

BÖLL TEA BRIEFING

Green Visions for Europe – a Preliminary Evaluation of Green Policy in the European Parliament¹

In February 2010, in the aftermath of the European elections, the European Union office of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung presented the publication “The Class of 2009 – Green Visions of Europe” (http://www.boell.eu/downloads/Class_of_2009_web.pdf) in which eleven new green Members of the European Parliament presented their hopes and aims for the next five years. The Greens had come out the real winners in the European elections; after all they were the only political group in the European Parliament that had managed to increase its number of seats. The new Green Group counted 46 members, had a strong French-German motor and was carried by the enthusiasm of many new, many young parliamentarians. Serious challenges lay ahead: the tackling of climate change; the response to the financial and economic crisis; the expansion of the EU's enlargement process; the development of a humane migration policy and the strengthening of the role of the EU as an actor in foreign and security policy, to name just a few. What has happened to these hopes and aims during two years? The European Union office of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung has invited three of the then new Green MEPs to discuss their visions and experiences with three political analysts and an audience. How much of their original green visions has been realised and what is left to do?

When the new MEPs started their work in 2009, nobody could have foreseen the situation we're facing today – with a staggering Euro and crumbling solidarity all over the continent. The crisis, it seems, has consumed most of our daily lives and certainly those of the MEPs. But the crisis is not everything. On the contrary, it has shown us many of the weaknesses the EU still has and dramatically guided our gaze to those issues threatening the very existence of this unique project. But if anything, the crisis has shown us that we need a vision of Europe and a vision of what sort of EU we want to live in. From that perspective, it is only too clear that we cannot simply focus on the day-to-day problems the crisis confronts us with. Rather, we have to work continually on all of the European issues to make a better Europe at last.

The event focussed on three topics: *Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)* which thanks to the Treaty of Lisbon has got (at least theoretically) a new impulse, *enlargement* which is hugely affected by a general EU fatigue not only within the European Union, but also in candidate countries and seems to have grinded to a hold and, finally, *labour migration*, another hugely unpopular subject.

¹ **Guest speakers** were: **Franziska Brantner**, MEP; **Ska Keller**, MEP; **Judith Sargentini**, MEP; **Ilana Bet-El**, writer, historian and political analyst; **Rosa Balfour**, senior policy analyst, European Policy Centre and **Sheena McLoughlin**, policy analyst, European Policy Centre. The meeting was moderated by **Marianne Ebertowski**, Director CFSP Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union. The event was held under Chatham House Rule. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

The EU as a global force for peace, development and the promotion of human rights

CFSP has been a sore spot in the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty for quite some time now. The most fundamental problem probably was that after the failure of the constitution, no provisions had been made to really put the Treaty to work in the Member States (MS) at the time of the ratification of the Treaty. There were no structures to fall back on and the European External Action Service had to be built from scratch. For this purpose, it would have only been logical to put someone in charge with experience in institution building and in foreign policy – neither of which Lady Ashton possessed. Her role was further complicated by the different hats she had to wear under the new Treaty. As a Vice-President of the Commission and as the chair of the Council of EU Foreign Ministers, Ashton has to take the initiative and make proposals. But as the co-ordinator and representative of CFSP, she has to forge consensus among the MS and get everyone to the negotiating table. She has to be provocative and daring and at the same time she is responsible for an acceptable outcome for everyone. To combine these diametric positions is a tough job and despite all the criticism on Lady Ashton, it is not certain that anyone else would have been up to the task.

For the Green MEPs one of the priorities concerning CFSP was to establish a conflict prevention team to keep international or regional conflicts from escalating into violence. Unfortunately, this hasn't happened so far. The Council's Crisis Management and Planning Directorate has unfortunately not been merged with the Commission department doing the same job. Instead of having one joint EU process for conceptualising a common EU approach to the reform of the security and police sector as well as rule of law, the prevailing strategy remains that of individual MS sending their own missions and Commission members running along. In the past Ashton set up a crisis management board to bring all the involved actors together as soon as a conflict broke out. But while this certainly is the right way to get out of a conflict, the EU's first step must be to try and prevent the conflict in the first place. Thanks to a Green initiative, the EU now has a conflict prevention team in charge of dealing with an imminent conflict in an informal non crisis mode and although this team is still heavily under-staffed, it still is a step in the right direction.

The way Europe reacted on the Arab Spring was in the eyes of the European Greens a major failure for CFSP. In North Africa the EU finally had the chance to put all its new instruments from the Lisbon Treaty into practice, but none of that happened. Instead of coming forward with one concentrated effort to stabilise the region and help foster democracy, the MS simply could not agree on anything and again resorted to individual missions. It remains problematic that the conflicts on the other side of the Mediterranean are often seen as standing in no connection to Europe, whereas the opposite is the case: North Africa is the EU's close neighbourhood and the promotion of democracy a self-declared priority of the MS. So if the Arab Spring does not concern the EU, then what does? But in response to the events south of Europe, Lady Ashton merely promised the people there the three M's "market, mobility and money" – none of which are her responsibility. There are other Commissioners dealing with each of these subjects specifically but there simply isn't any coordination between internal and external policies.

Enlargement fatigue? – No thank you!

The ambitious Green goals for the 2009-2014 legislative period were that Croatia, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and Iceland could already become

part of the Union, while Turkey would be negotiating its final chapters to accession and the other Balkan states would have become candidates. In the light of the current developments, however, this seems quite unrealistic and the EU has to ask itself whether it would prefer to continue the fast-paced enlargement process of the past couple of years or whether it might be wiser to take a step back and let everything sink in before continuing down the road. The euro crisis did its part to contribute to the spreading enlargement fatigue and may well be on its way to lead to a more general Europe and politics fatigue among the citizens.

