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The European Union for the Left: No Simple Answers to Complex Questions

The citizens of the beautiful city of Lisbon in no way deserved the fact that the Lisbon Strategy, issued in the year 2000 and its updates was followed by the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2007.

This is said to have officially launched the entry into the new cycle (2008-2010) of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

In March 2008, the European Council could no longer avoid broaching the subject of recently deteriorating economic conditions and lamenting the downward trend of the economy in the United States, rising prices of oil and raw materials, and the continuing turbulence on the financial markets. This means that strategies for completing and deepening the single market are to be continued more consistently and at greater speed. An increasingly well functioning single market is to help master the challenges posed in particular by the ageing population, climate change and energy supply. Measures that boost transparency and functioning and further improve the areas of control and regulation are to render financial markets more stable.

The European Union as challenge for left politics

Structural problems under the conditions of globalisation are therefore to be solved by better functioning markets, although it is precisely this focus on market regulation as opposed to the regulation of structural developments that caused these problems to increase in the first place. Social, political and resource problems and conflicts are confronted with increasing surveillance, repression and armament. The language of the “European Security Strategy” is straightforward: “We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and when necessary, robust intervention.” The Treaty of Lisbon clearly states: “The Member States shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities.”

All of this could lead one to the conclusion that the EU should be opposed. This would be logical if the “European Union” were identified only with market radicalism, social dumping, with the destruction of nature, repression and aggressive military policy. Daily routine in the European Union cannot how-

ever be reduced to these no doubt dangerous developments. This would mean ending up in an even smaller socio-political minority than the left are already.

In order to act against destructive tendencies, and to alleviate social, environmental and global problems in a fair way and solve them step by step it would be more promising and politically responsible to try to find politically feasible courses of action.

In the search for such courses of action all political levels are important, on the one hand as these are interrelated, on the other, as making politics always means fighting to assert one’s interests or the interests of certain social and political players in the dispute with others in a lasting way. To help the most socially excluded, their problems need to be appropriated, the perpetrator of the problems has to be opposed together with them, and the struggle to strengthen and change their political and social position in society should be taken up.

Linked to this is the impoverishment of public budgets in local authorities and the regions and the thereby fostered privatisation of public services and diminished scope to act democratically and maintain political control. This no doubt also has to do with EU policies. Making the EU responsible for the right-wing extremism promoted by this is hardly helpful in the fight against local neo-Nazis however. And the call for more nation state ignores the fact that it was or are the governments of the EU member states who are themselves responsible for EU policies. Member states often achieve things in a roundabout way. The employment market reform laws are an example of this: what is hard to achieve at home can be organised via European directives and appropriate laws can then be forced through by referring to Brussels.

The left were not able to mobilise relevant social forces and to win their support for attractive alternative political projects. Due to the resulting dimension of problems and complications, the alternative for the most powerful political, economic and military players in the European Union is either an increase in social, environmental and human problems aggravated by the European Union, or fighting for a change of policy which enables the EU to develop the potential to solve problems in a fair and united way.

About 492 million people live in the 27 EU member states. One in seven is affected by poverty. Nearly one in five children is poor, as many as one third of children of single parents. 21 % of women and 16 % of men over the age of 65 spend their retirement in poverty.

But the European Union produces almost 20 % of the world's gross national product. Its' proportion of world trade is at 12 %. 15 countries of the European Union alone conclude 45.5 % of direct investments overseas and have a proportion of the world capital import of over 20 %. 17.8 % of the world energy consumption occurs in the European Union. It produces 27.5 % of climate damaging carbon dioxide emissions. The European Union supplies almost a quarter of all military armies worldwide! It has intervened in breach of international law and is further developing its ability to attack.

To answer the question of an alternative it is extremely important whether or not the left in Germany becomes stronger and acts in a European and responsible way. Germany produces 20 % of the gross domestic product of the EU. Its proportion of Union exports is 85 %, of imports 63.7 %. 19.4 % of EU energy consumption and 13.3 % of its climate damaging carbon dioxide emissions fall to Germany. The Federal Republic of Germany supplies 13.6 % of the EU contingent of troops and 41.6 % of its military arms. However, it only pays 0.35 % of the GDP official development aid and this is clearly manipulated to seem higher.

In order to develop the potential of the EU to solve problems in a unified and fair way, European integration must be supported and its contractual basis rejected.

The fact that this is possible has been proved by socialist parties and other left forces. They acknowledge that the majority of Europeans as well as millions of people outside the borders of the European Union are united in their hope for security in individual freedom, for stable democracy and economic progress, for contributions to solve the most urgent social, environmental and global issues.

They have their reasons: wars amongst the EU member states are ruled out; mobility and freedom of movement have increased for most EU citizens. Their life has become more interesting. They could or can profit from many social, cultural and economic developments.

Socialists however have always been called to concrete opposition. This especially involved the common market and thereby the interests of the economically most powerful. At no point were social needs, environmental destruction and human threats consistently fought. The EU has increasingly become the perpetrator of problems.

