



Activity Report

of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists
and Democrats Group in the European Parliament

From Rome to Budapest:
fifteen months of challenges for the Socialists and Democrats

PES Congress, Budapest 11-13 June 2015



Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament

This Activity Report of the S&D Group is a continuation of the reports submitted to the PES Congress in Prague, Brussels and Rome. In the meantime, the European elections, the appointment of the Juncker Commission and the beginnings of a new European Parliament have taken place in a new political context for the S&D Group, now led by Gianni Pittella.

This report was updated on 29 April 2015.

Foreword

The 2014 European elections were a warning shot for the European project. The turnout was a mere 42.6% for the whole European Union. Eurosceptic and populist parties succeeded in making alarming inroads in various countries. At the other end of the political spectrum the radical left also made progress.

The voters were clearly sending a signal of distrust regarding a European project equated with austerity, against a background of political, economic and major social crisis.

The social divide in Europe is a tragic reality. Social inequalities on our continent have become comparable to those in the United States. More than ever, our political family must prove that the problem is not Europe, but what the right has done.

Europe needs an economic and social paradigm shift, and we have worked towards this during the electoral campaign and since the beginning of this new Parliament.

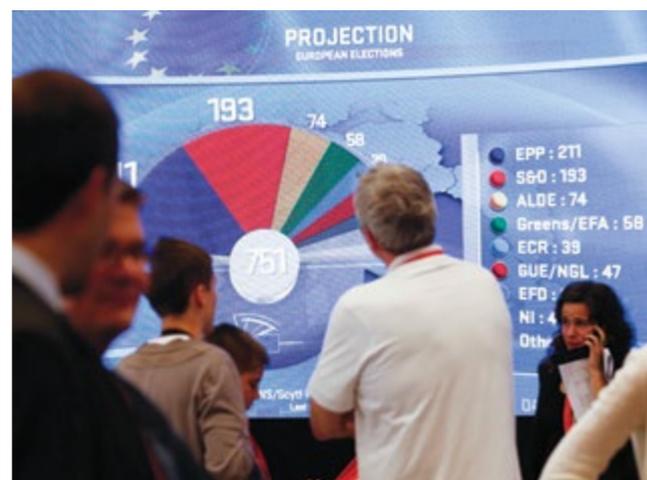
We are taking steps to ensure that Europe moves from a model of pure, harsh austerity to an alternative based on sound public finances, but also on growth, solidarity, the creation of decent jobs and an ambitious European social model. It will be our Group's responsibility to continue to further these goals in our parliamentary work.


GIANNI PITTELLA
S&D Group president

Elections of May 2014

new challenges for the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

Europe needs an economic and social paradigm shift, and we have worked towards this during the electoral campaign and since the beginning of this new Parliament.



The 2014 election campaign was very different from previous ones. For the first time, drawing the conclusions of the Lisbon Treaty which stipulates that the Council takes account of European election results when proposing a candidate for President of the Commission, the major European political parties presented their official candidates for the position.

At its Congress in Rome, the PES proposed a candidate for the first time – Martin Schulz, currently President of the European Parliament. The 2014 election campaign therefore had a greater European dimension than in the past, with a debate between the candidates of the major European political families in which Martin Schulz led a remarkable and determined campaign based on a progressive agenda for real change. Indeed, this debate was not only conducted between pro and anti-Europeans, but between advocates of a neoliberal Europe and austerity, and our political family; embodying the requirement for a more social alternative based on recovery.

The results of the European elections were also full of surprises, determining a new political landscape for the European Parliament that is more complex than in the past. Despite polls that had placed us neck and neck with the EPP, our Group maintained

its position with 191 deputies out of 751 (25.4%), compared to 194 out of 766 members (25.3%) in the previous Parliament. This was also thanks to a policy of openness to new political alliances, as we shall see later. The conservative EPP suffered a veritable bloodletting, losing 55 seats, but managed to maintain their leading position with 219 seats. Thus, with a lead of 28 seats, despite being considerably weakened, the EPP was still able to claim the presidency of the European Commission, although without the benefit of a balance of power that was as advantageous as in the past.

