



**18<sup>th</sup>**  
**COUNCIL**  
**MEETING**  
**OF THE**  
**EUROPEAN**  
**GREEN PARTY**

MADRID | SPAIN | MAY 10-12 | 2013



As adopted at Madrid Council, 12.05.2013

## **Reclaim the Future**

### **Emancipatory action by, for and of European Youth**

#### **Introduction**

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Since its outbreak in 2008, the crisis continues to whip Europe and affects our day to day life more than ever. This financial crisis is not an isolated situation. It has both caused and highlighted a democratic deficit, and the weakening of the welfare state. These have led to an increase in social inequality and threatened future social progress. These consequences primarily affect the most vulnerable groups, among them the European youth.

European society cannot afford to lose a whole generation of young people. 14 million young people are neither in education, employment nor in training (NEET). The highest ever unemployment rates, especially among young people, indicate an alarming situation in which many young people do not have any basic, or decent, opportunities. Still, young people do not surrender. They have the power and motivation to raise their voices against not just the crisis, but against all causes of it. Furthermore, young people are actively raising their voices against the handling of the crisis up till now, by national and European decision makers who rely on (or are hiding behind) austerity measures. Young people need Europe to deliver the urgently needed solutions to the systemic challenges that we all face. Solutions that are merely addressing a national level will not succeed.

We Greens do not see the present crisis as short-term catastrophe that Europe will magically survive if we just manage to handle it in the long term. We want to address the root causes of the crisis and advocate for transformational strategies that will enable us to fix core problems and ensure that in 20/50/70 years, future young people will not have to deal with one crisis after another. We strongly promote inter-generational justice in all areas from climate change to pension schemes. In light of the evidence, urgent action is needed. We want to establish youth policy as an independent policy field at the European level, and at the same time mainstream the needs and demands of young people in all other policy fields. However, we believe that the topic needs to be addressed not only at the European level, but at all different levels of decision-making. In order to do this we want to use both existing channels of policy-making, as well as develop new ways of empowering young people.

Stemming from the ability and right to enjoy full citizenship, we want the youth voice to be valued, respected and taken into consideration. Young people are not passive receivers of political decisions, but are active contributors – not only in the implementation phases but also in the process of setting political priorities. Next to that, we need to end the narrow understanding of youth participation, and enable young people to both express their thoughts and participate as equals in the decision making processes on social issues, environmental issues, political issues and all other issues that affect their societies, both directly or indirectly. Even though we address some

issues specifically as youth issues because of their relevance to the lives of young people, we are aware that all issues, be it economics or climate change, affect young people and that they need to have a say in all of those.

The current institutional response to youth issues must be examined and revised. Concrete processes for managing this framework must better reflect the interest of young people.

We see education systems as one of the core structures that need to be changed, to reflect young people's identities and differences and to strengthen and widen their possibilities and opportunities. The system should be reformed towards more openness and flexibility. Through these reformed education systems we pursue the aim of guaranteeing emancipation while at the same time matching vocational experience and institutional trajectories with the perspective of "good work"<sup>1</sup>.

Different areas of the economy need to be addressed and reformed to achieve these goals. Our model is a de-carbonised and human-centric economy able to provide the conditions for both good and fair jobs through a process of green re-industrialisation, capable of an effective re-distribution of wealth.

Another world is possible, but we need to shake up the current one. We Greens do not stand on the sidelines and wait for this to happen, but take an active and leading role in emancipatory action by, for and of young people.

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## **Youth must be heard**

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Youth are the future. But young people are also the present. Young people need to actively participate in the construction of the political system that we live in to be able to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship. Youth emancipation will never be achieved without real democratic process, where young people take active part in the design and implementation of public policies and without commitment from the rest of the society.

The contribution of young people is vital for the construction of a more democratic Europe. Thus, youth participation must be enabled and ensured both as regards formal and informal structures, non-formal education as well as voluntary work.