Now, yet again it finds itself at a crossroads: the dissatisfaction and disappointment of its citizens particularly in the new member states have resulted in a willingness to contribute democratically and in a changing way to the European Union. This is exploited by those in corporations, in the formal and informal committees of international capital, who only wish to turn the EU into a free trade zone or into a specific economic area. They get along far too well with the military circles,

regulators, and supporters of the police state who want to use the most modern military and directive methods to guarantee European resource provision, effective European border protection and European security.

This makes the challenge for democratic socialists and the modern left clear: they must prove themselves as international Europeans and as proponents of European integration. At the same time they should in no way ignore what has happened and is still happening since the introduction of the Single European Act and especially since the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht up until the ceremony of Lisbon in December 2007:

- Urgent social, environmental and global problems were and are ignored or discussed and treated in such an inconsistent way that they are in the end not sufficiently alleviated and have all in all continued to increase.
- The “challenges of globalisation” and the “advance of a common market” are at the centre of socio-politics. Economic policy and socio-politics are thereby forced into neoliberal shackles and the world market's influence is increased.
- The militarization of the European Union is being forced, its role as military global player is on the increase.
- Whilst the rights of European Parliament and elements of the citizen participation are being expanded, the situational constraints, regulating and repressive elements produced by politics are growing in socio-politics. The separation and restrictive regulation of asylum and migration are tendencies that are clearly gaining in importance.
- Important issues that must be settled in order for the EU's way of working and functioning to be refined are deferred and remain unanswered.

These facts were and are authorised and pushed by the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Niece and Lisbon. We rejected them as we rejected the draft of the European constitution – for reasons of content, not on principle. This does not mean in the slightest that we disrespect progress and new possible courses of action such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights, expanded parliamentary rights and the participation of citizens. On the contrary, it is essential to use them with and for the citizens.

First steps for the EU to become a plausible global player in dialogue and cooperation would be – demands of the left are:

- The immediate closure of EU reception or detention centres, intended to hold at bay “economic refugees “ and others who are “a danger to Europe's prosperity and security”.
- Encouraging import only for goods if the manufacturing countries have complied with all agreements of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Kyoto Protocol etc.
- Adopting the human rights clause in every trade and economic treaty.
- Ending an EU policy of unequal treaties which commit to and develop neoliberal relations of dependency.
- An immediate end to EU military deployment.
- The immediate disbanding of the Battle Groups.

- A moratorium on the EU Security Strategy.
- Closure of USA military bases in EU states.
- Ending arms exports to regions in crisis.
- Cutback in arms expenditures, conversion, taxation of arms exports.
- Consequent steps to demilitarize – in particular in development policy.
- Introducing a foreign exchange turnover tax, the revenue should be used to help the worlds poorest.
- A moratorium on all negotiations and treaties with developing countries if these do not serve to implement the Millennium Development Goals
- Consistent steps towards a solar energy “revolution”

Democratic and united for a social, environmental and civilian European Union

In the following I will put up to discussion another proposal which is intended to help communication with the varied democratic left and interested citizens about the alternatives to prevalent politics. The basic idea is that the European Union can and must become a space for new political hopes; that “another Europe” is essential and possible and would be instrumental in making “another world” possible; that a social, environmental and unified realignment of the EU will only then be reality when the political pressure for democratic change, which comes from local initiatives to European networks, is also taken up by members of the European Parliament and when they strive for communication, networking and cooperation with other democratic political and social players.

Our vision is an EU of democracy, peace, ecology, sexual equality, social security and sustainable economic management. In our struggle we are pursuing 3 main goals:

- We want to shape the general conditions of nation state, regional and local development in a democratic way.
- We are committed to the sustainable development of our society.
- We urge Europe to ensure that there will never again be a war emanating from European territory.

Such a development of the European Union is prerequisite of its new expansion.

A comprehensive policy of human and citizens’ rights that take the international community’s human rights conventions as their starting point and enforce them unconditionally underlies our policy of reshaping the EU.

1. For a democratic EU

As conscious Europeans we want the European Union to be experienced as an entity that can be changed democratically also at the level of the municipality and civilian society.

All people at home in the EU can and should have full share in the political process as citizens of the EU. They can and

should be protected effectively from discrimination. Discrimination due to gender, social or ethnic origins, bodily condition or ideology and religion must be counteracted fully and head-on.

Princess Europa from Asia Minor in Greek mythology was a woman – at least 50 % of women shall fill EU institutions by the year 2019. She was a female migrant. Migration is part of daily life in European societies. Good regulations can and must help migrants, their home countries and the European Union to profit equally. Children and young people growing up multilingually are an enrichment and the education system should provide the prerequisites for this. A Europe-wide democratisation of education, media and culture is the order of the day.

The same applies to the long overdue introduction of referendums into EU law. “Economic democracy” is the prerequisite for the economy actually serving people and thus also serving to preserve and recover natural livelihoods. The staff of companies and institutions must be granted a right to veto against decisions that compromise their interests.

We are committed to a wide democratic debate about a future European constitution as we want the integration and democratisation of the European Union to advance together Europe’s public services are a fundamental condition of actual democracy. Citizens, their interest groups, political and social players, and parliaments should agree and democratically decide what is to be understood by the term public services and how they are constituted.

