

# DELIVERING PROGRESS

**A RECORD OF SOCIALIST GROUP ACHIEVEMENTS**

**PES COUNCIL IN MADRID | 1-2 DECEMBER 2008**





The European elections of 2009 will clearly influence the remaining months of this European Parliament's term. During the campaign, the Socialist Group will build on its past achievements and its clear political priorities in fighting to become the new parliament's largest political group.

Citizens want a European Union that is more social, more inclusive, more democratic, more efficient and more transparent. We will keep up our commitment to improving people's daily lives by bringing about progress on specific measures at European level.

Despite the fact that our group is currently the second largest in the parliament, it has been the institution's political driving force. Our unity and coherence has allowed us to play a determining role in legislation.

It was the Socialists who in 2004 shaped the structure of the incoming European Commission by making full use of democratic scrutiny in the parliamentary hearings of nominees. We not only secured the replacement of nominees but also influenced the distribution and content of portfolios. It has become clear that Socialist Group support is essential for the Commission's work. We are in a position to build solid majorities to change Commission proposals or to request Commission action.

The Socialist Group changed its internal organisation to meet the new challenges of this legislature and to improve our profile and overall coordination. Close cooperation between the Group and the Party is vital to our success.

Our successes include:

### **A Social European Model**

The Socialist Group has been a reference point on social Europe throughout this parliamentary term. We fight tirelessly for a fairer Europe with more job opportunities and a safe environment, a Europe in which citizenship means rights and duties for everyone.

#### **- better economic governance**

The financial crisis shows that the market is sometimes the problem and politics the solution: where markets have failed, only strong and coordinated action can restore confidence. In times of economic recession it is up to the state to protect vulnerable people and promote growth. The Socialist Group has long called for a European investment strategy to accelerate the creation of a low-energy, high-skill knowledge economy, and for a Europe-wide boost to investment in housing, schools, hospitals and other social infrastructure.

We need not only economic recovery but also better economic governance and a more progressive society.

We have been stressing for a long time that without strong regulation and public supervision, markets, especially financial markets, are inherently unstable. While the Liberals and the EPP observed vows of silence, we worked intensively for two years on this issue. We put forward the Rasmussen report in September 2008, asking the Commission to ensure more transparency and stability in hedge funds and private equity. It was also the Socialists who shortly afterwards steered through the van den Burg/Daianu report to review the European system of financial market supervision and identify improvements.

#### **- share prosperity and create more and better jobs**

The Socialist Group called for revised EU 'Integrated Policy Guidelines for Growth and Jobs' to reflect changing economic realities. We managed to win the support of the European Parliament for our priorities. Despite our overwhelming majority, the European Council of March 2008 confirmed the European Commission's position with only minor changes.

We will keep promoting the public debate and pushing for our priorities, so that citizens benefit from:

- better social protection and inclusion;
- effective measures for reconciling professional and family life;
- minimum social standards;
- implementation of legislation on equal pay;
- high-quality, accessible and sustainable public services;
- coordinated investment in research and development;

One of the main concerns of our Group is to deliver. So in 2008 we began to follow up the member states' adoption of the services directive. The services directive and the Gebhardt report were highly controversial and a great success for our Group because we managed to change the neo-liberal proposal into a socially-oriented directive. We have continued to campaign for a European legal framework to safeguard public services from legal uncertainty, and to entrench the autonomy of public authorities at national and regional level in this area. In alliance with a broad coalition of stakeholders, we have managed to increase the public profile of this issue.

After the European Court of Justice's Laval judgement, the Socialist Group undertook a serious assessment of the consequences of this case for workers' rights. This led to the adoption in October 2008 of the Andersson report on challenges to collective agreements in the EU. For us, the free movement of services must not contradict or override the fundamental rights of trades unions. Free movement of workers, equal treatment and fundamental social rights must never be subordinated to economic freedoms. We need to continue to improve living and working conditions for workers across the Union and to reject a race to the bottom.

Our Group therefore took the lead in asking for a re-assertion in primary law of the balance between fundamental rights and economic freedoms.

The Socialist Group continues to be the parliamentary group fighting the hardest and most successfully for workers' rights in the EU, stressing the need for a work/life balance, for quality jobs and for regulated working hours.