Youth participation will contribute political creativity to the construction and legitimisation of Europe including non-violent forms of civil disobedience that have always been part of legitimate political action. We need consolidated participation spaces which empower the expression of youth perspectives throughout all aspects of life.

Youth movements and civil society groups focused on young people – particularly Youth Organisations on many different levels – are key actors in ensuring social inclusion and cohesion, ecological and environmental responsibility, political participation and democracy and political accountability. We support the existing forms of youth dialogue, among them the Youth Forum and Structure dialogue including national Youth Councils. At the same time, we are aware that many young people are not part of youth organisations and will develop new forms of participation to reach out to them and to ensure inclusiveness. Emancipation implies that youth are able to participate in this environment in a free and independent way, without discrimination or restriction.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on green definition of the "good work" please see "The Social Dimension of the Green New Deal" as adopted at the EGP Copenhagen Council 2012

We call on the European Union to develop an open and transparent process of consultation with youth organisations. At local, regional and national level, public authorities must engage with civil society to design measures that will allow the public to regain control of public finances in the long term. To start with, also young people should have a greater level of inclusion in discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) at a European level<sup>2</sup>.

Active participation in the political system is part of a full emancipation process. Thus, we call for the reduction of voting age to 16 years old. This measure needs to go hand in hand with an increase in political education in both formal and non-formal education systems, in order to give young people the tools to be informed about the political system.

Incorporating youth perspectives means taking into account the diverse European realities. We need to acknowledge diversity and differences among young people, who are one of the most socially divergent groups in society. Additionally, there are disenfranchised groups that need specific measures to be included in the process such as young people with disabilities, youth from poorer families, rural youth or young migrants. The gender dimension also needs to be strongly taken into consideration when addressing the situation of young people.

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### **Institutions matter!**

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Not a single democratic, social, cultural or environmental transformation has ever been successful without an act of confronting existing institutions, without finding ways of making better use of them or building new institutions that represent the new goals and perspectives. This is why European Youth movements must also find approaches towards dealing with and integration the European institutions. They must find ways of utilising them to promote institutional change, in order to support the realisation of their own aspirations. European institutional framework must ensure a quality of content and guarantee sufficient financial means and self-supporting structures that will enable youth programs to be independent of commercialisation.

European institutions, including the European Parliament, have to pay more attention to youth issues, and be more responsive to young people, to allow for wider participation by young people and to provide platforms for a more dedicated pursuit of the interests of young people.

### **Youth Guarantee**

In 2010 Greens in the European Parliament introduced the Youth Guarantee into European Union discussions on tackling youth unemployment. The Youth Guarantee has recently been adopted by the European Council. We expect to see this measure be fully implemented in every European country. It must ensure that all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. However, this is not enough. The Youth Guarantee should ensure inclusiveness within the labour market. Job offers, education and training programmes should be individually tailored to the needs of the individual young person - including those with special needs. Social businesses<sup>3</sup> with diverse workforces should get extra support.

We Greens want the Youth Guarantee Scheme to provide sustainable and long-lasting solutions for job creation. The gains in terms of learning opportunities for young people are high, if they are

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<sup>2</sup> For the green position on Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) please see the draft resolution on MFF

<sup>3</sup> For more information on green vision of the social businesses please see “The Social Dimension of the Green New Deal” as adopted at the EGP Copenhagen Council 2012.

empowered to try out their own ideas. The Youth Guarantee should provide special support in case young people want to establish their own projects. The founding of social enterprises, start-up businesses and non-profit NGOs should be equally supported. Innovative models of sharing jobs and transferring knowledge and skills between generations must be encouraged.

Even though the Youth Guarantee has been agreed upon on the European level, there has been no readiness on the part of the member states to invest new money into the effort. The present budget of €6bn over 7 years is not sufficient by far, as ILO has calculated that much more is needed. We criticise this short-sightedness. We will closely follow MS's implementation of the youth guarantee through the European semester. We should not shy away from naming and shaming the countries that do not live up to their obligations.

