logic and *a particular mode of articulation* of the social (Laclau, 2001 [1985]: 33-34). This specific mode of articulating heterogeneous social identities is based on an appeal to *"the people"* against the *"other"* – corrupt elites but also other actors - and the irruption of subaltern or excluded sectors in the public space (Barros, 2006: 71). This occurs through a process of dichotomization of the political space between certain type of elites – representatives of the status quo – and the people. In this conception of populism the opposition between the elites and the people is continues to be central but Laclau and the Essex school scholars include, in addition, a social dimension into the analysis. In accordance to Laclau, there is no successful populist appeal without the previous construction of chains of equivalence among non-satisfied social demands.

[16] For an exhaustive refutation of this definition see Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective of Paris Aslanidis, 2015.

This paper conceives populism as a type of political discourse that may show evidence in each of the dimensions described above; that is, in the rhetorical dimension of populism – in as much as it shapes words, sentences and the composition of texts and utterances of particular political actors -; and also, following Laclau and Mouffe, the traces of populism can be found in the changes of social aggregation and formation of equivalential chains between social demands in a broader social sphere -. Thus, with the goal to achieve a minimal consensus on the fundamental traits of the concept, this paper defines populism as a type of political discourse that should be contextualized social and historically and that can be associated to various populist subjects and specific situations of crisis. This political discourse entails four constitutive components (Ben Stanley, quoted in Van Kessel, 2014: 101):

- The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: 'the people' and 'the elite'.
- The antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite.
- The idea of popular sovereignty.
- The positive valorization of 'the people' and denigration of 'the elite'.

To sum up, the case of Podemos and its characterization as a populist agent revolve around two theoretical assumptions: first, the rhetorical features of this specific political agent – the aforementioned antagonism between the people (in Spanish *la gente, la mayoria social*) and the elites and the defence of a popular will -; second, the contextual crisis of representation that implies an, at least latent, populist identification of specific social sectors with empty and unifying signifiers.

3. Dislocation and points of rupture

Studying populism from a discursive perspective implies, when discourse is taken seriously, that the analysis expands beyond the rhetoric and looks at how the object of the appeal is also in construction in the turbulent terrain of the social. Thereby, and following the path of all discourse-oriented analysts, "the people" is not a passive object but rather a subject involved in its constitution. This notion of the people *in construction* opens up a terrain for further characterizations of what does this process consist of and how does it take place. The Essex School scholars have revealed some preconditions for the construction of the people from a discursive perspective (see Laclau, 2005b or Katsambekis, 2016). One of these preconditions is a certain crisis of representation as a prelude of a populist articulation. In a discourse-oriented approach, the will of the represented is not reflected or transposed in the representative bodies or subjects; it is on the contrary constituted, at least partially, in the very process of representation (Laclau, 2005b: 157-62). This is, in fact, the process to constitute hegemonic orders, political and discursive, that never are completely fixed or closed. This precarious order of the system of representation can be altered by specific dislocations and the proliferation of non-satisfied demands and non-represented subjects. In words of Mouffe and Laclau the non-satisfied demands equate to non-fixed elements that can, eventually, be articulated by alternative discourses (2005b: 105).

> "...articulation refers to the signifying mechanism through which elements are incessantly transformed to moments of distinct discourses in an attempt to (partially) fix their meaning and crystallize identities." (Stavrakakis, Kioupkiolis, Katsambekis, Siomos, Garefi, 2014: 17)

The dislocation of the order, operating as a precondition for the populist articulation, can be produced by extra-discursive events such as economic crises, corruption or key shocking events (Katsambekis, 2016: 393; Roberts, 2014: 681-92). There is an ongoing discussion on whether populism can be identified as a side effect of crisis or, conversely, it is a phenomenon independent of the dislocations and crisis of the political systems. This paper does not aim at solving this dilemma but rather argues that populism, as a type of political discourse, tends to strongly emerge in situations of dislocation or crisis. Thus, specific points of rupture can be identified and alternative discursive articulation evaluated in its process to ensemble the non-fixed elements through nodal points (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 122). In other words, even when a mechanic cause-effect relationship between crisis and populism is not advocated here, the exploration of the contextual features favouring specific populist articulations is seen in this study as an inescapable step in any thorough analysis of the populist phenomenon. Accordingly, this paper argues that the disruptive processes of Europeanization in Spain during the hard years of the crisis were crucial for the dislocation of the hegemonic discursive order on the EU (see Roch González, 2017). The pending question is how did Podemos, the allegedly populist agent in Spain, incorporate and articulate discursively the EU elements within its populist master frame, with the characteristic nodal points and empty signifiers.[17]

4. Methods

This case of study uses methodological tools from discourse-oriented analyses of populism, especially those influenced by Laclaunian theorizations and the further developments of the Essex School. The main goal is to identify points of rupture, in Laclau's words, that may shape the character and content of the populist articulation of Podemos in regards to the EU. The discourse of Podemos is, in a second step, analyzed to determine the position and characterization of the EU in its populist articulation. It is far from the scope of this study to make empirical generalizations about the discourse of left-wing populist parties on the EU; conversely, it attempts to provide a thick description and discourse analytical data for contributing to the ongoing cross national analysis and comparison of populist agents in Europe and beyond.