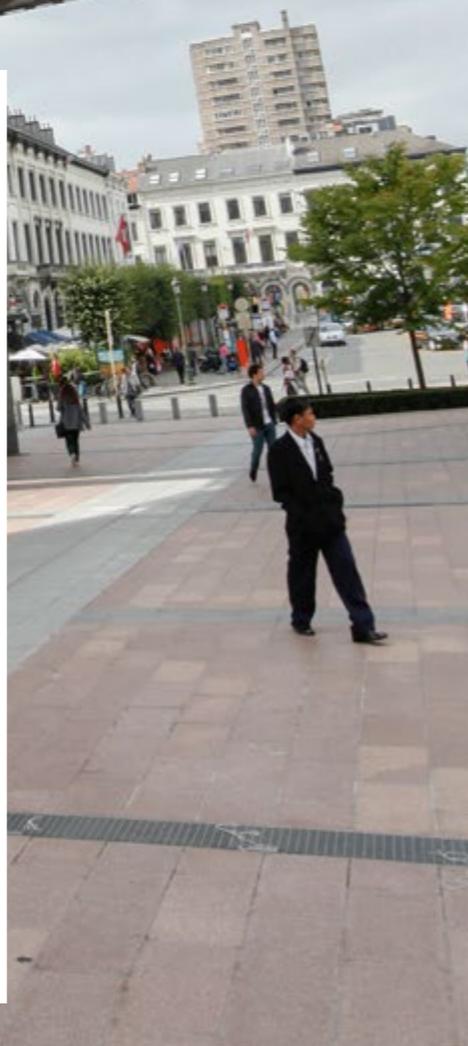
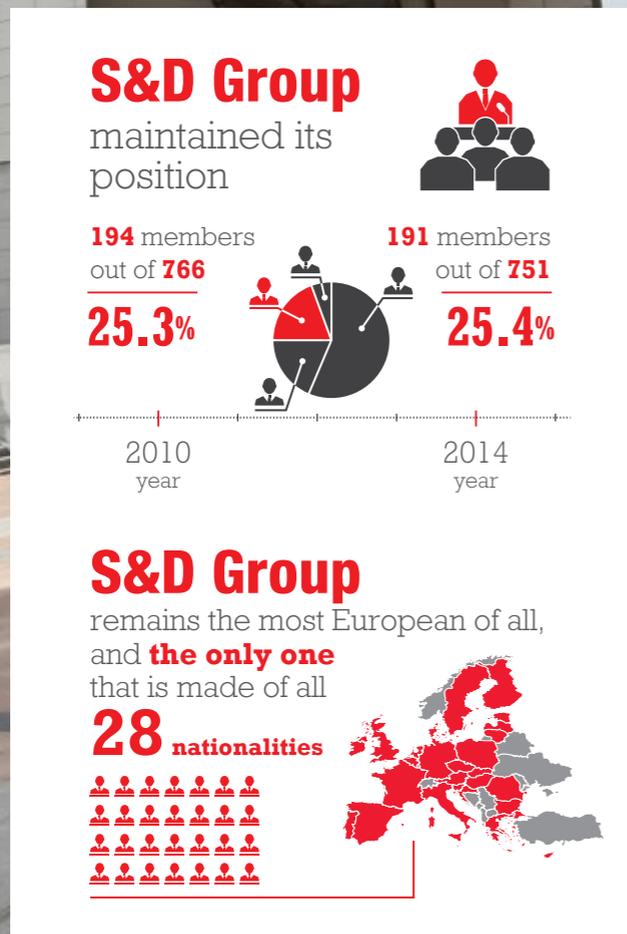
The defeat of the EPP has therefore not benefited us, but rather the ranks of Eurosceptics and/or the extreme right who are fortunately unable to unite on a broad scale. The ECR Group of conservatives and Eurosceptics were delighted with third place, outnumbering the Liberals, with 72 seats versus 68 for the ALDE. The radical left GUE took advantage of the unpopularity of austerity policies in many countries and increased its number of members from 35 to 52. Then came the Greens/European Free Alliance, which fell from 58 seats to 50, with EFDD Group rising to 47 seats compared with 31 in the previous Parliament, and finally unaffiliated members, essentially made up of the extreme right, with 52 seats.

The composition of the European Parliament

	January 2014	March 2015	Difference
Group of the European People's Party	274	219	-55
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	194	191	-3
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	85	68	-17
Green Group - European Free Alliance	58	50	-8
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	57	72	+15
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	35	52	+17
Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (2014) and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (2015)	31	47	+16
Unaffiliated	32	52	+20
European Parliament	766	751	



This debate was conducted between advocates of a neoliberal Europe and austerity, and our political family embodying the requirement for a more social alternative based on recovery.



Ultimately, one could consider that the overall winners were the right and extreme right Eurosceptics, whether the ECR, EFDD and the majority of the unaffiliated members on the one hand, and the radical left GUE on the other. The Europhile political parties lost ground (EPP, Liberals, Greens) or held their own (S&D). We have also observed a political fragmentation with the emergence of new parties, like Alternative für Deutschland, the Movimento Cinque Stelle, the Nazis of the Golden Dawn or NDP, and new radical left formations such as Syriza and Podemos.