That is why we consider the Social Package proposed by the Commission to be too little too late, even though we welcome proposals that take up longstanding Socialist requests. We continue to work to improve the content of this package.

That is also why the Working Time Directive (Cercas report) has been a fundamental fight for us. At first reading, following a Socialist Group lead, the EP insisted on an end to the opt-out within three years of the adoption of the directive. The vote in committee ahead of the second reading confirmed the EP's first reading and negotiations with the Council continue.

### **- fight climate change**

Socialists believe that if we are to leave a sustainable planet to future generations, we must fight climate change with ambitious, effective policies and rules based on clear targets and timetables.

The Parliament is now working on legislation about climate change and renewable energy, with Socialist members playing a leading role.

The Socialist Group wants an ambitious package that reconciles strong environmental goals with the competitiveness of European industry and job protection. Such a package will enable the EU to have a clear position ahead of global negotiations.

We urge a boost to green investment to allow an ecological industrial revolution in the years to come whilst helping to avoid a lasting recession.

### **- empower consumers**

In the consumer credit directive of 2007, the timeshare directive, revision of existing consumer legislation and the telecom and energy package, the Socialist Group strengthened consumers' rights. Throughout this legislature, the Group supported the creation of a collective redress mechanism within the EU, having finally won over the right wing, and is now waiting for proposals from the Commission.

In all legislation adopted since 2004, the Socialist Group managed to add special provisions for vulnerable consumers and we made this a priority for consumer strategy from 2007 to 2013. Combating energy poverty was one of our key priorities in debates on the internal market for electricity and gas.

Stricter health and consumer safeguards on food additives and a ban on misleading consumer information result from Socialist action. Children will be protected from dangerous chemicals because we secured specific labelling for food with colourings that could harm their health. We have also sought safeguards against dangerous toys.

In the first half of the legislature, our Group was successful in making producers and importers responsible for analysing their chemicals and proving either that they are safe or that their use is necessary and strictly controlled. The REACH procedure, a complex piece of legislation steered through by Socialist MEP Guido Sacconi, is a perfect example of our priority in balancing competitiveness and development with consumer protection.

The Socialist Group unanimously pressed for community funding for Galileo, a major industrial project to improve people's daily lives, which by 2013 will give the EU a satellite navigation system offering a wide range of services beyond travel and including communications and Earth observation. This major EU industrial project will bring technological innovation and jobs across Europe.

### **- put an end to discrimination**

On becoming Commission President in 2004, Jose Manuel Barroso gave Parliament a commitment to work on a wide-ranging directive outlawing discrimination outside the workplace. A strong, united Socialist Group – confronted by strong, right-wing conservative opposition -- spearheaded an alliance of progressive forces in urging the Commission to honour its commitment.

On 2 July 2008, the Commission finally proposed a directive outlawing discrimination outside the workplace on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

### **- manage immigration and foster integration**

The Socialist Group stands for a common European migration policy, a European Charter for the Integration of Migrants and EU codes of conduct for ethical recruitment and decent work. Member states should act in solidarity, sharing costs and responsibilities.

The rights of migrants, especially women, who face double-discrimination, must be respected, taking into account the needs both of EU member states and of the countries of origin and transit.

These principles, which underpin our action in this policy area, led us to vote against the Returns directive. They also led us to take the initiative for a compromise on the brain drain effect of the blue card that will allow highly skilled third-country nationals to take up jobs in the EU. We urge the member states to award the blue card within the framework of cooperation agreements with third countries.

## **- involve citizens and fight for their rights**

The Socialist Group responded to the EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) by exploring positive solutions to tensions. We addressed minority rights, populism and democracy, and the challenge of rising nationalism; we called for an EU Strategy for Roma people and we engaged in an extensive and fruitful dialogue with Muslim communities. For us, intercultural dialogue must be based on citizenship, empowerment for both women and men and the involvement of both EU and non-EU citizens in economic, social and political life.

We secured renewal of the Daphne III programme on tackling violence against women -- with a substantially increased budget. We have pressed for more action against human trafficking which affects 100,000 people, mostly women, in Europe every year.