The challenge of tackling unemployment cannot be solved at the EU-Level alone. The Youth guarantee needs transnational solidarity, and every European country needs to implement the Youth Guarantee in a concrete policy.

## **Youth Fund**

The EU budget is obviously a core tool to refocus European policy towards young people. Youth issues must be mainstreamed throughout the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). An MFF that reduces the EU's funding of research and development and innovation is short changing today's youth but also future generations. Any kind of public investment must consider the impact on young people.

However, in the present crisis there also must be an immediate effort to address the pressing burden of widespread youth unemployment. Therefore, we demand the establishment of Youth Fund. This Youth Fund must be part of the EU budget, including and extending the existing EU Youth programmes to create one integrated instrument. It should include financing for youth entrepreneurship (particularly social entrepreneurship), strong mobility instruments for non-academic youth, awareness raising amongst young people of their social, democratic and economic rights and financing for European Volunteering and civil society activities.

The implementation of European Investment Bank micro-credit lines with low interest rates for young people can contribute in alleviating the liquidity trap in the financial market and stir the recovery towards a Greener economy.

## **European Volunteering**

In addition to its other financing goals the Youth Fund should provide funding for European Volunteering. In the appeal "We are Europe! Manifesto for re-building Europe from the bottom up" many renowned European citizens and leaders have called for a European Year of Volunteering for Everyone, as a response to the European crisis. The initiators explained their proposal by arguing: "We need a European civil society and the vision of younger generations, if we are going to solve the burning issues of today. ... The European Year of Volunteering for Everyone ... forms a self-help organisation of creative disobedience, the countervailing force to the power of the European and national elites that exist in politics and business." We Greens support this initiative. We proposed a similar initiative in 1999 in the Gahrton Report to the European Parliament.

We believe in further developing the European Voluntary Service into a European volunteering programme for all ages, classes and backgrounds that will help create a new debate about what Europe means to its citizens. Youth plays a crucial role in this regard. Youth volunteering should be as diverse as European society is. Everybody in the European Union should have the opportunity to experience the benefits of a volunteering programme.

## **Youth Convention**

Greens have long advocated for a new European Convention to be the necessary democratic step of a European political integration. In order to make young peoples' voices heard more clearly as part of this process, we also propose establishing an EU Youth Convention. As part of this, young people under 30 years, representing both organised and non-organised youth, would come together to help shape the institutional future of the European Union. The results of this Youth Convention should be formally introduced into the deliberations of the general European Convention, the European institutions and the member states. We also want to see young people as participants in the European Convention.

## **Youth Proofing of EU Policies**

While the Youth Convention would be an ideal source of youth involvement in the process of resizing the European institutions, we also demand that youth concerns are given more attention in the everyday work of the European Union. Hence, we propose two new policy instruments. Firstly, Youth Proofing: in order to make the impact of EU legislation on young people visible we demand Youth proofing of all regulatory and administrative measures taken at the EU level, i.e. checking the short- and long-term impact of such measures on youth as a regular procedure<sup>4</sup>. Youth organisations are to be heard in the implementation of Youth proofing. Secondly, we want to use the European semester more efficiently. Therefore, we propose that Youth emancipation becomes a criteria in the country-specific recommendations that form part of the European semester. Member states must be obliged to actively involve youth organisations in the process of developing their own reform agendas under the European semester. We Greens will propose that the European Parliament will regularly organise extra youth hearings in this context.

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## **Education must learn new lessons**

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Education is one of the core processes to support and ensure the organisation of society and the inclusion of individuals into the overall social system. The right to education must not be abridged. Education is a pluralistic process centered around the individual that is of benefit to whole society. It has an intrinsic value regarding the self-cultivation and self-realization of the individual and is a core resource in the pursuit of happiness. It is widely understood that education starts at an early age and never stops. Therefore, we acknowledge life-long and life-wide learning as the base of understanding and systematization of education systems. Education as such can also be seen as a base, support and regulator of democracy, political and civic engagement, the economy and labour market. We see a great need and opportunity to develop educational systems towards the improvement of the situation and opportunities for young people, and as a primary tool for the reduction of youth unemployment. In addition, schools need to cooperate with the surrounding society, in particular work places, in order to allow young people a better insight into job options, while guarding the independence of schools and their curricula.