To Potami from Greece, Demokratikus Koalicio from Hungary and Feministiskt Initiativ from Sweden. Of course, we had the precedent of the Italian Partito Democratico, with which the new group was formed in 2009 and which subsequently joined the PES at the Congress in Rome. But the renewal of this broadening experience is worth mentioning and pursuing. It should also be stressed that our Group remains the most European of all, and the only one that is made up of all 28 nationalities.

The formation of political groups to the right of the spectrum was also marked by frantic horse-trading to fulfil the conditions for recognition of a group, namely to have at least 25 MEPs from at least seven member states. The ECR and EFDD were the winners, while the project of Le Pen and Wilders to form an ostensibly “presentable” far-right group without the most openly fascist parties narrowly failed due to a lack of candidates.

Our Group will play a central role in Parliament, as it has in the past, first of all by strengthening its internal cohesion despite its greater diversity. Our Group has always been strongest when it has managed to remain united and build internal consensus. We also establish space for dialogue and almost daily contact within the political family of Socialists and Democrats, and we must take advantage of this to continue building an identity and a common project, making us a unique model of trans-European cohesion. This is a big difference compared to the EPP, which is torn between an ‘old guard’ of centrist Christian Democrats and more radical parties, sometimes on the extreme fringes of the far right, whose main common point seems to be a wish to block progressive forces.

An important development was also observed in our family, namely the opening of our Group to progressive parties sharing our core values, even if they are not members of the Party of European Socialists:

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A progressive and responsible approach

Our impetus has undermined the European Union's approach dominated by neo-liberal dogmatism and blind austerity. We forcefully demand the end of the Troikas, a hateful symbol of austerity policies, economically absurd and undemocratic in the way they were imposed.



Let us be clear:
without the support of the S&D
Group, the Juncker Commission
would not exist.

Our focus is especially
directed on the Commission's
investment plan, which we
demand authorship of as a
central requirement of the
electoral campaign conducted
by our political family.

- 1 **Martin Schulz**, President of the European Parliament
- 2 **Federica Mogherini**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
- 3 **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the Commission for the Energy Union
- 4 **Pierre Moscovici**, European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs
- 5 **Frans Timmermans**, First Vice-President of the European Commission and the European Commissioner for Better Regulation, Inter-Institutional Relations, Rule of Law and Charter of Fundamental Rights
- 6 Visit of **Matteo Renzi**, Italian Prime Minister, Strasbourg, November 2014
- 7 **Corina Crețu**, European Commissioner for Regional Policy
- 8 **Neven Mimica**, European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development
- 9 **Vytenis Andriukaitis**, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
- 10 **Karmenu Vella**, European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

At an inter-institutional level, the new balance of power between the three main European political families is now more favourable to us than previously, with the loss of influence of the EPP and the Liberals. This has enabled our Group to exert maximum political pressure during the procedure to appoint the new European Commission, so that the Socialists and Democrats received posts reflecting the importance that the voters granted them.

Among its nine Commissioners, our family was given the positions of High Representative/Vice-President, First Vice-President and one additional Vice-President, and overall our Commissioners' portfolios cover significant European policy areas such as foreign affairs and security, international cooperation and development, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, regional policy, the Energy Union, economic and financial affairs, the environment, maritime affairs and fisheries policy, health and food safety, consumer protection, and justice. We also fought for this Commission to be as balanced as possible between men and women.

One element to consider is the fact that in the new political and institutional framework the S&D can, to a certain extent, play a role as a group supporting a "majority government", given the increased presence of our family within the Commission, our resulting responsibilities, and the momentum underway to ensure that the Juncker Commission adopts an agenda that breaks from the Barroso years.

Let us be clear: without the support of the S&D Group, the Juncker Commission would not exist. Our Group has endorsed this Commission, subject to results in line with a different Europe that is more ambitious, on solidarity, social justice, and investment policies for infrastructure, employment, research, education, sustainable development, that also stimulates SMEs. It remains to be seen how these results will be achieved by the new Commission. Our focus is especially directed towards the Commission's investment plan, which we demanded authorship of as a central platform of the electoral campaign conducted by our political family, and we will evaluate its effectiveness and capacity to mobilise the funds needed for recovery, with a target of 315 billion euros.