[17] Following Laclau, nodal points and empty signifiers are crucial figures to facilitate the populist articulation: "Terms such as 'the unity of the people', the 'welfare of the country', and so forth, as something that antagonistic political forces claim to ensure through totally different political means, have to be necessarily empty in order to constitute the aims of a political competition. They are alternative terms to refer to the plenitude of a fully fledged communitarian order as something which is absent and which has to be achieved" (Laclau, 1994: 37).

In a first step, key points of rupture of the hegemonic discursive order on the EU in Spain are identified and evaluated. The second part of the analysis is devoted to the study of Podemos' discourse on the EU and how is it integrated in a broader populist discourse. The data collected in this study are press releases and official documents of the European commission, other EU bodies or Spanish authorities during the period 2010 – 2012. In order to substantiate the discourse of Podemos on the EU, speeches of the party leader, Pablo Iglesias, during the European elections campaign in May 2014 are collected and explored.

The discourse analysis conducted in this study aims at describing and analysing the main features of Podemos' discourse on EU issues. A fully elaborated discourse analysis should entail not only the description and the analysis of *what is said* about the EU but also of *what is not said* and what are the forces operating as facilitators or constrains across discursive practices.

5. Points of rupture of the hegemonic discourse on the EU

There are some events during the hard years of the economic crisis in Spain that changed significantly the relationship of the EU with Spanish authorities and also the configuration of the imaginary about the EU in the Spanish public sphere and the political system (for a detailed analysis see Roch González, 2017). The austerity packages implemented consecutively by the Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, affiliated to the Socialist party (PSOE), and Mariano Rajoy of the Popular Party (PP) during the years 2010-12, responded both to pressures and recommendations of EU institutional bodies. For instance, at the ECOFIN meeting the 9th and 10th of May 2010 all financial ministers of the EU member states agreed on financial aid for Spain and Greece but, at the same time, urged the respective authorities to promote specific social and economic measures. The recommendations were in the line of the contention of public spending and the implementation of ensuring mechanisms to pay back the debt.

> We therefore welcome and strongly support the commitment of Portugal and Spain to take significant additional *consolidation measures* in 2010 and 2011 and present them to the 18 May ECOFIN Council. The adequacy of such measures will be assessed by the Commission in June in the context of the excessive deficit procedure. The Council also welcomes the commitment to announce by the 18 May ECOFIN Council structural reform measures aimed at enhancing growth performance and thus indirectly *fiscal sustainability* henceforth ([author's emphasis] Extraordinary Council meeting Economic and Financial Affairs Brussels, 9/10 May 2010)[18]

As explained somewhere else (Roch Gonzalez, 2017), these indications turned into concrete measures and budget cuts in social spending. The reform of the Spanish constitution the 27th of September 2011 under pressures of EU institutions and in order to guarantee the so called "fiscal consolidation", was

[18] "Press release Extraordinary Council meeting Economic and Financial Affairs in Brussels", 9/10 May 2010 extracted on March 5, 2017 from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-10-108_en.htm?locale=en.

equally supported by the two main parties in Spain (PSOE and PP). These events illustrate a political phenomenon studied by some Europeanization scholars: the convergence of the mainstream parties, socialists and conservatives, with specific varieties in each country (see Mair, 2007 or Ladrech, 2009). This process finds parallels in the case of Greece, as it is explained in Katsambekis (2016) or Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014). In the text of the constitutional reform - a balanced-budget amendment – there are words equivalent to *fiscal sustainability* such as *budgetary stability*:

> "1. All public administrations must adapt to the principle of *budgetary stability*."
>
> "2. The State and the Autonomic Communities cannot produce a structural deficit over the established thresholds, in the case, for the European Union to the Member States."[19]

Another point of rupture of the discursive order governing the relationships between the Spanish political system and the EU was the Memorandum of Undestanding (MoU) between the Spanish authorities and the European Council signed the 25th of June, 2012. The impact of the MoU on the political system and the hegemonic discourses has been also analysed for other cases (Kasambekis, 2016: 393). Similar semantic patterns can be found in the text:

> In particular, these recommendations invite Spain to: 1) introduce a taxation system consistent with the *fiscal consolidation* efforts and more supportive to growth, 2) ensure less tax-induced bias towards indebtedness and home-ownership, 3) implement the labour market reforms, 4) take additional measures to increase the effectiveness of active labour market policies, 5) take additional measures to open up professional services, reduce delays in obtaining business licences, and eliminate barriers to doing business, 6) complete the electricity and gas interconnections with neighbouring countries, and address the electricity tariff deficit in a comprehensive way.[20]

