

EU AFTER THE BREXIT REFERENDUM: TIME TO RESET

The EGP regrets the decision of a majority of British voters to take their country out of the EU, and considers that such a decision is negative both for the EU and the UK.

We also note that a majority of voters in Scotland (62%), Northern Ireland (56%) and Gibraltar (96%) favored remaining in the EU. This places them at clear odds with the majority of those in England and Wales who voted to leave, but that due to relative population size this means the people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar might be dragged out of the European Union against the will of the majority of their population. There is also particular concern for those in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for whom the implications of an EU/non-EU border could have even more serious security consequences.

The campaign for the referendum, largely acrimonious and flawed by false claims, which frequently fostered xenophobia, revealed a very divided country: a country which had been struggling to deliver fair economic development in the face of multiple challenges of globalization and weakened by socially unjust and short-sighted governmental policies as well as internal fighting in the ruling Conservative party for years. The EGP condemns the rise of violent attacks on minority groups, EU citizens and other third country residents and their property in the aftermath of the referendum

The UK Government has so far been unable or unwilling to embark on a clear course vis-à-vis the desired future relationships towards the EU. Although we consider that the people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar have given a clear mandate to their representatives to stay in the European Union, it is completely unclear how the wishes of the voters in these jurisdictions will be taken into consideration in the negotiations. A strong group within the Conservative Party seems to be aiming for the deepest possible break-up with the rest of the EU. It is already apparent that the Brexit referendum will have negative consequences both for the UK and the other 27 member states.

We consider that:

1. The first and most important priority for the EU is now to keep the EU together in the Brexit process and beyond. We need to align the diverging interests of the different member states with a strong common negotiating position. It must be clear that the fundamental values and all founding principles of the EU treaties must not be called into question.
2. All options will be explored to ensure Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar and their peoples can retain their membership of the EU.
3. If at any moment the British voters would want to reverse the course taken in the Brexit referendum, the EU should stand ready to welcome the UK back.
4. We must be extremely cautious about the Brexit procedure, so that it does not cause a precedent allowing other member states to design their own way out. The agreement to bring the UK out of the EU should be negotiated fairly for both sides, in full transparency and with the involvement of elected representatives of both the EU and UK. We want the European Council to appoint the European Commission to lead the negotiations with participation of the European Parliament.
5. The UK Government should include representatives of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales directly in the negotiations. We want the negotiations to redefine a partnership that keeps the UK and the EU together as closely as possible and that ensures the future of the EU is not jeopardized. The voices of the 48,1% UK citizens that voted remain should be taken into account.

6. It is in the interest of both the EU and the UK citizens, workers, students and economic actors that the agreement does not reduce their current rights and liberties. Introducing hurdles and obstacles to the every-day life of the citizens and residents and to their business and activities must not be allowed to be the result of an ill guided attempt to “regain sovereignty”; In this context, we reaffirm that the four freedoms (free movement of goods, freedom of movement for people, right of establishment and freedom to provide services, free movement of capital) are inseparable and will oppose any deal which would allow free movement for services, goods and capital without allowing free circulation of people. We will also be vigilant about the proposals of the UK concerning the European Convention on Human Rights and the Touquet Agreement (allows British officials to operate border controls in Calais and vice versa for French counterparts in Dover).

7. We oppose the idea that the British Government might try to base the economic future of the UK on building a tax haven for multinationals and rich individuals, on lowering social standards that have been achieved within the EU, or on rolling back environmental goals and standards that we have fought for so long. We consider that a trend towards UK basing its economic future on unfair tax competition and social dumping, mainly benefiting to large companies, or any attempts to build a tax haven, will only lead to more tax injustice and less well-being in the UK and in the EU. We will fight for the right of all, including young people, university students, apprentices, researchers, young entrepreneurs and workers to continue to have full access to free travel and exchanges throughout Europe.

8. The EU referendum result is already affecting the life of three million EU citizens living in the UK and 1.3 million Britons living in the EU. The Greens demand that all EU citizens currently living in the UK keep all their rights they are currently entitled to in the UK. This has to be negotiated at EU level and should aim at establishing reciprocal rights for Britons living in the EU.

9. The EGP supports the stance of EU Institutions that negotiations over Brexit can only start after the official invocation of Article 50 by the British Government. The prospective agreement between the EU and the UK shall be comprehensive and broad but cannot infringe upon the *acquis communautaire*. In the course of such negotiations, we want the EU to press for strong cooperation beyond single market related issues also in the future, e.g. climate policies, environmental protection, migration, domestic security, anti-terrorism, foreign and security policy, development cooperation, international rule of law and the defense of democracy and human rights.