In this context, it's clear that more than ever, the cooperation of the Socialists and Democrats in the Parliament, Commission and also the Council will be crucial, and must be continually reinforced. At Group Bureau level in particular, we are pleased to expand our dialogue with socialist Commissioners and participate in socialist preparatory meetings of the various sector committees. Our Group ensures great openness towards fraternal parties and is always ready to lend its political support, especially of our President, Gianni Pittella. We will continue our close cooperation with the PES. Likewise, we maintain close cooperation with trade unions including the CES and FEPS and civil society organisations such as Solidar, and we want to get closer to the public and especially young people through initiatives such

as the 'Relaunching Europe' conferences and the 'School of Democracy', which are extraordinary spaces for dialogue.

During the 2014 election campaign, our political family was keen to highlight its differences compared to the right, especially in its response to the financial, economic and social crisis. Our impetus has undermined the European Union's approach dominated by neo-liberal dogmatism and blind austerity. We forcefully demand the end of the Troikas, a hateful symbol of austerity policies, economically absurd and undemocratic in the way they were imposed.

We are proud to be the parliamentary political force capable of managing this break with the past. Finally, we want to embody European solidarity and the rejection of national selfishness, and we reflected our balanced position in the Greek crisis by refusing the logic of the north/south divide within the European Union.

We will pursue this affirmation of our identity as a Group. In different circumstances, and on politically sensitive issues, we will be able to build progressive coalitions in Parliament. In this context, our potential allies are the Greens and the GUE, but it will also be necessary to rally the more moderate elements of the EPP and the Liberals. This building of progressive majorities remains very difficult because the fragmentation of the right between the EPP, the Liberals, the two Eurosceptic right-wing groups and the morass of non-affiliated members does not alter the fact that the European Parliament remains predominantly conservative or reactionary.

Together, our Group, the GUE and the Greens only represent 39% of the new Parliament. On economic and social issues, there has always been a centrist fringe of the EPP that can join us on an ad hoc basis. The Liberals are a potential partner in matters of ethics and non-discrimination. It will also be interesting to see what the policy of the EPP will be in relation to groups on the right, and whether the fringe of the EPP is tempted by compromises on Eurosceptic and/or extreme right subjects.

The S&D Group,

the driving force of the European Union's social policies

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Social issues are part of our political DNA, and in this regard our Group remained very active last year. In our view the issue of posting of workers remains a major political issue because current legislation does not do enough to effectively combat social dumping, a problem with severe political consequences in many countries of the European Union. Leaving this question unresolved provides a platform for the extreme right and Eurosceptics.

The Barroso Commission was content to merely propose an implementing directive rather than a full review of the legislation, and our Group had no majority in Parliament to give greater scope to this inadequate proposal.

The new Commission only promises a targeted review, and we will see to it that any revisions are in full compliance with the principles of 'equal pay for equal work', the possibilities of member states establishing adequate control mechanisms and accountability in all sectors, and the entire chain of sub-contractors.

In the social field we also played a key role in the adoption of the directive facilitating the exercise of rights for workers who move from one country to another: more information and legal support to combat discrimination, with a significant role for social partners and labour inspectorates, including cross-border commuters, and a good balance between individual and collective rights.

We also contributed to legislation facilitating the acquisition, preservation and transferability of supplementary pension rights for these mobile workers.

Youth unemployment is one of our major concerns, and in 2014 our Group passed a resolution in Parliament demanding a European legal framework with minimum standards for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, high quality internships, and a well-defined framework for dual training courses.

Another resolution in 2014, also our initiative, highlighted the shortcomings of current policies in meeting the objectives of the 2020 strategy, and called for better jobs and greater flexibility in deficit reduction measures to meet this objective. The resolution also demanded improved measures to combat social dumping, a minimum wage and mandatory social protection goals, as well as the integration of social and employment standards in the European Semester process. Fighting unemployment involves close cooperation between public employment services, and our Group asked for their mandatory networking in all member states. Unfortunately, the Council unilaterally decided on voluntary participation and the battle over this point continues to this day.

Another favourite topic of the S&D Group is the demand for a directive, backed up by sanction, setting binding targets to reduce wage inequality

between men and women. More generally, we want the inclusion of targets for gender equality in the 2020 strategy. Let us not forget our actions to combat violence against women, including the demand for a framework directive, as well as the development of the Directive on the rights of victims and the European protection order, offering victims better assistance and protection.

We are closely monitoring the correct implementation of the Directive against people trafficking. We demand an ambitious agenda for the promotion of women in decision-making bodies, such as boards of directors, and for the inclusion of sexual health and reproductive rights in the public health strategy. The Directive on maternity leave, blocked for years in the Council, remains a major demand of our Group, as is the general issue of parental leave as a whole.