These pieces of evidence shed light on the disrupting character of Europeanization processes in Spain during the period 2010-12. The Europeanization of Spanish politics was governed by a general austerity discourse; its logic and categories – *fiscal consolidation*, *budgetary stability*, *fiscal sustainability* - underlie the proliferation of legal texts establishing rules and policies with specific meanings and directions. This austerity discourse can be described in similar terms than those used by Radealli to refer to the "master discourse" of competitiveness in the frame of the Open Method of Coordination and the Lisbon Treaty (Radaelli, 2003: 7). As it can be seen in *Figure 1*, the dramatic drop in the trust and the positive image of

---

[19] "Reform of the article 135 of the Spanish Constitution" 27 September 2011, Official State Gazette. Extracted on March 5, 2017 from: https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/09/27/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-15210.pdf . [in Spanish] To see the original article 135 before the reform it can be found in the old text of the Spanish Constitution: https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229 [In Spanish].

[20] "Spain memorandum of understanding on financial-sector policy conditionality", 20 July 2012. Article 31, page 15. Extracted on March 5, 2017 from: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu_borrower/mou/2012-07-20-spain-mou_en.pdf.

Spaniards towards the EU coincides exactly with the period 2009 – 2012, the years of the disruptive Europeanization and the harder austerity measures.

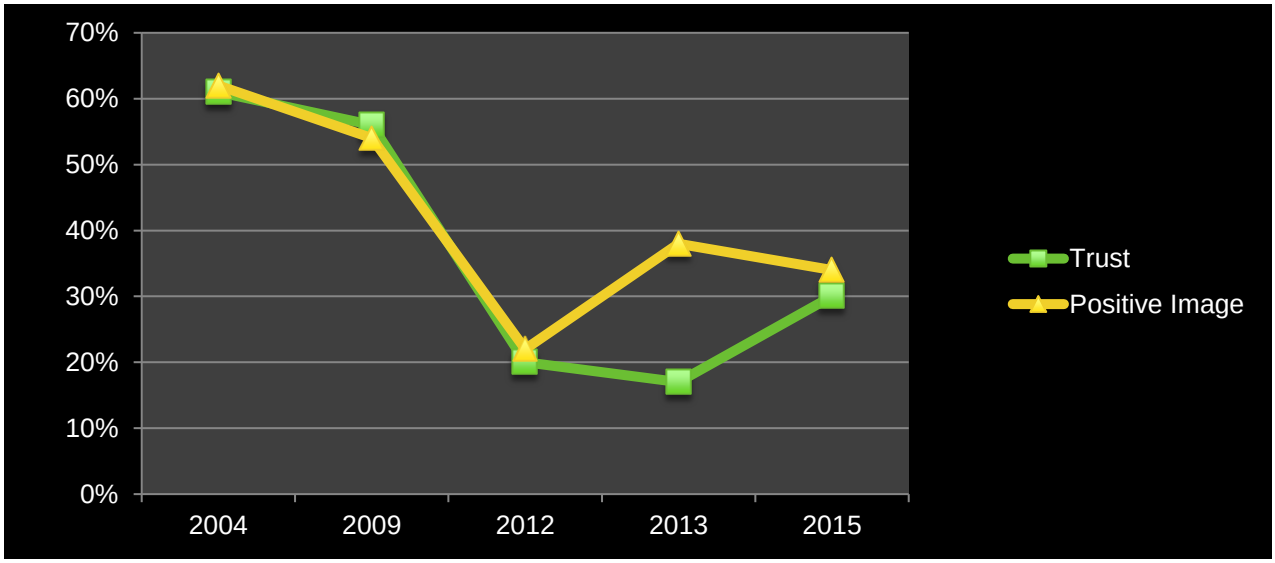

Figure 1. Percentage of Spaniards who trust on or have a positive image ofthe EU (2004-2015)[21]

5. The emergence of Podemos

The dislocation of the Spanish political system prior to the eruption of Podemos in the party system cannot be explained only on the basis of one specific point of rupture, following a mono-causal and linear way of explanation. Such dislocation, with the concomitant gradual defection of voters from the mainstream parties (Katsambekis, 2016: 393), would require a profound and extensive analysis of multiple factors, specific conjunctures and causal combinations (Rihoux and Ragin, 2009). This paper looks at a precise point of rupture – the one of the pro-European hegemonic discourse – and analyses the reactive articulatory practices of Podemos in regards to this point and within a more general frame of populist articulation and crisis of representation in Spain. Two indicators are relevant to understand the nature of the dislocation of the Spanish political system: (1) the uprising in the Spanish squares of the so-called *indignados* or 15-M movement in May 2011 and the significant popular support of Spanish civil society to these mobilizations and protests[22] ; (2) and the dramatic drop in legitimacy of the two mainstream parties, the social-democrats PSOE and the conservatives PP.