First steps

The Treaty of Lisbon should be rejected in a referendum; the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights should be bindingly enforceable EU-wide. The right of asylum should be expanded to include the right of the individual to asylum.

Central challenge is a broad public discussion about alternative European policies on all levels of political debate – not only in Brussels, but everywhere.

2. For a social and environmental EU

The vast majority of citizens want the EU to improve peoples’ living conditions. Living conditions are always at the same time of an economic, social and environmental nature. We want to take up the democratic fight against poverty, social exclusion, against the (ever increasing) social divisions and against the paralysis of economic development together with the citizens. At the same time we want to link this with the fight for social solidarity, public health, against climate change and the extinction of species.

Alternative economic policy in the EU can summon up considerable financial means; the macro-economic margin can be fully exploited without reservations. Additional financial flexibility can be generated especially by savings in military arms expenditures.

The Maastricht convergence criteria should not be permitted to further impede a social and environmental economic and

social policy. Increased tax revenues are needed to further strengthen the public services.

The ECB's priority responsibility to ensure price level stability should yield to the higher priority of being responsible for development aid and the stabilisation of financial markets.

An increase in real wages based on productivity must strengthen solvent demand and enhance the manoeuvrability of the trade unions. Exchange rate policy can and should be used by the Council to ease worldwide inequalities in the balance of trade and transactions. The EU must work towards fundamentally reforming the International Monetary Fund and above all redistributing voting rights and revising stabilisation policy.

A new type of full employment is needed to be able to meet the needs of society and enable women and men equally to gain an appropriate income through work. The concept of "good work" should replace that of "flexicurity". Important are the quality of life, environmental needs and economic democracy.

For years we have been advocating a social and environmental Union. Reorganising the current destructive Growth and Stability Pact can and should determine the principle of a co-ordinated procedure of member states in order to help reduce unemployment and poverty, decrease the consumption of atomic fossil energy and the emission of climate damaging gases. In a concerted effort together with the member states, the EU should determine compulsory goals of social, environmental, and cultural minimum standards. "Social and environmental records" should also be introduced parallel to this. Grouped together would be on the one hand countries with similar social rates (the relation of social expenditure to the gross national product) and on the other countries with a similar eco-investment rate (the relation of investments for environmental purposes to the gross national product). Compulsory enforcement mechanisms need to be determined to comply with corridor limits – maintaining and increasing rates.

A start must be made to mobilise resources in order to introduce a minimum wage that is not under 60 percent that of the average individual and household income.

First steps

We demand the introduction of the right to a minimum wage that secures an existence, or a basic social security for individuals. Steps should be taken to avoid unnecessary transportation, especially within road and air traffic and to reduce speed limits for road traffic.

3. For a civilian and globally united EU

The large majority of EU citizens want the EU to do what it can for peace and peaceful conflict resolution, and to do its best to improve the situation of the world's poorest.

Citizens need a European-wide economic and social area that does not exclude any European nation and is based on a varied bi- and multilateral system of treaties. This is why the EU needs to increase co-operation within the European Council and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE). It must develop a close partnership with its neighbour states that is free of discrimination, and take into account in particular the interests of Russia, the Ukraine and the states comprising the CIS.

We reject all attempts to exclude Turkey's admission into the EU on so-called religious grounds.

The best peace policy is an understanding amongst nations, help in solidarity and the demand for social, political and cultural human rights. Above all, this involves an active commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (UN development goals to be reached by 2010, which include drastically reducing extreme poverty, hunger, diseases such as Aids/HIV, Malaria, and Tuberculosis, health care and education, reducing mother and baby mortality in the poorest development countries). All existing treaties and current economic negotiations that do not comply with the Millennium Development Goals should be subject to a moratorium.

An EU that does justice to its responsibilities backs a democratic solution for global problems, political and democratic dialogue, financial, economic and technical co-operation, and the conscious support of civilian society. This also involves cultivating normal political and economic relations between the European Union and those countries discriminated against by the USA, such as Cuba.

Based on the demands of the US-American peace movement, we call for a peace and cooperation policy based on multilateral cooperation in the EU and which is independent of the imperial strategies of the USA.

We support the fact that new global negotiations – in particular within climate protection for the post-Kyoto period – are made in order to ease and solve urgent environmental problems. Together with numerous organisations we demand that the EU makes available sufficient financial funds to combat poverty, and to fund measures for climate protection and climate adjustment in the developing countries.

First steps

The EU should immediately close the reception and detention camps which are intended to keep at bay "economic refugees" and others who "endanger the prosperity and security of Europe".

It must immediately end its military operations and exports of arms in areas of crisis, disband the Battle Groups and impose a moratorium on the European Security Strategy. The EU should begin to close the US American bases on its territory and urge the USA to close the Guantanamo concentration camp.

The indispensable introduction of financial instruments such as a flight ticket tax, foreign exchange rate tax, kerosene tax and taxes on the export of arms can and should mobilise short term financial funds to help the global poor and measures to protect the environment in poor countries.

The EU should commit itself to democratic and globally fair reforms of the IWF and the World Bank and for sustainable reforms of the UN.