## **Multiple access points to education**

The opportunities an individual has both in life and in educational institutions should not depend on the circumstances of their birth. However, the circumstances of their birth do have an important influence on educational performance. Despite a rapid expansion of secondary and

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<sup>4</sup> EGP is asked to continue the development of these concrete proposals with a specific political position and plan.

tertiary education, which has paved the way for a more equal distribution of educational opportunities, educational inequality has proven quite resistant. Expansion is not a sufficient condition for more equality. We are further concerned with the rising numbers of school drop-outs, especially among sometimes marginalised categories, such as migrant youth. In this respect we demand an educational system offering multiple (re-)entry points, so that (re-)engagement in education can easily be undertaken. Because starting off well into the education life is very important, all children should have access to pre-school education/have access to at least one year in kindergarden free of charge. This will provide all children with more equal opportunities, regardless of the financial situation of their parents. Furthermore, decisions on what kind of educational career an individual should choose should be more independent from family background and parental advice. We therefore demand policies guaranteeing that young people are not tied to any one educational path and enabling them to make educational decisions further on. It is very important to ensure that young people leaving the educational system are equipped with up-to-date and practically applicable knowledge and skills. Integrating young people through vocational and university education and transitional measures into the labour market helps them to emancipate from their parents, become independent from social welfare and boosts their self-confidence.

### **Opening the educational system**

The whole system of formal education should be reformed. Today it is organised in a linear, one-way direction and leaves little or no place for entering educational system at a later stage. We urge the opening of educational systems to multiple entrance and exit points, avoiding “dead-end” diplomas and offering opportunities of horizontal mobility between more theoretical general educational and the more vocational tracks. With this system we want to support emancipation of young people, enabling dynamics within and between different social strata. Next to that, this system enables better fits between qualifications and labour markets. In addition, schools need to cooperate with the surrounding society, in particular work places, in order to allow young people a better inside into job options, while guarding the independence of schools and their curricula.

### **Dual system of vocational training and education**

In terms of transition rates, of reducing the rate of youth unemployment, of salaries and formation of competencies, the dual system of vocational training and education is the most successful in Europe. Linking practical work experience with an ongoing training and education has been a success. On the other hand, systems combining both school education and internships, and systems where only vocational training-at-the-workplace prevail produce much poorer results, because they do not consider that skill formation and youth employment are the social responsibility of the companies that contribute to their economy. They lack the framework of social partnership. From the point of view of the single firm, skills are seen as human capital that is residing in the worker and not in the firm, and thus may move with the worker to competing firms. Thus, the employer sees no incentive to pay for the training of competencies that are portable. He either delegates that task to the state, the worker’s unions or to the worker himself, or provides firm-centred vocational training at the workplace that aims at the formation of narrow firm-specific skills that are not easily transferable. Within the framework of social partnership, state, firms and trade unions cooperate in the process of formation of competencies. The firms are able to share in the benefits of cooperation consisting of a large pool of skilled workers accessible to the entire industry. The trade unions profit from raising their members’ competencies and using dual vocational training and education as a tool for youth recruitment.

Introducing this dual system of vocational training and education must be accompanied by re-inventing the framework of social partnership and social responsibility of firms.

## **Reorganising and opening higher educational institutions**

We call for democratisation of education institutions by overcoming the current focus on the elitist model of high academic strata. The framework of life-long-learning tertiary education has to meet the needs of those who enter universities with a more general education as freshmen, and those who enter universities with occupational or social experience through institutions of further education. This can be done within the same university by internal differentiation or by institutional differentiation<sup>5</sup>.

The recognition of vocational experience and of informal/non-formal learning processes should provide mobility between the different tracks of occupational education and academic or professional education.