Before this dislocated political system, the political party Podemos was launched in January 2014 and gained 5 seats in the 2014 May European elections - 7, 98 % of the vote – becoming the fourth most

[21] This figure was elaborated by the author with data extracted on March 3 from the website of the European commission: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm.

[22] The 15-M or *indignados* movement was a huge anti-austerity mobilization in Spain. Polls at that time showed an agreement of 80% of Spaniards with the demands of the 15-M movement. See a survey of Havas Media the 1st of June, 2011. Extracted on March 3, 2017 from: http://recursos.anuncios.com/files/428/77.pdf. See also the research on public opinion about May 15 mobilization (Calvo, Gómez-Pastrana and Mena 2011: 5).

popular political force in Spain. The impact of the unexpected ascendance of a new and fresh political party on the media and the Spanish public sphere boosted even more the popularity of Podemos scoring at the top of the opinion polls for a period, as can be seen in *Figure 2*.[23] The two main parties' combination vote (PSOE y PP) was below 50 % in the May 2014 European elections for the first time in the post-dictatorship Spain´s democracy. Likewise, in the December 2015 Spanish General Elections the percentage of vote of PSOE and PP only summed 50,73% while Podemos became the third political force in the country with 20,66% of the popular vote.

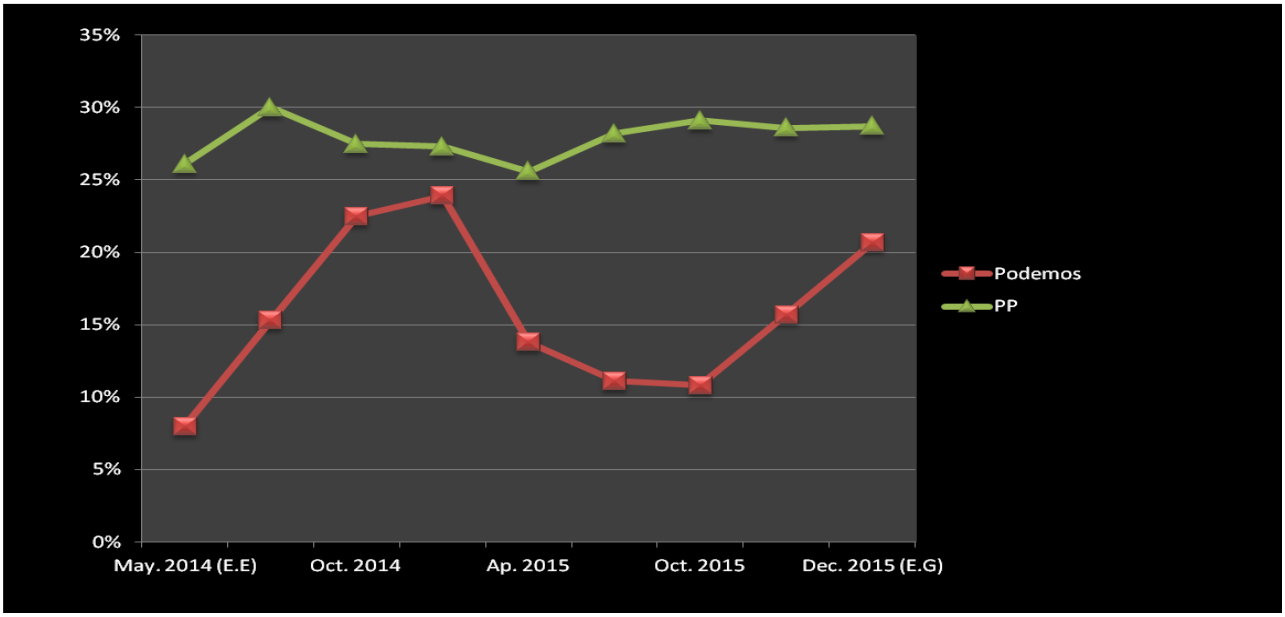

Figure 2. Vote intention and electoral results[24]

6.1. The political discourse of Podemos on the EU

Some scholars characterise the pre-crisis Spanish political system as a "Europhile system" (Vazquez Garcia, 2012: 110-111) where the "permissive consensus" (Robert Ladrech, 2009:4) towards the EU was hegemonic. The emergence of the political party Podemos came to disturb this order in the Spanish party system since its inception in January 2014. It should be noted, however, that the discourse of Podemos on the EU is analysed here in the specific period of the inception of the party and the European elections campaign in May 2014. To fully understand and describe the overall discourse of Podemos on the EU, its development, fluctuations and adaptations to different conjunctures, a diachronic evaluation across

[23] The electoral report of the CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) in October 2014 indicated that Podemos was the first political force in voting intention while the third in voting estimation – taking into account certain correctors to make the predictions -. Extracted on March 5, 2017 from: http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/TiposEncuestas/EncuestasElectorales/listaEstudiosYearElecciones.jsp?year=2014&tipoeleccion=generales [In Spanish].

