

Policy Paper on green socialism

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“Socialism is about improving the life of the people”

The world we want:

As socialists and social democrats, we have to think and prepare the socialism of the 21st century. The socialism of the 19th century was not the one of the 20th.

It will be the same for the 21st century by going towards a sober socialism, what we call green socialism or ecosocialism: that means fulfilling the needs of the citizens while making production structures more sustainable and reducing energy consumption in order to respect our environment and the limits of our natural resources. We believe that certain natural resources, such as water, are common goods and shouldn't be wasted nor privatised. It is a basic human right. Hence we also oppose the patenting of living organisms and the privatisation of nature.

Our objective has to be a society in which democracy, solidarity and sustainability are fundamentally linked.

In our perspective, no fight against inequalities is possible if no resources are available, but no preservation of the environment is thinkable without a fair redistribution.

The world we have:

The world we have today remains in many ways in contradiction with the ideal we stand for: the constant production and accumulation of more goods remains the norm, without questioning their use or for whom they are being produced. Our world is still based on huge inequalities: wealth and prosperity are not distributed as they should, and remain in the hands of a minority at the expense of a huge majority (the exploitation of human beings socialists and social democrats have always fought) but also at the expense of our planet and hence at the expense of any long-term development.

The dramatic use of pesticides and fertilisers and intensive farming in general illustrate the mad drive for profit that drives our economy and agriculture, while other parts of the world suffer from lacking development funds and the economic dumping of our companies.

Our economies are still ruled by wealth indicators that miss the vital questions: not the question of how much we produce, the question of quantity, but the question of what we produce, for whom and in which conditions, the question of the quality of our production and its impact on humans and nature.

We reaffirm that productivism, accumulation and inequality (in one word: capitalism) cannot be our future.

In the world we live in, nationalism and individualism still prevail over solidarity and cooperation. Wars for the access to water exist in many parts of our globe and will increase as this resource diminishes, excluding more people and creating even more poverty and radicalisation. Common goods that should be available for everyone are being privatised or used as instruments to anchor political power.

Climate catastrophes (increasing numbers of hurricanes, droughts, sea level rise, and so on) have a direct impact on all our societies. Nevertheless, the first victims of this remain the poorest people and the poorest countries left without instruments to face these new challenges: certain insular countries are jeopardised in their very existence, millions of people living along the coast are at risk because of the sea level rise, other millions due to the desertification in their regions. The consequence is and will be massive migration flows, while no climate refugee status has been recognised today at the international level, and the appearance of new diseases due to environmental changes affecting the whole ecosystem, its fauna and flora. The melting of packed ice in the Arctic and Antarctic Oceans is a terrible example: instead of being seen as an alarm to fight climate disruption, it has become a new playground for economic giants willing to exploit and gain as much as they can from global warming.

How to change the world we have into the world we want?

As socialists and social democrats, we need to have a global view on how to address what is the core question of the century: our ability to link our fight for a fair redistribution of wealth to sustainable development based on the preservation of nature. Growth shouldn't be the one of our gross domestic product, but a growth in our living conditions.

This ecological transition, linking the "red and the green", will have an impact on all spheres of our society.

The following proposals should be the base of a common European campaign to prepare and influence the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris.

A democratic process

As socialists and social democrats, respect of the democratic process while implementing the ecological transition will be a guideline. No deep changes in our lives and societies could be accepted without respecting the democratic process. Elected parliaments at all levels have to be included in this process, by proposing and defining the ways to formulate this ecological transition, while fighting any kind of political corruption by powerful industrial lobbies. Environmental non-governmental organisations should be seen as partners in reaching our common objectives and developing new goals.

Local initiatives of citizens have to be stimulated in order for instance to organise the energy supply in a way as decentralised as possible, or to consult the local population for any infrastructure project that might harm the environment. But these local initiatives cannot be left aside without any regulation. They should be thought through in a fully democratic ecological planning of the green transition.

