

André Brie, MEP, Discussion input, Punto Rosso, Milano, 1 November 2008:

### **Is there a foreign policy of the European Left? What then would it be?**

“There is no alternative“, this infamous assertion by Margaret Thatcher sums up the ideology of neoliberalism. It also finds its expression in a new foreign policy: “For modern industrial nations, there is no 'right-wing' or 'left-wing' foreign policy. In the democratic societies of the post-war world, major foreign policy orientations were chosen mostly by consensus.“ That was written by the former federal chancellor Gerhard Schröder in summer 1999 in his contribution: “A foreign policy of the 'The Third Way'?“ for the “Trade Union Monthly“. [1](#)

What was already fundamentally wrong back then, in the meantime turns out an extremely threatening obstacle to the necessary restructuring of international relations. Almost all problems have been globalised and have been exacerbated to crisis dimensions: the attempts of 11 September 2001 and the “war against terror“ waged by the USA and its allies, the invasions in the Kosovo, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the devaluation of the UN and the disrespect of international law, the geographic and military-strategic expansion of NATO, the enlargement of the EU by South and East European countries, their almost hundred percent switch to neoliberal positions and policies as well as their forced militarisation, the deregulated globalisation of the economy, climate change, and last but not least, the world-wide financial crisis are only some keywords for that.

At the same time, however, there emerged in past years strong national and international counter-movements to this development. The social and anti-war movements, especially in EU member states, the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum, the alter-globalist network ATTAC and citizens' initiatives, the strengthening of progressive forces, for instance in Germany, Greece and Cyprus belonged in there just as the election and remaining in power of left-wing presidents in South and Latin American states. Last but not least, the world-wide and European Left after a – long – time of self-searching is networking again across country borders and begins to develop common positions and to implement them. The question whether there really is no 'left-wing' or 'right-wing' foreign policy that way comes up again.

Foreign policy has never been state or government policy alone. States are of course the most important subjects of foreign policy. Their sovereignty under international law and their character as “subjects of international law“, therefore, convey to this side of foreign policy a different character than to domestic political processes. Yet, it is undisputed even in bourgeois literature that “other organisations that are also able to act in the international power game“ pursue their interests and goals at the international and foreign policy level. [2](#) That is valid of course also for international state organisations, for large multinational enterprises and international companies and banks, but also for parties, social, political and other movements: “... The ability for foreign-policy activity (is) not limited to the sovereign states, the 'subjects of international law' in the legal sense, ... but (is germane) also to supranational and non-state organisations, yes, even to private companies and corporations.“ [3](#)

Therefore, the question is not whether there may be a left foreign policy, a foreign policy of the national and international socialist and anti-capitalist left, but whether the Left turns out a subject capable of acting in foreign policy and at the international level. Under conditions of ever greater internationality and globalisation of many aspects of social development, the

political power to act of the Left in its respective nation-state spaces depends more and more on its capability for international action and – with respect to the EU member states – EU European policy. I shall concentrate on these European aspects here, even though other questions are no less important.

In order to anticipate the answer to the question: If the Left wants to become an influential force in the individual European states and in their Europe-wide structures, it *will have to* develop and realise its own, specific foreign policy. That already raises the first problem: How should the Left go about Europe and the EU?

I believe that the retreat into nationalism cannot be an adequate position. On the contrary; I am convinced that for many (not all) member states of the EU it holds that their left parties and movements must take an active and offensive position in favour of European integration in order to turn it into a social, democratic and ecological alternative to the reactionary destruction of neoliberal globalisation.

### **1) A positive and offensive attitude towards European integration**

It is indisputable that the European Union is a decisive engine of privatisation, market radicalism and neoliberal de-regulation. Therefore, the Left has refused the contractual bases of the EU since the Maastricht Treaty as well as its practical policies. In particular, by way of the monetarism of the Maastricht Treaty and by way of the so-called Lisbon strategy, the rulers wage on the dominance of markets, financial institutes and socially destructive competition, in particular the competition for the best location among the member states. What is debatable, however, are the consequences to be drawn from that.

“The PDS advocates European integration and the enlargement of the European Union on an equal, civil and democratic basis grounded on mutual solidarity. Therefore, it emphatically advocates a turn in integration policy“, it said in the European electoral programme of 2004 of the German PDS.<sup>4</sup> Resistance of the Left against the current policy by the EU and its member states is urgently required; it must become clearly stronger, more publicly effective, less cyclical, but more sustained and persevering in the decisive strategic areas. It cannot limit itself to the criticism of the Lisbon Treaty currently on ice, but needs to be directed against the contractual foundations of European integration ever since Maastricht.

