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Some current perspectives on the creation of the Party of the European Left

0. Introductory remark

Six years ago, in June 1998, personalities from a number of left socialist, Communist and red-green parties of the European Union met in Berlin on the eve of the 1999 elections to the European Parliament to think about new forms and ways of cooperation. Many parties of the transforming European Left, after a phase of difficult reorientation of their politics after the upheavals of 1989/90, had reached the conclusion that it was high time to build up a more concrete collaboration, so as to convey a common profile to this European Left.

As a result of the meeting, thirteen European Left-wing parties in January 1999 in Paris for the first time elaborated and passed a common call to the European elections addressed to all people living in the EU. In this call, the participating left parties formulated common aims and key ideas for a social and ecological, democratic and peaceful, solidarity-based Europe as well as an outline of common goals for their cooperation in the EU. After the elections in June 1999, there emerged on that basis the Confederated Faction of the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (*Gauche Unifiée Européenne/Nordic Green Left*, abbr. GUE/NGL) in the European Parliament.

At the above-mentioned meeting, PDS Chairman Lothar Bisky had declared the need to think beyond the pre-existing forms of parliamentary cooperation in the European Parliament and in the Forum of the New European Left (NELF) and to conceive of new ways of common political work independent of the way, in which individual parties determine their relationship to the European Union and the integration steps in progress. Taking into account the very different concrete historical experiences in the cooperation of the Left that can be used in the present, there is on the other hand no reason why the European Left should not also think about forming a common European party.

1.

Upon invitation by the Greek coalition of the Left and the Movements, SYNASPISMOS, there was carried out, in mid-March 2003, a work instruction - passed and agreed upon on occasion of the NELF meetings in Copenhagen and Paris (2002) - to strive actively for the creation of a European Left-wing Party. In the same year, there followed further work meetings by the so-called initiative group, at which deliberations took place on a Basic Political Document (program) as well as on the necessary structure and basis for transactions (statute).

In January 2004, finally, there took place in Berlin a meeting of parties, which by passing a common call to all interested European left parties triggered the initiative for the founding of the Party of the European Left. 11 parties joined that call; other party representatives present in Berlin declared they would actively observe the process. (Berlin call of January 10 and 11 2004 – www.sozialisten.de/international).

The Athens follow-up meeting of the initiative group (all parties having signed the Berlin initiative, open also to interested observer parties) agreed in the beginning of February on convening the founding congress for May 8 and 9 2004 to Rome. An international

preparatory group was formed to which there adhered representatives of all parties in the initiative.

2.

Within the PDS and within the political Left in Germany, the founding call of the Party of European Left has given rise to interest, approval and new hopes. Especially among young, politically committed people the thought of a common Party of the Left finds great and noticeable resonance.

From the beginning on, there was agreement that the further work on the creation of a Left party has to take place openly and transparently, that the issue is to involve the membership of the parties and to discuss concrete political steps together with them and with the sympathisers. At the same time this involves the very sensitive field of sovereignty and independence of the parties – which especially at the European level had a lot to do with “patronising” by Moscow and other centres of ruling state parties during the time of the East-West block confrontation, with attempts to go independent developmental paths (keyword: Euro-Communism), with the events in Hungary (1956), Prague (1968) and Afghanistan (1978) and the resulting controversies in the international Left. It also takes into account the processes around the emergence of new emancipative democratic Left parties, which have earned themselves a respected place in society due to their wrestling for alternatives in their respective countries.

3.

The dynamic of the Berlin meeting has also promoted the discussion within the Left parties in Europe, because of the decision situation they face. This decision situation bundles approval and contradictions among the heterogeneous Left parties and movements. All of them sense that the Left in Europe confronts a historical choice.

There are many European debates around the question: who can and should be a member, how concrete does the profile have to be, and how do the national member parties guarantee inner-party democratic opinion formation and independence in such a European unified organisation, which should be more than just an umbrella organisation. In fact, it consciously leans on the famous historical model defined as the association of European Left parties – composed of member and of observing parties. The time is ripe to discuss whether and if this initiative can contribute to the cooperation of the Left.

