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Supporting democracy and fostering renewal in times of change

International Social Democracy undergoing transformation

Our values: Freedom, justice and solidarity

The joint set of values held by social democratic and socialist parties – Freedom, justice and solidarity – is sturdy and held in high esteem around the globe. These values are echoed in many social campaigns. The challenge facing our movement is to gain enough confidence to be able to reconcile these values with current problems and then draw practical conclusions for political topics and strategies, the forming of alliances, a political style and party structure.

Overcoming contradictions: Thinking and acting together to achieve new solutions

In light of global and internal social challenges, progressive, socialist and social democratic parties are now needed more than ever. In the past, they were often called for when the lines of conflict between different forms of political, social and economic ideas became evident, when central rifts in society had to be dealt with, contradictions had to be overcome and differing interests and opinions had to be resolved. And whenever large sections of society have a strong need for explanations and alternative solutions with regard to the current state of affairs, as is now the case, this ability to think together and act together has to be strengthened again.

Challenges for our movement



The radical changes in the cultural, economic, organisational and bureaucratic foundations of our work pose a challenge. The issues at hand involve developments and phenomena such as the dissolution of traditional (working class) environments and the differentiation of societies, structural changes in the economy and pressure on social democratic efforts to introduce regulation into the nation state, determination to combat neo-liberal policies, the holistic discussion on ecological and economic issues, the loss of former allies and the revival of populism.

What is more, in many countries and regions political parties – and not just those belonging to our movement – are so severely suppressed that they cannot fulfil their democratic and social role.

For a culture of independence and understanding

The goal of our political activities is a good life for everyone, where people are free, enjoy respect, determine their own lives and are safe. Our activities must be based on a political humanism that takes people seriously – with all their anxieties, but also and above all, with their ability to help in solving problems. Our politics must allow people to actively contribute their own political ideas in order to shape and decide the future. While right-wing populists promote a culture of dependency and ignorance, social democratic and socialist politics help people regain their world by their own efforts – in cooperation with others – to give it a new meaning and to reinstate community spirit. But this new political humanism also includes standing up to those who claim that nothing can be changed anyway. In fact, we must also take up the struggle for the future again, for our societies have a tremendous need for an open, adaptable future which involves more than just paying off debts and remedying the sins of the past. It is not just a matter of overcoming the past, we have to create a future as well.

Combining alternative visions with concrete measures

What does this mean specifically? We need convincing, plausible and attractive alternatives, each combined with a strategy for action.

These must encompass both political strategies and initial projects for the here and now as well as long-term ideas and plans in order to establish a relationship between everyday political activities and far-reaching visions. Actually, we need not reinvent the wheel, since all this talk of ‘no alternative’ is unfounded because numerous practical and concrete suggestions already exist: the parameters of an energy transition have already been calculated, implementable climate protection plans have been drafted and detailed suggestions for a radical banking reform have been discussed, concrete measures to contain the financial markets and transnational corporations even further, to reduce inequality and implement decent jobs have been presented worldwide. And now that the ‘Agenda 2030 for a sustainable development’ has been approved by the international community, a global framework for the vision of social and ecological transformation is also in place – with specific aims and indicators.

Four benchmarks for our policies

- **Establishing justice:** Instead of only partially occupying ourselves with the social question in moral terms, as conservative parties do, we must establish social justice across all fields of politics – economics, security, climate change and the environment, technology, education and health – the core element of our policies
- **Building trust and confidence:** However difficult it may be, we have to start promoting trust and confidence – both between and within societies, in local communities, at a national level and in the field of international politics. This means that political and social trust and confidence have to be established and erosion of trust and confidence must be avoided. Trust and confidence are the essence of political and social action, they form the real, mutual “security contract” as well as being the essential requirement for cooperation.
- **Renewing democracy:** The scope for democracy has been severely restricted in many countries. Democratic structures are being steadily weakened and democratic processes reduced to



government procedures, plebiscites and public relations work; the ability of democratic politics to assert itself against economic power has diminished. On the other hand, the emphatic understanding of democracy, i. e. democracy as a ‘form of life’ and a laboratory in which people try out different forms of coexistence, has become less important or has not even been developed in many countries. However, democracy is also needed as a resource for political, economic and social innovation and creating values.

- **Overcoming differences and cooperating:** One cannot resolve differences by simply ignoring them, but by facing up to them and trying to resolve them together with other players in society. The ability to cooperate is still the main resource of modern power and the capacity to shape the world we live in. And for this reason, we must concentrate on creating and strengthening cooperative and inclusive institutions.

Key topics of social-democratic politics

In the coming years, we will have to concentrate on topics which are key to the social and ecological transformation process, contribute to the renewal of democracy, “motivate” our society and parties, help to build trust and confidence within and between societies and which emphasise fundamental socialist and social democratic values. These include:

- **Digitalisation and climate change – shaping the widespread transformation process**

In the coming years, digitalisation will have a decisive effect not only on the economy and the labour market, but also on our social coexistence. Digitalisation is a major driving force in the international division of labour. This trend will increase in the coming years; the linking of different technologies such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing, smart phones, robotics and biotechnology will increase the differentiation of labour even further. Digitalisation, however, poses a challenge not only for the labour market and social stability, but also for human freedom. At



the same time, digital technologies harbour a potential for transformation in terms of decent jobs and emancipatory progress. The question as to who will reap the “digital dividends” has not yet been decided. Similar to the way the Industrial Revolution shaped 20th century society both politically and socially, the labour movement and social democracy are currently facing the immense challenge of shaping the digital revolution in political, social and human terms.