[24] *Figure 4* is elaborated by the author with data from the CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas) corresponding to various opinion polls. It compares the voting intention and the final results for the general elections of Podemos and the Popular Party, the ruling party at that time. Data extracted on March 6 from: http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/TiposEncuestas/EncuestasElectorales/eleccionescongreso.jsp [In Spanish].

the various stages of the party must be conducted. This paper aims at grasping an initial reaction and deployment of the discourse in the specific context of the emergence of the party and the European elections campaign, from January to May 2014. This is relevant due to two main reasons: first, it captures the initial and allegedly pure populist appeal of the party (Gomez Reino and Llamazares, 2015) and second, it covers the European elections campaign when EU topics are more likely to be salient in the general political discourse of the party.

6.1.1. The "elites" as a nodal point

> "I ask Ms. Valenciano [candidate of the socialist party, PSOE] and Mr. Cañete [candidate of the conservative party, PP] to be coherent and put forward a unique list to let citizens know what they can vote: either the "Casta" or democracy!" [Pablo Iglesias in a campaign event for the European elections in Zaragoza].[25]

The starting point of Podemos's European election campaign was a symbolic event in Berlin, at Humbold Universität Berlin, as a way to protest against the austerity measures promoted by EU institutions and the government of Angela Merkel[26]. The depiction of Angela Merkel, and more generally of the European elites, as a group of privileged actors against democracy and social rights is part of the anti-establishment discourse articulated by Podemos and especially by the leader of the party, Pablo Iglesias. Thus, the European elites are constructed in this specific context, as evil and foreign economic and political elites and tend to be described as an extension of the national elites or vice versa. As it can be seen above in the speech of the leader of the party, Pablo Iglesias, the dichotomization of the social space is made through two signifiers: democracy and the "Casta". This last term has been already used by leaders such as Beppe Grillo of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* and represents the political, economic, and media establishment. The second movement of Podemos is identifying the content and dynamics, on the one hand of the signifier "Casta" and on the other hand, of "democracy". The "Casta" is due to be filled with specific actors, properties of the actors, relationships and aspirations. In the excerpt of the same speech shown below, the signifier "Casta" is filled with specific names of parties or party leaders across Europe; they basically represent two party families: the social-democratic and the conservative family.

> "They [referring to the PSOE] should compare themselves with Ms. Merkel who governs together with the socialists in Germany, they should compare with François Hollande who implements the same policies than Sarkozy; they should compare with the PASOK in Greece that governs also with the right;

[25] Iglesias, Pablo "Speech during the European elections campaign in Zaragoza", May 20, 2014, accessed January 3,2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DipcspGXx7k&list=PLaW8IgjEn4d04xcsbVT1w_QfLTGmukHqB&index2 [in Spanish].

[26] The event and talk of the leader of the party Pablo Iglesias was held the 8th of May 2014 at Humbold Universität Berlin with the following title: Other Europe is possible (the original: "Otra Europa es posible").

> they should compare with themselves, with that "Casta" who end up in boards of directors of companies, with that "Casta" who grant pardon to bankers..." [Pablo Iglesias, *Ibid*].[27]

The elites' category, in this case the "Casta", is constituted with a mixture of socioeconomic and territorial components. "La patria", or the homeland, and as a by-product the people, is placed continuously in the discourse of Podemos in an antagonistic position against the elites. In order to constitute this frontier between the people and the elites the territorial divide is used but without ethnic or racial components; the "Casta" belongs rather to a set of more or less dispersed and cosmopolitan transnational actors.

6.1.2. Constructing the people

The "Casta" is constructed in the discourse of Podemos through an antagonist relation with "the people". As it has been described above, the "Casta" is formed by mainly political mainstream actors, that is, social-democrats and conservatives; the other option stressed in the discourse of Pablo Iglesias is democracy. In the discourse of Podemos, democracy is "the power of the people" and "the people" can be constituted through the active identification with the party and the leader, Pablo Iglesias, the opposition to the elites and the generation of an equivalential chain among particular demands. "Democracy" is the empty signifier *par excellence* in the discourse of Podemos, with the goal of integrating the set of plural demands emerging at least since the 15-M movement in Spain. In the general discourse of Podemos the people is represented by the following signifiers: the people ("la gente") the social majority or the citizens.

> "What we are saying is what the majority of the people think, the majority of the people want to have a decent health system, the majority of the people want to have a decent education system, the majority of the people want the rich to sometimes pay taxes, the majority of the people love their country and want to keep dignity up" [Pablo Iglesias in a campaign event for the European elections in Albacete][28]

The "people" is also expanded, to be constructed in an antagonist relation with the elites or the "Casta", a transnational group of politicians with connections with the economic elites. In this case, the "people" is formed not only through the opposition to the elites but also through the distinction from "an institutionalised other", in words of Laclau (2005b: 117), representing alien or floating demands; these demands and their meaning are in dispute and can be incorporated to alternative equivalential chains (Laclau, 2005: 131). Thus, the equivalential chain needed for the constitution of the people is always limited to a specific sector of the society that aims at representing the whole community. Podemos defines the people and the constitution of an equivalential chain at that point, as something restricted to South

---

[27] Iglesias, Pablo, *Ibid.*

[28] Iglesias, Pablo "Speech during the European elections campaign in Albacete", May 19, 2014, accessed January 15,2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT2ElfZuARs [in Spanish].