11 Relaunching Europe, Nicosia, 2014

12 Maternity Leave Directive, Sylvie Guillaume, Vice-President of the European Parliament, Brussels September 2014

13 Female Genital Mutilation, Brussels, April 2014

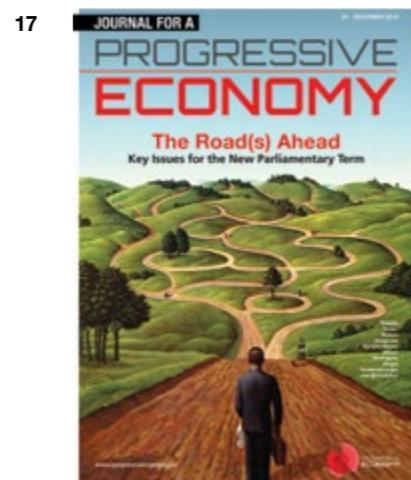
14 Relaunching Europe, Naples, September 2014

An economy that serves

its citizens and the real economy



NO
TAX HAVENS



The effects of the financial, economic and social crisis are still keenly felt, and the huge job of regulating the financial sector is far from complete. Our Group has contributed to protecting the public against the excesses of the sector, strengthening the single resolution mechanism adopted in 2014, accelerating the creation of its own fund and giving it borrowing capacity. This will help to protect the taxpayer and real economy against bank failures.

At the same time we also fought for the reform of bank structures to ensure separation between 'conventional' deposit activities and speculative activities. In future we will examine the EU's capital markets project, which is still at draft stage. We will also continue our fight for fairer taxation and against fraud and tax evasion. As such, and in the wake of the LuxLeaks affair, we were behind the creation of the special parliamentary committee on tax rulings and other similar measures, commonly known as 'the TAXE committee'.

We believe that public investment is essential for the recovery policies that Europe needs. We fully support our socialist Commissioner in his smart and flexible approach to the Stability and Growth Pact, so that it is no longer in contradiction with investment requirements and is also perfectly compatible with the need to clean up public finances. Our demand for a 'golden rule', by which strategic investments are not counted as part of national budgetary adjustments, was finally applied, completely breaking with the dogmatism of the Barroso years. More fundamentally, we are continuing our fight for radical reform of the Economic and Monetary Union.

We fought for public tendering that incorporates social and environmental criteria and encourages innovation and quality, with complete transparency throughout the chain of contractors and subcontractors. This was achieved thanks to the directive adopted in 2014, under the initiative of the S&D Group.

We want an economy that serves its citizens and not the other way round. This means a consumer policy, which our Group has championed in Parliament, including through the Directive on consumer rights under purchase contracts. It provides for the upward harmonisation of legislation with better consumer information and the right to an adequate cancellation period.

We are also concerned about the blockage in the Council of regulations on consumer product safety and market supervision, two essential texts both

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for the protection of consumers and to boost our local production through information on the origin of products. We expect the Commission to support these texts. Finally, we await the revision of the Directive on package travel with interest.

Our economies cannot be built at the expense of a strong cultural dimension and without greater ambition in the areas of education and research. From the Commission we have obtained the introduction of proposals on the reform of intellectual property rights, encouraging creativity and cultural diversity, and broad access to culture and information. Education issues are high on our political agenda, whether as part of the Bologna process, or the integration of new technologies and innovation in schools. We want education and research to be central to the Commission's investment plan.

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Sustainable development

at the heart of our concerns

We consider it an initial victory for our political family that the First Vice-President of the Commission, who comes from our ranks, is responsible for overall coordination of policies that impact sustainable development, including climate change and energy. We expect the Commission to comprehensively measure the impact of its legislative proposals, respecting the balance between economic, social and environmental concerns.

Our Group is working closely with our socialist Commissioner to implement an ambitious Energy Union capable of reconciling such crucial and strategic objectives as sustainable development and a carbon-free economy, the EU's energy independence, and lower energy bills for households and businesses. This ambition must obviously be included in the investment plan.

During this period, new environmental measures were adopted with our support, such as a new Commission proposal allowing member states to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in all or part of their territory on the basis of elements other than the risk assessment provided for in the European system.

This is also the case with a Parliament resolution, calling for a proposal on the labelling of meat in processed food to determine its origin. We should also mention legislation on reducing the use of lightweight plastic bags, a major source of pollution, which was adopted with many amendments from our Group. We have made good progress in Parliament by obtaining large reductions in the use of giant trucks, and encouraging the creation of European transport, communications and energy networks, which are sustainable both in environmental and efficiency terms.

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In agriculture many specific legislative files come to Parliament on matters of animal health, veterinary medicine, organic goods, etc. We have to face the problems caused by the crisis in Ukraine and the Russian embargo, and the crisis in milk prices.