The Nice Treaty is also anything but a positive alternative, all the more so since it is also the legal basis for the outrageous judgements of the ECJ against strike law, social award criteria and collective agreements. I am convinced that disintegration and return to nationalism that in the meantime, unfortunately, have become less improbable are no responsible alternatives and must be fought by the Left.

After all, *first of all*, they would not do justice either to the positive historical aspects of integration up to now, or to the social, democratic and ecological possibilities of European integration. Admittedly, these lie fallow at present. They would actually be the proper focus for left thought and left struggles. *Second*, at the end of disintegration, there would also stand a neoliberal and socially destructive Europe-wide free-trade zone, which in contrast to the EU, however, would not only offer difficult and inadequate, but no democratic and social possibilities for shaping things whatsoever. *Third*, there would be spoilt any chances to use European integration for building up a structural incapacity for war and for overcoming destructive European nationalism at least on the European continent. *Fourth*, finally, we should not ignore that the EU is maybe an engine and an instrument of neoliberalism, that it

is driven mainly, however, by the national governments and the national business organisations in the member states.

What is required is certainly a dual strategy of the Left: The Left must contribute to win back from the EU enlarged scopes of manoeuvre for the individual states and possibilities for social and political struggles in our own societies. At the same time, it can and must make the European Union the battle ground for the defence and for the continued development of the European social state models against neoliberal globalisation.

I am firmly convinced that the European Left may neither leave European integration to the right nor give it up. "Neither abstention nor resignation can be the answer", it says on this question in the proposed electoral platform for the Party of the European Left that the PCF already put up for discussion on its web site.<sup>5</sup> Alternatives to the current Europe were possible, however, this required "ideas, initiatives and a relentless work by political actors, democratic forces, trade unions and social movements and by the representatives of civil society."

I think that European integration and a European social union (that does not infringe on the priority of nation-state social and employment policy, but installs positive European framework conditions along with it) must be two sides of the same coin. One thing without the other will fail. Who, if not the Left might be able to articulate precisely that in a convincing way and in this respect tie in with the ideas of a social Europe by Jacques Delors that all other political forces, also social democracy, have given up?

## **2) Left foreign policy in the here and now**

A left foreign policy needs to be realised in the here and now. There is no lack of visions and general demands, but very much so of concrete concepts, of the effort required to change the intellectual and political climate in our societies and in Europe generally as well as lasting continuity, organisational force and international networking.

How much the Left can achieve by acting together with alterglobalist and anti-war movements, it proved it in the resistance against the US aggression in Iraq. Even if the war itself could not be prevented, the USA at least did not manage to provide it with a legal basis in the UN Security Council. One of its lessons is, however, that wars can only be prevented in the long term by an obstinate change in the political and intellectual relationship of forces in the individual states and at the global level.

How tragic our incapacity for a long-term international strategy truly is, can be shown on the example of the current crisis in the international financial system. Alternative and realistic concepts, the Left already had them in the 80s, for instance, in the publications of Oskar Lafontaine. In the late 90s, we contributed in a major way on an international scale to the struggles for the Tobin tax. Yet, we did not pursue these topics effectively and didn't place them into the centre of our policy.

## **3) A Europe of peace**

"The EU remained dynamically engaged in foreign and security policy, including through an active role in crisis management and conflict prevention, adding value, coherence and

effectiveness to multilateral efforts to promote stability, security and peace in the world. The European Security Strategy continued to serve as a valid source of guidance for the further development and implementation of the CFSP.

“, it says euphemistically in the “Annual Report 2007 by the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Options of the CFSP“<sup>6</sup>

Quite practically, this means that the EU since 2003 has conducted over 20 missions on three continents, last year they were 9.<sup>7</sup>“We need to be able to act before the situation in neighbouring countries deteriorates and humanitarian crises develop. By preventive engagement, it will be possible to avoid important problems in the future. A European Union that assumes greater responsibility and commits itself actively will enjoy greater political weight“, it says in the above-quoted European Security Strategy<sup>8</sup> of December 2003. Basis for that there were the “safe-keeping and continued development of international law“ (ibidem) as well as the Charta of the UN.

