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Green Trade for All

A Greens/EFA paper

Introduction

Across the world, trade policy has been politically contested for the most of the last two decades. This is understandable, given that misguided trade policies can lead to profound social and ecological problems in an era when economic globalisation has led to fundamental and unavoidable interconnection.

Globalisation has led to an unsustainable level of wealth concentration and inequality which has translated into negative competition between workers, territories and public choices. Decision-making processes are becoming more opaque and multinational companies are getting greater power to define common norms and standards, thereby impacting on issues of general public interest. As a result, globalisation as it stands is legitimately perceived as a threat to democracy.

As Greens in the European Parliament, we have been engaged in all the recent battles about EU trade policy. We opposed the “Mandelson Doctrine” of 2006 (Global Europe) of unconditionally opening trade up to the unfettered forces of the free market. In 2010, Greens expressed some relief that the “De Gucht Doctrine” at least acknowledged that politicians are not so naive as to believe that free markets can ensure fairness. The “Malmström Doctrine” of 2015 - that trade policy ought to be based on values beyond return-on-investment and economic growth - were greeted with cautious optimism by Greens. But we are waiting for evidence that this is more than spin and that it will be backed up by real policy change.

Trade policy is not made against a fixed backdrop; rather the world within which trade takes place has been changing rapidly. Our knowledge of the limits of global resources and the regenerative and assimilative capacities of ecosystems has grown significantly. But globalisation continues to drive an economic model based on twice the resources that the planet can provide. At the same time, frameworks for global action, such as the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) have been created and provide benchmarks against which to measure progress towards future-proofed development.

In this context, a trade policy based on high global material input and low global output of human well-

being, is no longer an option. For Greens, the time is right to reconsider the function of trade in a global economy. Greens are open to the world; indeed our political stage is the world and the planet. International trade is not our enemy. But the policy governing trade needs to be firmly rooted in a vision of socio-ecological justice of economic policies.

The overarching goal of a Green trade policy is to ensure that trade achieves the maximum human well-being for the minimum use of energy and resources. This entails the redesign of the global trade system so that it does not undermine the regeneration of ecosystems, while ensuring the possibility of high-quality employment and environmental protection at home and abroad. Such systematic change must be firmly based on a foundation that respects the dignity and rights of all people, including with a clear gender perspective, and is not at the expense of other species with which we share the planet.

Green trade policy needs to identify the first bold steps on the path to bring us closer to an ecological vision for trade. Such steps should be developed as much as possible at the multilateral level, including proposing the necessary changes to the existing rules of the world trade system as embodied in the WTO.

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