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 will 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 in some cases fostered xenophobia, revealed a very divided country, weakened by the social and economic effects of the internal Conservative policies.

The EGP criticizes that in the aftermath of the referendum, violent attacks on EU citizens and other third country residents and their property became more frequent. 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. How the wishes of voters in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar could be accounted for, has also remained a riddle. A strong group within the Conservative Party seems to be aiming for as deep a break with the rest of the EU as possible. 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. 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 as an equal among equals.

2. The agreement to bring the UK out of the EU should be negotiated in full transparency and with the involvement of elected representatives of both the EU and UK; 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. In this way the voices of the 48,1% UK citizens that voted remain should be taken into account.

3. 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”; we want the four basic freedoms of the EU to apply in the UK also in the future; 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 will fight for the right of young people, university students, apprentices, researchers, young entrepreneurs and workers to continue to have full access to free travel and exchanges throughout Europe.

4. 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. 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. 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

5. EGP believes that today it is not only the EU project and its ambitions to create a common space of freedom, security, prosperity and democracy which is challenged as never before. As demonstrated every day in some EU countries by the attacks on minorities, opposition forces and independent media, it is our core values which are today at risk.

6. 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.

7. For the EU to reset, it needs to change. 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.

8. 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 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.

- 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.

- Young people are the most passionate advocates of our common European future; this is why the EU
cannot afford to fail them and to lose their support 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.

9. 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 democracy 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.