Of course, the Lisbon Treaty also in its General Provisions on the Union's External Action (Chapter 1, Art. 21) refers to international law and to the UN Charta.<sup>9</sup> However, that it is concerned here mainly with securing “its values and its basic interests“ becomes apparent in the same article already in the first paragraph. And obviously not only European interests: “EU-US cooperation cover (s) the full spectrum of international issues, from the Middle East, Africa and the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, to non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism“, the Annual Report 2007 on CFSP operations acknowledges.

Not only before that background, the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on an “operational capability based on civilian and military means“ (Art. 42-1) to “Missions outside of the Union“ (ibidem) or the “progressive framing of a common defence policy of the Union“ (Art. 42-2) in particular appear in a negative light. All the more so given that, in Article 43, the whole world is immediately declared a territory of potential interventions and all forms of military action are enabled: “The tasks referred in Art. 42 (1), in the course of which the Union may use civilian or military means, shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in their territories.“

Already Paragraph 3 of Article 42 demands to extend capabilities for that: “Member States shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities. The Agency in the field of defence capabilities, development, research, acquisition and armament (hereinafter referred to as the “European Defence Agency“) shall identify operational requirements, shall promote measures to satisfy these requirements, shall contribute to identifying and, where appropriate, implementing any measures needed to strengthen the industrial and technological base of the defence sector, shall participate in defining a European capability and armaments policy and shall assist the Council in evaluating the improvement of military capabilities.“ This de facto obligation to a renewed arms build-up is probably unique in international law.

Certainly, the capacity to act of the Left with respect to international decision-making is given especially in the nation-state framework, and there in the parliaments. The fact not to be able to directly determine the foreign policy of its states, however, in no way dispenses it of the obligation not only to place “the finger in the wound“, but to show realistic alternatives to the

militarisation course of the EU. In here belongs the strengthening of the UN and of international law, in particular its ban of war, a cause-oriented social and ecological policy based on political and world-wide economic solidarity in order to prevent international conflicts, the struggle for a civil political union, the interdiction of weapons' exports, radical nuclear and other disarmament, a consequent and all-encompassing human rights policy and the overcoming of its dominant manipulated character.

#### **4) A European employment and social union**

Social questions determine in a decisive way how people in the EU experience and evaluate the action – or non-action – of the Left. On this field as well, serious changes have taken place in the past years. Over decades, European integration in spite of the lacking social dimension contributed to welfare, economic growth and strengthened interior demand. Today, however, the neoliberal market and competitive radicalism that was founded by way of documents such as the Single European Act of 1987 and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) advances to become a fundamental threat to social cohesion but also to European integration itself.

Although the governments pretend that these treaties are steps of ever deeper integration, they in fact put into question, in the course of their implementation and continuation up to and including the Lisbon strategy of 2000<sup>10</sup>, the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty, European unification itself. The competitive Europe conceptualised in the Lisbon strategy and grounded in the Treaties means not only a threat to social cohesion, but also a Europe where the states compete with no holds barred for the most profitable conditions of capital exploitation by way of low corporate taxes, low wages, low social and environmental standards and by the reduction in democratic participation.

Ultimately, this will not bring the European societies closer to each other, but unavoidably pit them in a competition for capital costs against each other. The social division, exclusion and down-grading of millions of people within the European states is scandalised by the Left for good reason; at the same time, the European aspect is being neglected, however.

The Lisbon Treaty is supposed to put this policy on a renewed, but not really changed basis. Maybe in part adorned with the adjective “social”, in a somewhat more qualified and weakened form than in the Constitutional Treaty, there are conjured up here as well, on the one hand, the gods of competitiveness and of the free market, at the same time, however, social welfare is belittled as a European task and transferred to the responsibility of the member states. Thus it says in Article 3 of the first title of the Lisbon Treaty: “(The Union) shall work for the sustainable development of

Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. (...). It shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States.” (Title 1, Common Provisions, Art. 3-3) In the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, this is expressed much less clearly: “Member States, having regard to national practices related to the responsibilities of management and labour, shall regard promoting employment as a matter of common concern and shall coordinate their action in this respect within the Council.” (Third Part, Title IX, Employment, Art. 146-2)

Social policy is also far removed from being a subject for the community, and even more so from legally binding goals. This is proven by the provisions on an “appropriate social protection“, social dialogue and the struggle against discrimination: “To this end, the Union and the Member States shall implement measures which take account of the diverse forms of national practices, in particular in the field of contractual relations, and the need to maintain the competitiveness of the Union economy. “ (Third Part, Title X, Social Policy, Art. 151)

If the Left wants to effectively oppose the destruction of social security and justice in the nation-states, it will have to commit at the same time to social cohesion and solidarity in the EU, to a European interior market and ecological policy, to the reform of the Maastricht Stability and Growth Pact, the reform of the statute and monetary policy of the European Central Bank, to a decisive European contribution to the re-regulation of the world financial system as well as to European standards for corporate taxes, wages and social services.