European citizens:

> We are fed up with the fact that the European institutions are governed by criminals...our problem is not with Europe, is with these criminals...we are convinced that we have many things in common with many south-European citizens" [Pablo Iglesias in a campaign event for the European elections in Burgos][29]

The antagonism between the people and the elites is constructed on the basis of specific divides, operating the logic of difference for such purpose. In the context of the European elections, the combination of socioeconomic and territorial divides is used to generate this antagonism. The separation between South European citizens and other citizens or elites indicates a territorial divide used to construct the people. This divide operates in combination with the socioeconomic division between the economic elites and the normal or decent people:

> Corruption is a way to govern that allows who does not run for elections to rule. The economic elites that have enough power, using threats, using their influence or using briefcases full of 500 Euros bills that go to the main political parties' headquarters [Pablo Iglesias, Ibid].[30]

6.1.3. Europe as a floating signifier

The signifier "Europe" is also integrated in this populist articulation in a dichotomist and antagonist way. In relation to the constitution of the nodal points the "elites" and the "people", Europe plays an ambivalent role with two meanings associated to each of the antagonistic poles. In the case of the elites, there is one Europe of banks, financial institutions and non-accountable politicians. On the other hand, in the case of the people, there is a Europe of social rights, of South European and decent citizens.

> We want the majority of the people to say clearly we can!, we can do politics ourselves, we want dignity for our countries, we want dignity for our people, we want a future for our children and that future can be in Europe but not with a currency and with a central bank without democratic control serving the banks. We do not want a Europe serving the rich and the banks but serving the citizens and that is called democracy [Pablo Iglesias in a campaign event for the European elections in Albacete][31]

Thereby, Europe appears in the discourse of Podemos primarily as a floating signifier, in the sense that it can be appropriated by many actors and filled with several meanings and directions; but, at the same time, it is functioning as an empty signifier in as much as allows for the development of an equivalential

[29] Iglesias, Pablo "Speech during the European elections campaign in Burgos", May 4, 2014, accessed January 15,2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epox-y-V0iE [in Spanish].
[30] Iglesias, Pablo, *Ibid.*
[31] Iglesias, Pablo "Speech during the European elections campaign in Albacete", April 19, 2014, accessed January 15,2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT2ElfZuARs&t=1006s [in Spanish].

chain among specific South European "peoples". This idea of different meanings and the different potentialities for the construction of the people associated to the signifier Europe is clearly depicted by Pablo Iglesias in the following speech:

> Some say that we are Eurosceptics. We love Europe if Europe means freedom, equality and fraternity, we love Europe if Europe means social rights we love Europe if Europe means human rights. The problem is not Europe, the problem is that the European Central Bank president is called Mario Draghi and was representative of Goldman Sachs in Europe....Europe's problem is called Durau Barroso....that's why we say along with other southern Europeans that we want to recover the dignity and the future of our peoples and our countries [Pablo Iglesias in a campaign event for the European elections in Sevilla].[32]

Concluding remarks

In contrast to the Europhile Spanish political system, the emergence of the political party Podemos during the European elections campaign served to illuminate some points of rupture in the hegemonic view on the EU. The dislocation of the symbolic and political order has been described in this paper in terms of a "disruptive Europeanization" taking place in Spain during the hard years of the crisis (Roch Gonzalez, 2017). Therefore, the dislocation of the Spanish political system was, in part, triggered by disruptive Europeanization processes. This fact, together with contextual factors such as the European elections and party-internal and ideological factors, allowed for a specific integration of EU elements in the populist articulation of Podemos. These floating elements, detached from the hegemonic articulation on the EU, permit the emergence of new discursive formations with counter-hegemonic purposes.

The research has also shown that the discourse of Podemos on EU issues is integrated in more general articulatory populist practices. Thereby, two main signifiers have been identified as nodal points of the discourse of Podemos: the "Casta" and "Democracy". The antagonistic relationship between the "people" and the "elites" is articulated on the basis of these two signifiers. The analysis reveals how the people and the elites – in this case the "Casta" and "Democracy" - are *Europeanized*, that is, expanded as elastic signifiers to incorporate content from EU issues. The "Casta" is expanded in order to encompass transnational and European elites and allow for the integration of EU elements in the discourse. The elites appear as a homogeneous group separated from the people by territorial and socioeconomic divides. However, the discourse of Podemos differs significantly from the classical Eurosceptic parties in Europe since there are no racial or ethnic elements in its discursive articulation.