During the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, our Group successfully argued for a greening of agriculture and to ensure a strong rural development policy, thus following the logic of sustainable development. It is time for the implementation of this new policy, its programmes and regulations, in particular the 2014-2020 operational rural development programmes. It's the same for the Common Fisheries Policy, also designed under our initiative to be more sustainable and take better account of regional specificities in the sector.

18 S&D staff engaging with visitors during the **Open Doors Day** event, Brussels, May 2015



The S&D Group for a Europe of ambition and solidarity

The implementation of social, economic and sustainable development policies, the policy of long-awaited recovery, is inconceivable if Europe does not give itself the means to realise its ambitions. The economic crisis has been compounded by the erroneous responses of the Troika, whose austerity policies lead to recession. Consequently, the lack of public investment in recent years has been particularly grievous and damaging. In response, the EU budget is a formidable financial tool to stimulate economic recovery, growth and employment. Our Group has been advocating an increase and redistribution of spending on innovation, research, SMEs, education and infrastructure in 2015.

During the next budget negotiations our goals will be an increase in resources for the youth employment initiative, and adequate funding for policies for 2016 and beyond. We will keep a very close eye on the evaluation of the multiannual financial framework when it is revised in 2016, and continue to reflect on a future system based on our own resources strengthened within the high-level working group we have secured the establishment of.

Asking for a more aspirational budget also requires the disciplined use of public money, and we will remain vigilant during budgetary control procedures, advocating a more efficient use of resources and proper implementation of the new programmes by member states.

Above all, the European budget is a tool for solidarity between the regions and member states, particularly in the scope of the regional policy. Our Group ensured that the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy is in line with the 2020 strategy, and concentrated on a limited number of thematic objectives such as research, innovation, the digital agenda, the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, and low carbon energy sources. We shall be keeping a close eye on the implementation of this policy until 2020.



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19 S&D staff group photo during the Open Doors Day event, Brussels, May 2015

20 S&D Abortion rights action, Brussels, November 2014

21 Save the refugees, Brussels, May 2015

22 Euro Pride activists, Brussels, May 2015

23 Roma Genocide Conference, Brussels, February 2015

24 Women for change, Brussels, March 2015

Democracy,

defence of all citizens: our daily struggle

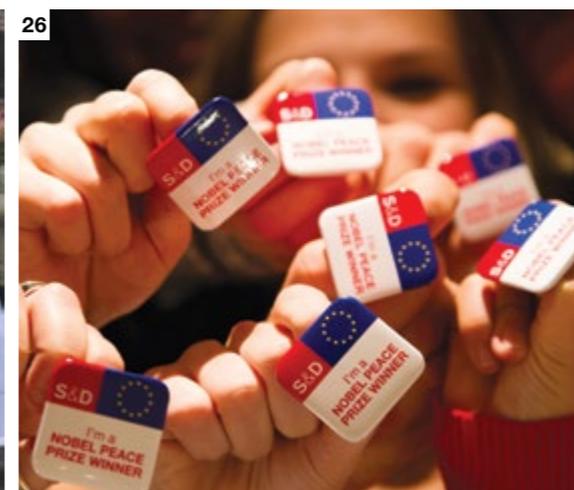
We expect the new Commission to demonstrate that it is particularly vigilant in monitoring respect for the rule of law across Europe, to combat the serious abuses already seen in Hungary. The legal character of the Charter of Fundamental Rights under the Lisbon Treaty must be fully utilised in this regard. We support the rapid accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The protection of privacy is a constant concern, and our Group was instrumental in the negotiations on the reform of data protection, for the enquiry into surveillance of citizens by the American NSA or the defence of citizen's rights in negotiations with the United States on the exchange of data. We are equally vigilant in preparing the Directive on passenger name records (PNR).

On immigration matters, we want a holistic approach based on the duty of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility between states, the fight against traffickers and smugglers, the establishment of a strong legal framework for refugee access and asylum seekers, and close collaboration with third countries. Our policy cannot be limited to the fight against illegal immigration, but must also focus on creating a framework for legal migration.



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We will ensure that the European non-discrimination policy is sufficiently ambitious and that the legislation is fully implemented.

We are resisting the attempts of the right and Eurosceptics to question the Schengen acquis by exploiting the trauma of the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. The Schengen instruments are sufficient to guarantee the security of citizens if they are implemented and used fully and appropriately. To combat terrorism we favour strategies that counter radicalisation and promote integration. We also advocate the fight against financial flows of terrorists, and our Group has been instrumental in the Directive against money laundering.