We believe that media pluralism is important for social inclusion. We have acted for the protection of minors and access to culture and sport. Creativity is an important factor in promoting European citizenship and in bringing cultures and people together.

It was our Group that led efforts to increase funds for the lifelong learning programme 2007-2013, allowing more people to benefit from study and professional training abroad.

## **An enlarged Europe**

The European Parliament that emerged from the 2004 elections was the first with MEPs from 25 and later 27 member states. The Socialist Group has a positive, realistic and forward-looking position on EU enlargement as a huge opportunity for Europe and its citizens. If we can now speak of successful enlargement, this is mainly due to our Group's fundamental message of integration and shared commitment.

The future of Europe and the progress of the candidate countries (Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Turkey) are important for us. Turkey's accession talks illustrate the ideological divide between us and the EPP. Some EPP members believe that Turkey should not be allowed to join the EU because it is a largely Muslim country, but they hide this view behind a call on the EU 'to remain a community of shared values'. We remain committed to Turkey's accession without new preconditions and we reject the idea of a 'privileged partnership'. This issue will come to the fore again ahead of the European Elections with the adoption of Turkey's 2008 Progress Report. The Socialist Group believes that the EU should now strongly engage with Turkey - a country that has proven to be an indispensable partner for the EU, playing a positive role for peace and security in the South Caucasus and the Middle East.

However, to keep enlarging, Europe needs to go through a process of reform.

## **A more democratic and effective Europe**

In order to face forthcoming challenges we need a strong Europe. The Socialist Group - and the overwhelming majority of the EP – therefore backs the Lisbon Treaty, which will make the Union more democratic, transparent and efficient. It will bring the EU closer to its citizens by boosting the role of European and national Parliaments and by strengthening citizens' rights. EU decision-making rules and policy areas will be more clearly defined in the new Treaty. We therefore await the outcome of the December Council with great interest.

## **A Europe with a global vision**

We want the European Union to be a strong and reliable partner at international level.

Our first concern is a good relationship with our closest neighbours in the East and in the South. In that context we have supported all initiatives to strengthen the European Neighbourhood Policy and bilateral relations with our northern and eastern neighbours. More particularly, the Socialist Group proposed a Union for the Black Sea to create a framework for

cooperation that offers more opportunities to strengthen political and economic ties with the EU.

The Socialist Group is convinced that Europe could and should play a more active role in relation to our Mediterranean neighbours. In that context, peace in the Middle East is a cornerstone of our activities. Apart from initiating numerous parliamentary debates, the Group has organised conferences, seminars and workshops focusing on political, economic and social developments in the Middle East, keeping this high on the agenda.

We have been a staunch ally of the world's poorest countries. Socialists find it unacceptable that 850 million people go hungry everyday and we put the principle that every human being has the right to food at the heart of the EP. So, we fought for members states to keep their promise of a one billion Euro food facility to help poor countries face the food crisis. At the same time, we keep working for a sustainable EU food and agricultural policy - with Capoulas Santos, the Socialist rapporteur who worked on the CAP-Health check - and to ensure sustainable regulation of global agricultural markets.

The Socialist Group is also strongly committed to a successful, development-friendly Doha Round and in making sure that Economic Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are genuine development tools.

We want a safer and more peaceful world. We strongly believe that democracy, the rule of law, good governance and strong civil societies are the best means of conflict prevention. We therefore support emerging democracies through election observation and through assistance in capacity-building. We are the leading force within the Parliament calling for prevention or peaceful resolution of conflicts, supporting an end to all forms of violence and standing for genuine dialogue and respect for human rights.

We support the fight against terrorism and we strongly believe that security aspects of this fight must be reconciled with the rights of the individual.

### **The road ahead**

Before the end of the legislature, the EU will face major challenges:

- preventing a lasting recession in the aftermath of the financial crisis;
- helping small firms and vulnerable households most at risk;
- creating strong regulation and supervision of the financial sector to ensure its stability, transparency, accountability and probity;
- helping to build a new, more progressive and democratic form of global economic governance;
- adopting an ambitious and sustainable climate change and renewable energy package; and
- further engaging with our world partners.

Despite all our successes, much work remains to be done to ensure that our values and principles are implemented in all these policy fields, so that Europe is a better place to live in and an example to the rest of the world.

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