Europe functions in the discourse of Podemos as a floating signifier; Podemos makes visible the floating

[32] Iglesias, Pablo "Speech during the European elections campaign in Sevilla", May 22, 2014, accessed January 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw7_GrvxBPk&list=PLaW8IgjEn4d04xcsbVT1w_QfLTGmukHqB&index=6.

character of Europe and its potential connections – equivalential chain – either with more "democratic" demands or with the "Casta". This coheres perfectly with prior theorizations of Laclau in which "...the floating dimension becomes more visible in periods of organic crisis, when the symbolic system needs to be radically recast" (2005b: 132). The hegemony of the symbolic order on the EU in Spain was challenged by a structural moment of dislocation and the emergence of a new articulatory agent. In general, therefore, it seems that "Democracy" represents in the discourse of Podemos the empty signifier moment – with this integrating and articulating function in regards to particular demands – whereas "Europe" represents the floating signifier moment – signalling the hegemonic struggle on how to fix the meaning of such particular demands -. Thus, Europe is subdivided into two meanings to highlight on the one hand, the hitherto hegemonic articulation of democracy in a liberal version, with traditional actors (mainly social-democrats and conservatives), economic transnational actors and part of the civil society; on the other hand Europe, with its alternative meaning as a democracy of "the people", of social rights and of south European citizens signals the emergence of a counter-hegemonic articulation. Laclau conceives the empty and floating moment as different dimensions of the same hegemonic struggle whereby:

> "the first concerns the construction of a popular identity once the presence of a stable frontier is taken for granted; the second try conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacement of that frontier" (Laclau, 2005b:133)

The scope of this study was limited in terms of time-dimension and actor-centre explanation. The discourse of Podemos on the EU was only explored during an initial period in the European elections campaign and it limits the ability to infer conclusions about the overall discourse of Podemos on the EU - even though it illuminates an important moment of emergence of the party -. Consequently, the selection of this period affects the salience of EU issues in the general discourse of Podemos; such salience is, in turn, determined by (1) the audience object of the speech – a restricted or expanded public -, (2) the general political and economic context and (3) the internal strategy of the party. The analysis of this variance of the salience and direction of EU issues in the discourse of Podemos should be addressed in future studies. The analysis of the speeches of the leader of the party implies an assumption about the representativeness of the leader in the case of Podemos. Even when the centrality of Pablo Iglesias in the European elections – Podemos' ballot papers were illustrated with a picture of the leader – is unquestionable, a finer analysis should incorporate different voices in the construction of the political discourse of Podemos.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited scope, this work offers valuable insights into the articulatory practices of populist parties, especially left-wing populist parties, in regards to EU elements. It offers evidence on how the master populist discourse can integrate diverse elements in its antagonistic form. A

natural progression of this work is to analyse how these practices are consistent across left-wing populist parties in Europe and how they can be differentiated from traditional Eurosceptic parties or new right-wing populist parties.

References

Albertazzi, Daniele and McDonnell, Duncan. Eds. (2007): Twenty-First Century Populism. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Aslanidis, Paris (2015): "Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective." Political Studies, 64:1, 88-104. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12224

Barros, Sebastian (2006): "Inclusión radical y conflicto en la constitución del pueblo populista." Confines, 2-3.

Berbuir, Nicole., Lewandowsky, Marcel and Siri, Jasmin (2015): "The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?" German Politics, 24:2, 154-178. http://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2014.982546

Bertoncini, Yves and Koenig, Nicole (2014): Euroscepticism or europhobia: voice vs. exit? Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute.

Calvo, Kerman, Teresa Gómez-Pastrana and Luis Mena (2011): "Movimiento 15-M. ¿Quiénes son y qué reivindican?" Zoon Politikon, 4, 4-17.

Dahlström, Carl and Anders Sundell (2012): A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti immigrant party success. The Quality of Government Institute, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg.

Deutschmann, Christoph (2014): "The future of the European Union: A 'Hayekian' regime?" European Journal of Social Theory, 17:3, 343–358. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431014530924

Eder, Klaus (2014): "The EU in search of its people: The birth of a society out of the crisis of Europe." European Journal of Social Theory, 17:3, 219–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431014530925

Exadaktylos, Theofanis and Radaelli, Claudio M. Eds. (2012): Research Design in European Studies: Establishing Causality in Europeanization. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fella, Stefano (2007): Britain: Imperial Legacies, Institutional Constraints and New Political Opportunities in Twenty-First Century Populism. (D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell, Eds.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ford, Robert., Goodwin, Matthew J. and Cutts, David (2012): "Strategic Eurosceptics and polite xenophobes: Support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2009 European Parliament elections." European Journal of Political Research, 51, 204–234. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01994.x

Giusto, Hedwig, Kitching, David, & Rizzo, Stefano (2013): The changing faces of populisms. FEPS, CRS and Fundazione Italianieuropei.

Genga, Nicola (2013): The Front National and the national populist right in France in The changing faces of populisms. Giusto, H., Kitching, D., & Rizzo. FEPS, CRS and Fundazione Italianieuropei.