Apart from that, it needs to continue to speak up even more strongly for trade union rights and for a European policy truly committed to the world-wide realisation of the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation and the Kyoto agreement and to develop these standards. Moreover, it would be appropriate, last but not least because of the financial crisis spreading ever further even in Europe, to hark back to the ideas of former EU Commission president Jacques Delors on a European economic government and a social union into the social debate. The struggle for a social alternative is linked in this respect indissolubly with the struggle for a united Europe.

## **5) A Europe of democracy and citizens' participation**

That the European Union has a grave deficit in democracy and transparency didn't show itself for the first time, but an exemplary way, in the response to the French and Dutch “No“ to the EU Constitution and the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland. While the constitutional treaty was just revamped a bit and resubmitted as Lisbon agreement, the Irish population got a hail storm of sweeping blame for its negative vote – without even an attempt at analysing the real causes of the rejection and draw consequences from that.

The heads of state and government seem firmly committed to put the Lisbon Treaty into force. Quite surreptitiously, the EU under the German council presidency fetched the negotiations back into the drawing rooms – a clear step back in comparison with the convent for the elaboration of the Constitutional Treaty that secured at least a minimal participation of civil society.

In fact, the lack of democracy in the EU is also founded in that most structures and decision-making procedures still date from the founding period of the community and are no longer suitable for today's tasks, quite apart from those of a still further enlarged union. In particular, the rights of the European Union remain limited – even if there are improvements in the Lisbon Treaty -, just as the participation of member states' parliament. To commit to reinforced parliamentary participation and co-decision at equal rank with the Council is a prime task for the European Left.

At the same time, however, it is a matter of an immediate participation of the women and men citizens in decisions. An important and first step in that direction should be to hold referendums on the Lisbon Treaty – at the member state as well as at the European level.

That way also the citizens' petition envisaged in this agreement, which is to be welcomed, might receive a boost independently of the coming into force of the treaty.

## **6) A (left) preview**

European integration has been an epoch-making, historical achievement: after a century of terrible capitalist wars, it has secured peace among the concerned states. This was a decisive element of its acceptance among the people and remains a task for the integration of additional states. The integration has encouraged economic growth and – whether intentionally or as a “side effect” - has contributed to a certain measure of social security. Moreover, it has contributed in an essential way to promoting human and cultural contacts and meetings on a large part of the continent. In spite of its grave deficits and repeated crises, European integration is, therefore, for the Left a positive point of reference for its policy.

The justified criticism of the current orientation of European integration and policy must exclude an attitude hostile to Europe on principle. The nation-state space continues to remain the most effective political framework for the required democratic and social changes. However, under current circumstances, it is no longer adequate. Just as in the 19th century national struggles and political institutions were used by the workers' movement and other political and social forces for the shackling of Manchester capitalism and for developing alternatives pointing beyond it, the political left, apart from its inner-state opportunities, may now open for itself the European space. It needs to face this task.

[1](http://library.fes.de/gmh/jahresin.html)library.fes.de/gmh/jahresin.html.

[2](#)Staatslexikon. Recht, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft (State encyclopedia. Power, Economy, Society), Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1995, p. 439.

[3](#)ibidem.

[4](#)archiv2007.sozialisten.de/download/dokumente/wahlprogramme/europawahlprogramm2004.pdf

[5](http://pcf.fr/spip.php?article3114)pcf.fr/spip.php?article3114

[6](http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/DE_CFSP.pdf)consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/DE\_CFSP.pdf.

[7](http://consilium.europa.eu/showpage_asp?id=268&lang=EN&mode=g)consilium.europa.eu/showpage\_asp?id=268&lang=EN&mode=g.

[8](http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/031208ESSIIDE.pdf)consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/031208ESSIIDE.pdf.

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