We must formulate an even profounder response to the imminent self-imposed threats to civilisation. The WWF’s Living Planet Report comes to the conclusion that two planets will be needed to cover mankind’s food, water and energy needs by 2030 and just under three planets by 2050 if the world continues to deplete resources at the current rate. So in this respect we need a rapid change of attitude. The urgently needed de-carbonisation of the economy must be stringently linked to the social issues and renewal of democracy. Otherwise social inequality will increase and acceptance of ecological renewal measures will decline, especially among those who have already suffered as a result of structural transformation processes in the past. This is a monumental task, but it is up to our movement to master this challenge. For some societies, this means that just and fair transitions must be achieved for those affected by ecological transformation. In a global context this means that the developed countries (including a number of emerging economies) will have to restructure their economic system, while at the same time the developing countries must be put in a position to mitigate damage that has already been done and move in the direction of sustainable development.

- **Taming the global economy**

If the aim is to make economic development more sustainable, to strengthen confidence in politics and within societies, to reduce inequality and to focus economic processes on the needs of the



people, then political taming of the international financial markets will have to be at the top of the agenda.

The economic, political and psychological damage caused by the crisis of 2008 was devastating. Despite a number of reforms, we still have a long way to go if we want to achieve the goals of the G20 resolutions of 2008, envisaging comprehensive supervision of all players, products and markets in the financial sector. The financial markets continue to pose a considerable risk and, by nature, are directed against the interests of the vast majority of people in our societies. In our opinion, transformation of the financial markets and reforms to trade policies must include the following: stricter regulation of the shadow-banking system, a functioning separate banking system, the prohibition of risky transactions and speculation with agricultural and energy commodities, regulation of high-frequency trading, massive expansion of supervision and a reform of the rating agencies' business models. These measures should also include a reversal of international tax policies, for example by ending the ruinous competition for the lowest tax rates, as well as transparency obligations for transnational corporations and a systematic shut-down of tax havens.

- **Responsibility to prevent – avoiding conflicts**

In a world that has become increasingly complex, we must work at various levels towards developing networks of trust which allow joint action. Active diplomacy that accepts responsibility and attempts to search for common perspectives and interests is the fundamental requirement for this endeavour. The most sustainable way of gaining trust is to stabilise and develop effective international organisations. Progressive, socialist and social-democratic politics have always included a strong commitment to firm embedding in international organisations. The global tasks currently facing us cannot be managed without a strong United Nations. Many people are put off by the UN's (apparent) unwillingness to introduce reforms. But we should take the UN



seriously. This means, for example, striving to ensure that we actually use the UN more in conflict situations, strengthen it by means of precise initiatives and take steps to ensure that it also has the personnel and financial means to perform its tasks. Strengthening disarmament and arms control initiatives, improving the UN's 2030 Agenda, extending instruments for crisis prevention – all these are targets which our parties can specifically pursue in the next few years.

In many countries, crises and conflicts have destroyed progress or hampered development. One central topic inside and outside the UN will therefore be the importance of civil crisis prevention. When discussing security, one should always ask oneself: Whose security are we talking about? Who do we want to protect and what is the danger? The instruments of crisis prevention, mediation and post-conflict rehabilitation should be the key elements of the peace policies of our parties in the years to come.

- **Breaking new ground for gender equality**
Despite improvements with regard to political participation and access to education in recent years, significant gender-gaps are still prevalent in the world of work as well as in politics and society. Even if neoliberal institutions are promoting female participation and leadership, the reason behind it is not to achieve gender equality but to maximise profit. Additionally, only a small stratum of women is benefiting while gender-based discrimination for the less privileged is on the rise. Fuelled by a comeback of fundamentalists promoting a “natural” hierarchy between the sexes, a reinstatement of patriarchal power relations can be observed globally.

Creating equal opportunities for everyone with regard to political, economic and social participation is a core value of progressive parties and will not only promote socially just and sustainable growth, but also political stability, social cohesion, solidarity, and the redistribution of resources. Forging alliances with the feminist



movement and other social movements striving for gender equality is therefore imperative.

- **A world on the move - shaping migration policies**

The world is on the move and this situation will persist for years to come. Exodus and migration will continue to increase all around the world. The reasons for this are many and varied: People flee from war and adverse climate conditions, from their own governments and from social deprivation.

There are two key issues here: Firstly, migration policies have to be shaped on a global basis. The two major processes involved are a “Global Compact Initiative for safe, orderly and regular migration” and a “Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework”. Ongoing negotiation processes will culminate in government-level negotiations at the UN in 2018. Even though it is unlikely that a new binding convention will be developed here, it is nevertheless an important step towards a global debate on regulated migration. We want to be closely involved in this process with our own proposals and regard it as a central element of a new migration policy.

Secondly, a more accurate concept of the phrase “combating the causes for migration and flight” needs to be developed and made politically manageable. This requires more expertise and sensitisation. In this context, one must of course discuss the reasons why people flee their country, as well as the causes of migration and flight that were “made in the rich countries”. In particular, however, a systematic review of which policies promote flight and migration and which policies reduce it must be made.

- **Progressive, socialist and social-democratic parties as community parties**

Strong actors are needed to react to social developments, to provide orientation and to propose and implement solutions. These are, above all, the tasks of our parties. In order to perform these tasks, we must work on further development within our parties. Progressive, socialist and social-democratic parties must



aspire to shape and utilise state-run institutions. They are also expected to make an ideological, social and cultural impact on conflicts within society. This task can only be performed in an alliance with others. However, in order to act as a link, our parties must develop more strongly into community parties, remaining in close personal contact with all people, social movements and organisations following progressive, socialist and social-democratic approaches outside of the party. Thus our policies are not solely geared to attaining power: By forming social alliances, they also promote tangible changes beyond government level.