The European Union has to set an example in this regard: in the goals set to decrease our greenhouse gas emissions, in our involvement to reach a binding agreement at the global level, but also in the objectives given to the European institutions. The ability of states to finance ecological projects and an energetic transition towards renewable energies in Europe should be a priority beyond the current treaties on debt reduction and public deficits. In order to reach that objective, the European Central Bank should also be able to directly lend money to states as a last resort in order to support project bonds in the environmental field.

International relations, trade and treaties should be negotiated based on a priority of fair trade instead of free trade, in order to increase environmental and social norms at the global scale. Therefore, we oppose the current free trade agreements negotiated by the European Union with the United States without a change in the foundations and binding guarantees on the protection of social and environmental norms. Preserving our planet and quality of life should be at the heart of any trade agreement: instead of the current "World Trade Organisation philosophy", we propose the creation of a World Environmental Organisation, in charge of controlling the implementation of binding agreements or collecting a possible green tax, based on the polluter-pays principle rather than on a greenhouse gas emissions market, and used to

fund the environmental transition. In order to avoid the current North-South divide, where the richest countries impose their views on the poorest, socialists and social democrats should promote a democratisation of the existing international organisations.

Transforming our ways of production and consumption

1. Energy

As socialists and social democrats, we stand for the development of renewable energies instead of the current use of fossil fuels, whose reserves are limited on earth and far more polluting. This would also have a positive impact on our trade imbalances, and hence on the economic downturn in Europe. Coal and nuclear power plants should progressively be closed in Europe, and the extracting of shale gas not permitted, in order to preserve the environment and the access to drinking water.

The reorientation of lands from food production to biofuels, due to the evolution of the market prices of both goods, if intensified, could have terrible consequences in regions where food production remains too low.

Decreasing our energy consumption is a necessity. As socialists and social democrats, our approach cannot only be based on a consumer perspective, but must also enhance a regulatory aspect. Different ways of decreasing our energy consumption could be:

- producing goods and services locally to answer the needs of the people in order to avoid massive pollution due to transporting goods from one part of the globe to another;
- thinking of the entire "life span" of a product while conceiving it, including the best ways to recycle most of the product itself;
- developing the collective use of goods, instead of the individual accumulation of goods, whose active use is limited (a car is only used 20% of the time).

For instance, the implementation of a green tax on products that require massive carbon dioxide emissions or pollution is at the same time a way to limit these, but also to collect the financial means to develop an energy transition.

2. Circular economy

We are living in a society based on the production of waste, while instead, we should be interconnecting people and areas by using the energy some of us produce to the benefit of others, by making resources out of waste or by limiting energy losses. We strive for a circular economy, as an alternative to the market-based economy.

Instead of pushing consumers to constantly buy new products or replace them, we should promote a society where reusing, repairing and recycling are the norm and planned obsolescence abolished. We should also encourage research and business opportunities on creating efficient ways for circular economy.

3. Agriculture and food safety

The existing subsidies to companies or industries in Europe and our current agricultural policy are based on incentives to produce, disregarding the environment and the real needs of the people. On the contrary, we should be encouraging local and organic farming financially and by helping other farmers to shift from industrial to organic agriculture.

Developing a more sustainable agriculture also implies decreasing meat production, taking into consideration that fruits and vegetables are produced according to seasons and regions, and eradicating any production of genetically modified organisms. Food safety also remains based on limiting, controlling and regulating the use of fertilisers and pesticides, or the use of antibiotics on animals.

4. Creating sustainable jobs beyond the concept of growth

Creating sustainable jobs first implies to increase wages to improve the life of the people, but also to give them the possibility to have the financial capacity to buy products respecting higher environmental norms that might be more expensive.

A second aspect is working-time reduction to create jobs and implement a society of freedom and social involvement. By sharing working time, we ensure a good way to increase the number of workers and to increase free time at the same time for culture, trade unions, political or social involvement. We need more sustainable and quality production to decrease unemployment. The belief that we could achieve it with our current materialistic production is no longer valid, considering the fact that our natural resources are limited.

