



## **STRENGTHENING LINKS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY**

The S&D Group stands for radical changes in the European Union – changes that can be achieved only through a broad alliance of forces within the political system and society in general. That is why a close working relationship with trade unions, non-governmental organisations and civil society is essential to our way of doing politics.

During this whole legislative period we have used each opportunity to renew strategic relations between the progressive left and civil society. The S&D Group has worked for an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representatives of trades unions and NGOs to give a new impetus to this relationship.

The main aims of the new approach are:

- to create synergies through common political activities and joint actions.
- to look at common political priorities such as long-term sustainable growth, more and better jobs and greater social inclusion and equality for all.
- to work for a cohesive approach to major issues such as a progressive vision of social issues, environment-friendly production and consumption and creation of high-quality and safe jobs.

Dialogue has been at the heart of this new relationship, to communicate and to listen. The S&D Group is not only ready to listen to the views of trades unions and NGOs but it has shown itself to be open to effective cooperation, beginning with improved social dialogue at all levels.

Specifically, the S&D Group has developed various tools:

1. seminars/conferences with European trade union federations, national trade union offices and non-governmental organisations
2. targeted mailing lists with trade union federations, non-governmental organisations, sectoral press contacts
3. an internal "early warning system".

### **Seminars**

The S&D Group has organised regular seminars/conferences with European trade union partners and non-governmental organisations to establish better policy cooperation and to deal with specific problems. The aim has also been to improve communication by

strengthening ties with civil society organisations' political officers responsible for links with the EP and by developing short-, medium- and long-term actions together.

An example of this cooperation between civil society and the S&D Group was the S&D conference in May 2013 "ACCESS TO QUALITY LONG-TERM CARE: A RIGHT FOR ALL". In particular in times of crisis, when many European governments are making cuts in healthcare, it is of crucial importance that the European Social Model can guarantee the right to quality long-term care, accessible to all in the European Union, and the protection of vulnerable people with increased care needs.

The conference was attended by hundreds of trade union members coming from all over Europe to discuss this topical issue with MEPs, the European Commission, experts and NGO representatives. The event was webstreamed and the debate was broadcast by a trade union radio, Articolo 21, to reach the highest number of citizens.

### **Mailing lists**

The S&D Group has set up targeted mailing lists to ensure that our contacts in civil society regularly receive the information they need to be effective in the European political arena. We aim to avoid spamming our partners, but to provide the most useful information on S&D Group positions, what is in the Parliamentary pipeline, bring their expertise into the debate and encourage their involvement in political initiatives on which we have common aims.

### **The internal "early warning system"**

In order to better coordinate, structure and strengthen our relations with trades unions and NGOs, the Group put this system into place to ensure that whenever the S&D Group organises meetings that deal with a topic of interest for either of these actors, they are properly informed and invited to take part.

Equally, when the S&D Group political advisor in charge of relations with civil society is aware of any initiative by the trades unions and NGOs which could be politically relevant for the activities of the Group, he or she will alert colleagues for follow-up. The idea is to have an open door through which information and coordinated efforts can circulate in both directions to maximise results.

### **European Economic & Social Committee and Committee of the Regions**

The S&D Group is also in constant liaison with the Workers' Group in the European Economic and Social Committee, representing civil society via its more than 80 trade union organisations, and with the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions, composed of representatives of local authorities, the power centres closest to European citizens.

With both we have been working closely on common actions to defend and improve European social structures and give citizens a real say in European policy-making.