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Publication | 29.04.2019

Greens/EFA demands for a Social Union

1. The EU needs Greens Jobs provided by the Green Economy

Greens/EFA are convinced that we urgently need clear steps towards the sustainable transformation of our economy and the creation of quality, long-term jobs. Europe needs a plan to face the challenges of climate change and a just transition roadmap that fairly distributes the benefits as well as the effort required to get to a resource-efficient future economy. To truly deliver this change, a clear direction of travel for investment and innovation must be put forward, based on:

- ambitious binding EU targets on energy saving, resource efficiency, renewable energy, waste management and circular economy
- significant net job creation in the Green sector, including in rural and former fossil economy dependent areas
- support for businesses in training, re-training, and up-skilling of workforce; re-adaptation of education and training systems

2. An adequate guaranteed minimum income scheme should be established across the EU set to at least 60% to the median income in each country

One of the soft principles in the European Pillar of Social Rights that urgently needs to be made a hard law reality throughout the EU is Principle 14 on minimum income.

Minimum income schemes are last resort support measures specifically designed to ensure decent living standards for individuals and families who have no other means of financial support. This could be either because they cannot work, access a decent job, or are refused unemployment benefits.

All EU Member States now have some sort of minimum income scheme. However, as far as adequacy is concerned, all Southern and nearly all central and eastern European countries have set schemes at a level below 60% of median income5. It is urgent that legislative action is taken at EU level to ensure that all Member States upgrade their minimum income schemes above the poverty line for all.

3. EU-level social protection mechanisms are essential to ensure the Economic and Monetary Union is coherent with a true Social Union

Greens/EFA want **an adequate and workable unemployment (re)insurance scheme** - open to countries with the euro and any others that wish to join - that would be able **to back up national schemes** when a part of the EU experiences a temporary economic shock.

Such an "automatic stabiliser" is **essential to allow member states in crisis to recover in an orderly way** without resorting to downward spiral of cutting spending on essential social services or being forced to borrow in difficult markets.

4. Access to affordable quality housing is a right not a luxury. The EU and its members should commit 3% of GDP to respecting this right

Access to affordable decent, energy efficient housing close to where we work, learn and play is at least as important as, and definitely a more immediate concern than, **defence**. Why do we have **fixed targets** for the latter and not the former? We call for an EU wide target of at least 3% of GDP to be spent on housing.

In 2016, housing was the highest expenditure for Europeans, hitting disproportionally harder those with the lowest income. **House prices are growing faster than income** in most Member States, while inequality and housing exclusion are mutually reinforcing. Finding **adequate and affordable housing where job opportunities are**, is increasingly hard.

Social Housing must be an EU priority. We urgently need a European framework for social and affordable housing to coordinate national policies in a more efficient way. The construction of social housing should not contradict state aid rules by giving undue advantages to building firms or create "ghettos" where the most disadvantaged are housed together, but aim instead at promoting diverse communities.

Furthermore, that framework should also protect those who rent from exploitation, providing guidance on minimum standards. A major programme aimed at **greening the housing stock as well as building new low energy housing** provides **not only affordability and climate action but also jobs.**

5. End child poverty

Although in recent years in the EU the number of children under 18 at risk of poverty and social exclusion has slightly decreased, still today **around 25 million children are suffering daily from lack of income and basic services**.

Greens/EFA insist that a Europe-wide approach must guarantee

- Access to quality affordable resources for parents, as well as providing for quality care and time to care for parents, by supporting parents' participation in the labour market and providing for decent quality living standards through a combination of child and family benefits and by providing adequate minimum income for the house-hold.
- Access to affordable quality services

- Access to safe warm and healthy housing
- Children's right to participate in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities, as well as in decisions that affect their lives.

6. Access to affordable quality education

Education is the **principle way in which a person's opportunities in society are improved**. No child should be denied quality education for economic or any other reason.

Education is for all people, irrespective of status, and should be inclusive and accessible to all. Educational curricula should therefore **prepare young people for life ... not just "hard skills" like science, technology, engineering and maths aimed principally at the job market**. A broad curriculum - opening minds and bodies to languages, the arts, music, handicrafts and sports - maximising a person's ability to contribute to as well as benefit from all aspects of society is essential to a balanced emotional and cognitive development.

Ten years after the crisis hit, the **average government expenditure in the EU is almost 10% lower than before the crisis**. Even mature economies such as Italy and Austria are spending less now than at the turn of the century. We want the EU and the Member States to reverse this trend now and spend money on education, on child and youth friendly infrastructure.

7. End energy poverty in Europe!

According to different estimates, **50 to 125 million people are suffering from energy poverty** in Europe. These people struggle to have their house insulated to keep it at adequate temperature or pay the utility bills.

Even though energy vulnerability is affecting an important part of European citizens, there is **no consistent criterion yet for the measurement of energy poverty** at a European level. Greens have succeeded in obliging Member States to define energy poverty nationally, and those with a significant share must propose reduction objectives and measures within their annual plans under the Governance Regulation. EU funds are successfully used in many regions for the renovation of public buildings.

Nevertheless, **EU funding schemes should be focused more on social housing and the private rent of energy poor households** in order to reach the EU 2020 anti-poverty target and contribute to the EU 2030 energy efficiency and renewable target.

We believe that money raised through taxes on polluters, and money saved by removing subsidies to fossil fuel industries, should be used to boost both EU and national funds, including those targeting energy poverty with energy efficiency investments.

8. Work life Balance: protecting the right to take care of others and oneself is fundamental

Achieving a better, fairer work- life balance has been a key priority for the Group. Families keep on

struggling and juggling every day **trying to reconcile their personal and working lives**. This reality is **even harder for single parents, the majority of whom are women**. European **working women spend almost 3 times more in unpaid care work than men** (22 hours per week, vs 9 hours done by men).

Greens/EFA consider essential that any work life balance policy should focus on making it possible and **encouraging men to take more care responsibilities and promoting gender equality and cultural changes**. European legislation on the matter must ensure that it does not reproduce the unequal gender division of labour, or indirectly promote laws that keep on attributing women the role of care.

The European Union can play a vital role in establishing the necessary conditions for a coherent work life balance system for parents and carers. With the agreement reached in on the Work-Life-Balance Directive, Greens/EFA were able to ensure the introduction of minimum standards

- **Introduction of at least 10 days of mandatory and fully paid paternity leave** to ensure that all men stay at home and have the opportunity to take full part of the care experience of the first days.
- **At least two months of "adequately paid" parental leave for both parents,** which cannot be transferred to the other partner.
- **Introduction of a five days carers leave per year**. Although Greens/EFA advocated for at least 12 days of carers leave, this is an important step in order to acknowledge the work of informal carers.

It will now be up to the Member States to transfer these minimum standards into national law. We will also continue to advocate for a **revision of the maternity leave rules** to better protect women, including against pregnancy-related discrimination, which remains a reality in the EU and a **carer leave of 12 days per year per person** in order to give a response to workers with care responsibilities.

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