From then on, we have to reconsider the idea that the constant increase of production would be the only way to create jobs (the current calculation of the gross domestic product). It is about time to ask ourselves how we can create jobs while maintaining our current production level or even decrease it in certain sectors: sharing working time appears to be a good way to reach these goals, while ensuring a structural funding of our welfare systems and more people contributing to it by working. As socialists and social democrats, we consider that wealth is about quality, not quantity, and hence that new wealth indicators are needed.

Finally, public investments in the green sector are also needed (renewable energies, recycling, repairing, circular economy, innovation, and so on) and could create long-term sustainable jobs. In this regard, the current logic in Europe to impose austerity policies and reduce public investments should be stopped.

5. True wealth redistribution, taxation systems

As socialists and social democrats, we believe that the green transition can only be linked to fair redistribution, from the wealthiest to the poorest. This means that taxes should be progressive and also based on the polluter-pays principle, in combination with the rewarding of sustainable behaviour. Taxes on production or consumption can depend on the types of goods or services produced or bought, e.g. higher taxes on fossil fuels and lower on renewable energies, but should then be used for the adaptation of our economy: we need higher funding for research, innovation, energy storage, the circular economy, and an energetic transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies, to mention some.

National and European budgets should have a larger proportion of their expenditure allocated to fund the green transition.

6. Housing

Urbanisation should be controlled in order to preserve nature and at the same time avoid natural disasters. In order to overcome the current urban expansion, people should be able to live in the city centres: hence, the preservation of the environment is also linked to affordable access to housing.

Production centres, residential areas and consumer locations shouldn't be thought of separately, creating carbon dioxide emissions and excessive transportation from one place to another, but on the contrary be organised to enable proximity, thereby reducing everyday life constraints to the benefit of the people's social environment.

A priority in creating more sustainability is energy efficiency. Taxing the lack of housing insulation might seem ecological but will not help to enhance the insulation of houses if people and families are not financially able to invest in the insulation of their houses. Rewarding good behaviour through taxes could be an incentive for those who are able to make the investment, and for the others the government can take responsibility by providing assistance to improve insulation. In this way, the government creates jobs temporarily in the construction industry and helps the progress of sustainability by insulating houses.

7. Transportation

Thinking of a green transition of our societies implies to have a global reflection on our mobility and transportation. Alternatives to polluting ways of transport should be developed, such as rail networks or waterway transport instead of cars or planes.

Our collective response cannot only be a tax on fuel without seeing the difference between those who have the option to use their car or public transportation and those who don't. Taxes on fuel for instance, should lead people to change their mobility choices towards a better preservation of the environment, but these financial means should at the same time be redistributed to help the people that would not have the financial capacity to adopt ecological practices. In this perspective, funding research into environmentally friendly cars should be supported, so as to overcome the current dependence on fossil fuels and its cost.

In addition to this, the widening of our public transportation should remain a priority. For instance, people living on the countryside sometimes have limited access to public transportation and have no other choice than to use cars. For this reason sharing or collective use of cars should be promoted. Moreover, public transportation networks have to be extended and should as far as possible be for free, as it is the case in several cities or regions in Europe, and city centres should be closed to polluting cars. The speed limit should generally be limited in order to decrease carbon dioxide emissions, which would diminish pollution rates in big cities.

8. Electronic Infrastructure

Today there are immense possibilities to save in the green space; this is because of the technology revolution. We should seek to improve our existing electronic infrastructure so that people can more and more work from home or on the move. Imagine if you didn't have to take the bus or car to work, you simply logged on to your computer and start working.

Towards the next United Nations Conference on Climate Change

A United Nations Conference on Climate Change will take place in Paris next year. This has to be a major moment in the international fight against the current and increasing climate disaster. This paper and its proposals should therefore be the base of a common European campaign in 2015 to influence this summit and push for ambitious environmental goals in our countries, in Europe and at the global level.