Glynos, Jason, Howarth, David, Norval, Aletta, Speed, Ewen (2009): Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods. Centre for Theoretical Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. University of Essex.

Golder, Matt (2003): "Explaining variation in the success of extreme right parties in Western Europe." Comparative Political Studies 36:4, 432–466. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414003251176

Gomez Reino, Margarita, Llamazares, Ivan (2015): Left Populism in Spain? The Rise of Podemos. Conference 'Solving the Puzzles of Populism.'

Grabow, Karsten and Hartleb, Florian (2013): Exposing the demagogues. Right-wing and national populist parties in Europe. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Hartleb, Florian (2012): European Project in Danger? Understanding Precisely the Phenomena "Euroscepticsm, Populism and Extremism" in Times of Crisis. Review of European Studies, 4:5, 45–64. https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v4n5p45

Jabko, Nicolas and Meuiner, Sophie (2003): Global cleavages? How Globalization and Europeanization Redefine Domestic politics in Europe. EUSA Biennial Meeting.

Jansen, Robert (2011): "Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism." Sociological Theory 29:2. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01388.x

Kriesi, Hanspeter and Pappas, Takis S. Eds. (2015): European populism in the shadow of the great recession. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Katsambekis, Giorgos (2016): "Radical Left Populism in Contemporary Greece: Syriza's Trajectory from Minoritarian Opposition to Power." Constellations, 23:3. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12234

Laclau, Eenresto, Mouffe, Chantal ([1985]2001): Hegemony and socialist strategy. London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto. Ed. (1994): The Making of Political Identities, London: Verso.

_____ (2005a): "Populism: What's in a Name?", in F. Panizza. Ed. Populism and the Mirror of Democracy. London: Verso, pp. 32–49.

_____ (2005b): On populist reason. Verso

Ladrech, Robert (2009): "Europeanization and political parties." Living Reviews in European Governance, 4:1.

Mair, Peter (2007): "Political Parties and Party Systems," in Graziano, Paolo, Vink, Maarten P. Eds. Europeanization: New Research Agendas. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 154-166.

Malone, John. (2014): "Examining the Rise of Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe." Honors Theses. Paper 45. Saint John's University [online]: http://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors_theses/45

Meguid, Bonnie M. (2005): "Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success." The American Political Science Review, 99:3, pp. 347-359. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051701

Moffitt, Benjamin, Tormey, Simon (2014): "Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style." Political Studies, 62:2, 381–397. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12032

Mudde, Cas (2004): "The Populist Zeitgeist." Government and Opposition, 39: 4, 541-63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Radaelli, Claudio M. (2003): The Open Method of Coordination: A new governance architecture for the European Union? Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies.

_____ (2004): Europeanisation – Solution or Problem? In European Integration online Papers, 8:16.

Rihoux, Benoit and Ragin, Charles (2009): Configurational Comparative Methods. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques. London: SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226569

Roberts, Kenneth M. (2014): "Populism, Political Mobilizations, and Crises of Political Representation" in De la Torre, Carlos. Ed. The Promise and Perils of Populism. Global Perspectives. University Press of Kentucky.

Roch González, Juan (2017): "Europeanization in the shadow of the financial crisis: disruptive effects on the Spanish party system." IDP. Revista de Internet, Derecho y Política, 23.

Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristobal (2012): "The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy." Democratization, 19:2, 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.572619

Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristobal and Mudde, Cas (2011): Voices of the peoples: populism in Europe and Latin America compared. Kellogg Institute.

Saurugger, Sabine and Radaelli, Claudio M. (2008): "The Europeanization of Public Policies: Introduction." Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice, 10:3, 213-219. https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980802276847

Senninger, Roman and Wagner, Markus (2015): "Political parties and the EU in national election campaigns: Who talks about Europe, and how?" JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 53:6, 1336-1351. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12278

Stavrakakis, Yannis and Katsambekis, Giorgos (2014): "Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA." Journal of Political Ideologies, 19:2, 119–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2014.909266

Stavrakakis, Yannis, Kioupkiolis, Alexandros, Katsambekis, Giorgos, Siomos, Thomas, Garefi, Ioanna (2014): Methodological orientation internal technical report – English version. Populismus.

Van Kessel, Stijn (2014): "The populist cat-dog: applying the concept of populism to contemporary European party systems." Journal of Political Ideologies, 19:1, 99-118, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2013.869457

Vasilopoulou, Sofia, Halikiopoulou, Daphne, Exadaktylos, Theofanis (2014): "Greece in Crisis: Austerity, Populism and the Politics of Blame." JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 52:2, 388–402. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12093

Vazquez Garcia, Rafael (2012): The Spanish party system and European integration – A consensual Europeanization, in Kulahci, Erol. Ed. Europeanisation and party politics: How the EU affects domestic actors, patterns and systems. Colchester: ECPR Press.