FUTURE OF THE EU/RESET

10. The European Union was and still is a project of peace, overcoming borders and nationalism and bringing people together. We are determined to defend its achievements with regards to our shared European values, the rule of law, security and development, and continue to promote the EU is the best level of governance to tackle the major current challenges, such as climate change and globalization. But over the last years, the EU has progressively lost for many of its citizens the ability of protecting them from impoverishment and precariousness, to demonstrate that public policies at the EU level guarantee the general interest and its capacity to take positive decisions in such important issues like migration and security.

11. EGP believes that today, it is not just the EU's ambitions - to build and strengthen a common European space of freedom, security, prosperity and democracy - that are being challenged. It is the very idea of a common future, shared sovereignty and core democratic values that is being undermined, with a steady rise of attacks against minorities, opposition forces and independent media and a widespread EU bashing coming from populist forces and governments.

12. In light of the wave of populism continuing to gain ground, many European leaders are adopting the intolerant and scapegoating rhetoric of the far right. This is a threat to a democratic and diverse Europe. Countering right-wing and populist movements, fighting the hostile atmosphere minorities are currently confronted with and standing with marginalised groups is a matter of common responsibility. More than ever, social and political alliances against the extreme right are needed in order to counteract this trend and to promote the values of a Europe of solidarity.

13. That is why EGP wants the EU to “reset”, in order to be able to deliver credible solutions to the citizens. It is possible to implement policies which aim at solving the persistent economic uncertainty and a growing sense of insecurity; policies of empowering citizens; policies of realizing a green transition of our economies; policies of responding to the desperate needs of people escaping from wars and misery. Such solutions must be an alternative to the mainstream policies, carried out today by an increasing number of national governments. Whether it originates with member states or with the Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker, we will oppose policies that reduce social and citizenship rights, that seal borders, that seek competitiveness through deregulation, and that limit our capacity as European citizens to act together.

14. For the EU to reset, it needs to change. We need to start the process for a democratic reform in the institutional framework, which currently focuses on intergovernmental procedures and lacks transparency and public ownership of the decision-making. We are in favor of a strong parliament, composed partly on the basis of European lists. We remain convinced that democracy can be expanded at all levels in Europe. Facing a risk of collapse, Europe’s policies need to provide more efficiency, transparency and accountability. The EGP rejects the myth that in order to regain control and ownership of the most important decisions and to face the challenges of growing economic and social insecurity, it would be necessary to dismantle the EU, just the contrary.

15. We see 5 areas of common action that will have to play a major role in regaining citizens trust:

- We need a paradigm shift from austerity to investment, with a particular emphasis on building a “Transformation Union” that, against the backdrop of the threats of climate change, drives the necessary green economic transition. We want to make the Energy- und Climate Union based on renewables efficiency and energy savings a key element of a strengthened European integration project. The EU should finally comply with the Commission's promises to create a "Social Europe", including an effective spending of available means to fight poverty, precarious work and social exclusion. Member States urgently need to deliver a fair wage for a fair day's work.

- We need more European cooperation on domestic as well as foreign security, while insisting that the respect of human and civil rights must not be seen as an impediment to, but the basis of such cooperation.

- The EU must continue fighting against tax evasion, tax fraud, unfair tax loopholes and tax havens, because it is obviously easier to force big corporations and rich individuals to pay their fair share if EU member states act in unison. This would help financing the welfare state and strengthen social security including unemployment insurance schemes, public health, pensions and basic social security.

- Whereas it seems to be very difficult at the moment to find unanimity on a pan-EU level on a humanitarian refugee and migration policy, we advocate that the countries that take a more progressive stance on this issue should break the deadlock by going for enhanced cooperation between them, within the legal framework of the EU and with the involvement of the Commission and the EP. Furthermore, EGP is in favour for introducing a mechanism, which would support countries accepting to relocate

refugees and encourage the others to reconsider their decision not to participate in the relocation scheme, decided on the basis of the Commission's proposal. There must be consequences if a member state does not take its' share of responsibility.

- Young people are the passionate advocates of our common European future. The EU cannot afford to fail young people by not answering to their needs; youth policies, in particular a consistent fight against youth unemployment, which is still hovering at about 20%, is of paramount importance. We additionally need to strengthen the cooperation and the exchange via Erasmus+ and other programmes between young people in Europe. We want to advance ideas like the free inter-rail ticket for young Europeans - to make Europe a reality for the young generation.

14. The EGP intends to be an active part and promoter of a large alliance between civil society, trade unions, social movements and progressive political forces to lead Europe out of the crisis, towards an efficient multi-layered democracy. The supranational level of competences must be matched with adequate resources. As demonstrated by the large mobilization against TTIP, the increasing importance of campaigns such as Divestment and the important involvement of local authorities and citizens in favor of migrants and refugees in many countries, it is possible to have an impact on decision-making and revert decisions that seemed already done. The building of such alliances and mobilizations in favor of a EU democratic reform represents for EGP a major challenge and priority for the years to come.