If the enlargement process is managed well and conducted thoroughly, then it will be a long time before the next round of enlargement after Croatia and Iceland. The recent struggles with the Schengen accession of Bulgaria and Romania have shown that a politically driven enlargement process can lead to big problems, even if we account for all the benefits. The issues now put on the table to prevent both countries from joining the Schengen Area (first and foremost corruption) should all have been dealt with in the accession process to the EU. Now there is the risk of a backlash while having to keep up the momentum to not become unattractive for the remaining Balkan states.

A better management of the enlargement process is essential for a further successful enlargement of the EU. Part of that would be more transparency and clarity of rules, both of which are clearly lacking nowadays, especially in the case of Turkey. The rule of law demands that there are clear criteria as to how and when a country may join the EU and everybody should be equal before the law. But this is precisely not the case with Turkey. Here, demands are constantly made without ever giving them a perspective of one day being able to join the EU. The so-called privileged partnership (and it's never even been clarified what that would be) is a simple discrimination of Turkey, declassing them in respect to other candidates. Right now, the EU has a double standard when it comes to accession and this leads to enlargement fatigue on the Turkish side, too. Erdoğan's reach for dominance in the Arab world can well be explained with the lack of perspective in Turkey's relationship with the EU. One way to improve Turkish involvement in the EU and to establish closer ties between the two powers would be an enhanced customs union. At the moment, if the EU has an agreement with a third country, that country's goods can freely travel into Turkey but not the other way round. Additionally, Turkey is not involved in the negotiation of the agreement, so it is forced to accept the terms that the other two parties agree upon blindly, which is not a very democratic solution.

The unique position of Turkey is in many respects too important to the EU to simply not care about the future of its relationship to the country. Turkey is seen as a role model by many people in the Arab world, which could also be seen during Erdoğan's visit to Egypt after the Arab Spring. The disputes with Israel, the conflicts with Armenia and the unsolved situation with Cyprus are all much too important not to care. The EU will have to abandon its culturalist, religious and geographic visions in favour of a civic vision to come to terms with Turkey and meet the country with the appropriate level of respect and attention.

Enlargement could help Europeans to see the EU from another angle and another perspective. Even though we're in a time of crisis, there are still many countries that see the EU as a haven of safety – economically as well as politically. For them, this supranational construction is more than just a conglomeration of states who try to coordinate their politics out of sheer necessity, but a union of states who bind themselves voluntarily and who base their policies on certain values such as the rule of

law, etc. In this respect, enlargement can surely help to create a more positive image of the EU and all that Europeans have gained from it. From a Green perspective, the vision of the EU is clearly distinct from the picture that modern right-wing, euro-sceptic parties try to create. It is a vision of a Europe that is open, inclusive and free for everybody.

Making the most of labour migration

The topic of labour migration has somewhat moved to the back of the political agenda. But still, Europe will have to discuss this topic because of its importance for the not-too-far-away future. The EU's society is growing older and older and birth rates are much too low to provide for sustainability. Sooner or later, this contrast will put the public pension and insurance systems under enormous pressure as fewer workers will have to provide for more elderly people. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, the world's youngest workforce is eager to go to work in Europe and get out of unemployment. Many of those (and others) work in Europe on illegal terms, creating an unfortunate position for themselves and the respective MS. The MS's protectionism in the wake of the crisis has even worsened this phenomenon, as MS have tried to restrict access to their labour markets, even taking back some of the hard-fought-for liberalisations of the past years. The problem here is not that these temporary measures are put in place, but there is a growing concern that they might not be 'temporary' after all as it will be hard to come up with a 'crisis-exit-strategy' that fits every single MS and puts a binding expiry date on the crisis for everyone.

In Europe's own borders, the problem of labour migration should not really exist because of the Single Market. In fact, it still does exist and MS are still willing to use all the tools they have to protect their own labour market, despite the fact that the much-feared labour migration after the accession of the Middle and East European countries never occurred. It seems that employment standards and wages in the EU have levelled to such a degree that it just does not pay off for most people to emigrate because of work. The case might be slightly different in the new MS Romania and Bulgaria, where wages are still quite low and which still have to adjust their labour markets to European standard.

The illegality of some forms of labour migration poses a real problem to foreign employees and local employers alike. There are some jobs that no one in Europe will take on but that still are illegal for third country nationals to do. The much quoted example of the housekeeping-lady is a good example of such a job: No EU citizen in Europe would want a 24/7 job watching the kids and cleaning someone else's home, but it still is illegal to hire third country nationals to do the job because there are people to clean and people to babysit in Europe. If the EU would come up with a scheme for rotating jobs, allowing these people to stay here every year for a couple of months and then return home, much of the illegality and the frustration could be resolved.

Conclusion

Lots of things remain to be done in the EU and after the first two years in office, the new Green MEPs will have realised that their job is tougher than probably expected. The ability to equip Europe with a brighter vision for the future may be one of the most important instruments for the Greens – and in times of crisis, it is a much needed one, too. Progress in some areas and set-backs in others are part of the job but the important part here is to carry on and work on the Green principles to guide Europe in the future; like sustainability, democracy, the rule of law, ecology, etc. As only the fifth biggest party in the European Parliament, the European Greens cannot be regarded as major players. But

with ideas and concepts that are up-to-date, workable and that find general consensus, they have the chance to influence European politics to a significant degree.