We do not want more inward-looking policies on immigration matters. We want a holistic approach based on the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility between states, the fight against traffickers and smugglers, and the establishment of a strong legal framework for refugee access and asylum seekers. The recent dramatic events in the Mediterranean show that such a strategy, also in concert with third countries, is more necessary than ever. Our Group will be at the forefront of this fight. Finally, our policy cannot be limited to the fight against illegal immigration, but must also focus on creating a framework for legal migration, as was the case with the Directive on seasonal workers.

Finally, we will ensure that the European non-discrimination policy is sufficiently ambitious and that the legislation is fully implemented. We will ensure that the Horizontal Directive is not watered down or shelved. Our fight against discrimination can be illustrated by our action in favour of Roma people, including the adoption by the European Parliament, at our initiative, of a resolution against acts of violence against them, and the establishment of a European day in memory of the Roma victims of the Holocaust.

25 FSM Tunis with Global Progressive Forum, March 2015

26 S&D Nobel Peace Prize badge

27 Rainbow Rose, Javier Moreno Sánchez, Secretary General of the S&D Group (left) and Aurélien Mazuy, President of Rainbow Rose

28 School of Democracy participants, Reggio Emilia (Italy), April 2015

29 Charlie Hebdo solidarity, Strasbourg, January 2015

Europe

in the world

Our world is changing. New challenges and new sources of tension appear both in the immediate vicinity of the European Union and beyond. In this context our priority will more than ever be to promote peace and stability, human rights, democracy and development. We plan to work closely with our partners in the new Commission, including the High Representative and the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, who we are proud to have in our political family.

In the world, our priority will more than ever be to promote peace and stability, human rights, democracy and development.

One of the most controversial issues at the moment is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). We support the principle of partnership because it could promote economic development, but our support is highly conditional. We want a TTIP that is fully compatible with state sovereignty and the interests of consumers. We will ensure that it does not threaten our public services, our social norms, or employment and environmental law. We demanded transparency in the negotiations. We were the first to raise concerns about the mechanisms for resolving disputes between investors and states (ISDS) that we consider unnecessary where the rule of law and a legal systems exists, which the ISDS is no substitute for. This is also our position for all trade agreements.

More than ever we support an ambitious development policy. This requires giving careful attention to Africa, particularly in the context of the global development agenda post-2015. In Parliament, we played a key role in relation to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and in the framework of Election Observation Missions. As part of the debate on 'conflict minerals' we have consistently demanded that companies extracting minerals in developing countries do so in a responsible and respectful manner towards their people. We require binding legislation, particularly by ensuring traceability, showing that the materials used in our products have been extracted in accordance with ethical standards.

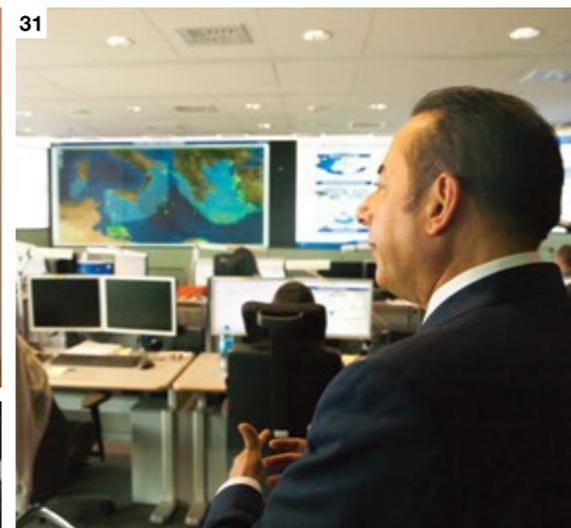


We are also vigilant regarding European companies, which we demand comply with these standards and improve working conditions where they operate.

Human rights are at the centre of our foreign policy. We fight to ensure that all trade agreement include provisions on the matter. We work closely with civil society and NGOs. At each session of Parliament we initiate resolutions in defence of human rights with regard to terrorism, violations of the rights of the press, the worrying situation of women or sexual minorities in parts of the world, blasphemy laws, etc. We are very attentive to the rights of women and children and the fight against social inequality. We are proud that our candidate Dr Mukwege won the 2014 Sakharov Prize for his efforts for women and child victims of war in eastern Congo.

We consider the fight against ISIS to be a top priority that must fully involve regional partners, while the responsibility of some of them in the development of

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ISIS must be clarified. We support a political solution to the Syrian civil conflict, recognising the rights of the various components of this society. We also support a step-by-step political solution with Iran to normalise relations with the EU, based on an agreement on the nuclear programme, respect for human rights, and the involvement of Iran in the resolution to multiple regional problems.