The Left in Europe consists of diverse, in part opposing political and social formations, different in their politics, programs and worldviews, different in their backing and regional bases, different in their experiences and in their attitude towards the EU.

Precisely for this reason, however, the Left – if it wants to channel its resistance against demolition of the social state and of democracy into political alternatives, also has to articulate itself in common at the level of the EU and approach together with the others the elaboration of necessary concrete, alternative proposals for a different EU, a different Europe. Why should it not find and determine the common political denominator - not the smallest, but in the face of the maximum credible attack (MCA) by neo-liberal social destruction, the greatest possible - in order to successfully be, while an independent political force, partner to the social movements, in order to influence European politics as a recognised actor and to change it. In the light of the strength and tradition as well as the expectations of the European workers', feminist, ecological and peace movements, it is high time that the political Left live up to that responsibility. We want to contribute to the formulation and realisation of political strategies. This without any doubt is the central challenge to Left parties in the EU and in Europe in a situation, in which neo-liberal thought has apparently conquered ever more space in the minds of people, in a situation of seeming

absence of alternatives to capitalist market logic, to cost reductions and to the rigid and outrageous social demolition, yes indeed to the economic market sale of the whole society.

Although the Left in Europe is still acting out of a strategic defensive, neo-liberal policies dominate, it in many countries – regardless of whether it participated in governments or acted out of the role of opposition – had to accept heavy losses at elections, and in various countries of Europe Centre-Right, Right and right-wing populist governments have won the day, new movements are rising from the bases of society, common initiatives and movements have multiplied. For many Left-wingers an important upcoming date are the European elections, which for the Left forces also raise the challenge of defending their place as influential force in their respective countries.

In different countries of Europe – probably in most of them- different forces are competing with one another for the European elections. This also makes itself felt in the formation process of the Left. And therefore, in a very constructive manner, work takes place on different forms and structures. For this reason, aside from the process for the creation of the Party of the European Left, member parties of the GUE/NGL at the same time in a very wide circle of Left parties work on a common election call for the elections to the European parliament on June 13 of this year, also and precisely to prolong the good experiences of the present collaboration in a confederated fraction. Not all parties will sign this common call, and nobody is being forced to. To this multiplicity of avenues also belongs the process, initiated in the environment of the European Social Forum at Florence, of the European Anti-capitalist Left that excludes those parties, which do not carry out structural restrictions of their social alternatives to capitalism organised out of society (keyword: participation in governments). In this context also belongs the continuation of the cooperation in NELF.

4.

For the PDS, in the weeks since the Berlin meeting, it is noteworthy that there exists, despite the differentiation of the Left in Europe, a considerable measure of communality, which expresses itself quite clearly in the program draft of the European Left. The communalities lie mainly in politics, in the orientation towards extra-parliamentary movements and less in ideology and historical provenance. This gives us courage. The Party of the European Left demands another Europe,

- a Europe that says no to war and militarization. The European Left is an anti-War-Left;
- a Europe that defends the social states and renews it, that redistributes wealth, power and influence;
- a Europe of diverse cultures, of freedom of spirit, a Europe open to the world. The European Left is a cultural Left, which refuses historical revisionism, because it is capable of dealing with its own history critically and with respect;
- a Europe open to the world that resists capitalist globalisation. The European Left is critical of capitalism and anti-capitalist and aims at a transformation of societies beyond the rule of capital;
- a democratic Europe. The European Left wants to get politics out of the backrooms of power back into society, onto the squares and streets, into the debates of citizens, men and women of all ages, it is a part of movements and it is a party; its member parties act in parliaments and in governments, in initiatives and in extra-parliamentary protests; it is counter-power and designing force. And it is therefore ready to be held accountable, which is what distinguishes parties in the broad social discourse.

Until the founding congress, until Europe Day, the day of liberation from Hitler fascism on May 8 and 9, we still have got a lot to do. The slogan of the participating parties is therefore: let us pull up our sleeves together: Carpe diem! The social, peaceful and solidarity-based Europe needs our intervention!