The events of recent years in the Mediterranean call for strong responses by the European Union, and our Group supported initiatives in favour of the Tunisian democratic transition, the only successful experience of the Arab Spring. We also demanded respect for human rights and democracy in Egypt. We were the driving force of progressive forces in the European Parliament in favour of Middle East peace, based on a two-state solution and our many initiatives have been the source of a real breakthrough in this area. These include the high-level delegation to Gaza, led on the ground by President Pittella.

We should also mention the Parliament resolution supporting the recognition of a Palestinian state, another of our Group's initiatives and a major victory. We continue to work with the Israeli Labour Party, Fatah and Israeli and Palestinian civil society. Our Group has consistently advocated a balanced approach to our eastern neighbours. Faced with the Ukrainian crisis, we strongly condemned the Russian attitude, without advocating a military solution. We supported a policy of trade preferences with regard to Ukraine and Moldova, and encouraged the Commission to consider cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Deepening relations with China as part of a critical dialogue emphasising human rights and social and environmental standards is another important element of our Group's foreign policy.

Similarly, relations with Latin America, and in particular progressive forces, have become a political priority, particularly with the establishment of a Forum on Latin America within the Group. We encourage a policy of equality and social justice, sustainable development and regional integration and negotiation of trade agreements with the EU based on high standards of social, environmental and human rights.

A major development was the strengthening of the dialogue with Cuba on modernising the country, the participation of civil society, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In April 2014, the High Representative initiated negotiations for a bilateral agreement on political dialogue and cooperation. This is a substantial change, breaking with the common position adopted by the Council in 1996. And at a time when even the United States is restoring bilateral relations with Cuba.

GIANNI PITTELLA
S&D Group president

JAVIER MORENO SÁNCHEZ
S&D Group secretary general

Our Group in action



34 Visit of **Professor Muhammad Yunus**, Brussels, March 2015
 35 **Roma Genocide Conference**, Brussels, February 2015
 36 Visit of **Victor Ponta**, Romanian Prime Minister, Strasbourg, May 2015
 37 **Abortion rights action**, Brussels, November 2014
 38 Visit of **Dr. Denis Mukwégé**, Sakharov Prize winner 2014, Strasbourg, 2015
 39 **Arni Páll Arnason**, Leader of the Icelandic Social Democratic Alliance
 Strasbourg, April 2015
 40 **Female Genital Mutilation**, Brussels, April 2014

41 **Gianni Pittella**, S&D Group President and **Dr. Denis Mukwégé**, Sakharov Prize winner 2014, Brussels, March 2015
 42 Visit of **Pedro Sánchez**, Secretary General of PSOE, Brussels, January 2015
 43 Visit of **Jean-Christian Cambadélis**, First Secretary of the French Socialist Party, Strasbourg, February 2015
 44 **School of Democracy**, Reggio Emilia (Italy), April 2015
 45 **Martin Schulz**, President of the European Parliament, attending an S&D Group meeting, Strasbourg, 2015

46 Visit of **Matteo Renzi**, Italian Prime Minister, Brussels, November 2014
 47 **Jean Jaurès Commemoration**, Brussels, September 2014
 48 **Ioan Mircea Pascu**, Vice-President of the European Parliament
 49 Visit of **Bernadette Ségol**, Secretary General of the of the ETUC, Strasbourg, April 2015
 50 **David Maria Sassoli**, Vice-President of the European Parliament
 51 **Female Genital Mutilation**, Brussels, April 2014
 52 Visit of **Nabil Shaath**, Commissioner of International Relations of Fatah, Senior Palestinian Negotiator Brussels, December 2014

53 **European Year for Development**, Brussels, May 2015
 54 **Conference on Libya**, Brussels, May 2015
 55 **Meeting with ETUC**, Brussels, February 2015
 56 From left to right: **Viorica Dănciă**, S&D MEP, **Gianni Pittella**, S&D Group President, **Rovana Plumb**, Romanian Minister of Labour, **Victor Bostinaru**, S&D Group Vice-President
 57 **Gianni Pittella**, S&D Group President, and **Antonio Costa**, Secretary General of PS Portugal, European Parliament, Brussels, March 2015

ABOUT THE S&D GROUP

The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (the S&D Group) is the second largest political group in the European Parliament with 191 members from all 28 EU Member States.

We stand for an inclusive European society based on principles of solidarity, equality, diversity, freedom and fairness. We campaign for social justice, jobs and growth, consumer rights, sustainable development, financial market reforms and human rights to create a stronger and more democratic Europe and a better future for all citizens.



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