We also call for a higher education that is free of tuition fees and that is designed in a way to permit flexibility for students so that they can combine studies with work or civil participation.

## **Pan-European education**

We are facing the Europeanisation of decision-making, policies, people, information and capital. In order to ensure sustainability, and the legitimacy of this processes we need to increase the mobility of individuals through their own choice and competencies, and strengthen an equitable and equalising pan-European education that is not mainly focused on the formation of a national elite. We also recognise the value of the work of the Council of Europe in this context.

We acknowledge that English has become and is commonly accepted as the *Lingua Franca* of today. Thus, we support English language education in formal curricula, from the earliest age, Europe wide, without undermining the value of all languages. We also encourage the development and use of automated open source translation tools for a better communication and understanding between people using other languages than English.

We support the positive impact of current initiatives such as the Erasmus programme. We call for pan- European education based on European values, the common market and possibilities for the application of acquired knowledge and skills.

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## **Go from Economy to REconomy**

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Developing youth perspectives without addressing economic issues is like trying to ride a bicycle without wheels. It doesn't work! Without a fundamental change in the economic outlook, whatever promises are being made to the younger generations are hardly credible. This is what the Green New Deal is about. In Europe, we need a transformational Green strategy. We call it here the Green REconomy.

There are many causes of the recent crisis, but untamed financial capitalism focusing on unsustainable, short-termed growth is certainly core among them. We present our alternative concept, and advocate the many elements of our Green REconomy: REnewable Energies; REthinking the economy; REindustrialisation including REshoring jobs and investments and REcycling; REdistribution of wealth and opportunities; REregulation of the markets.

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<sup>5</sup> Internal differentiation: providing special curricular for further education; institutional differentiation: running universities for further education.

The Green REconomy can create both good and fair jobs, and contribute to meaningful and decent standards of living for young people. Europe's young people need jobs. We Greens do not want to store young people in job provision schemes, nor to bury them in endless sequences of internships or cycles of fruitless training. We propose sustainable solutions and ideas that will transform the economy and create both new and fair jobs. In order to do so, we pursue the creation of a sustainable, de-carbonised and human-centric economy. The European Green Party has defined this transformational process in its concept of the Green New Deal.

## **REnewable Energies**

A major success story for the Greens has been the transition from a carbon-intensive, dirty oil-based energy supply to clean, labour-intensive renewable energies. The renewable energy revolution has already created 2.3 million jobs worldwide. The job creation possibilities of this industry are huge and we Greens will continue to pursue our policies of investing in these new industries.

## **RE-Thinking our Economy**

Europe's biggest resource is its people. We aim to invest in young people. Therefore, we advocate for programs that provide them financial support and advice for realising their dreams. Youth Initiative and entrepreneurship need to be supported, for example when creating social entrepreneurs or normal start-ups. Whether through basic income grants, crowd financing or labour contracts that include RElearning benefits or other such tools, we want to enable youth and the rest of society to expand their economic options, including the opportunity to live decent lives working in the social sector, taking care of cultural issues or realising their own dreams. We expect companies to live up to their social obligations. We want to encourage businesses that are organized as co-operatives. In the present crisis we've also seen the emergence of new, grass roots economic systems like time-banks, local energy communities and regional currencies, not-for profit self-organised local health communities and many more innovative non-capitalist projects.

## **Re-Industrialisation**

The ecological transformation of our industry will provide Europe with a new manufacturing base and plenty of jobs. Such a transformation has to be achieved by creating the right framework for industrial development by putting a price on CO<sub>2</sub>-Emissions and by working together with European industry to recycle its waste and become more efficient. We support industrial moves to bring jobs back to Europe. However, new industries need to look different. They need to meet high energy efficiency requirements, high resource efficiency requirements, high environmental and social standards.

## **RE-Distribution**

Our vision for a sustainable economy that serves the need of the youth cannot accept current imbalances in opportunities and wealth distribution within our societies and within Europe. We need to encourage European solidarity on a state and individual level. The redistribution of wealth will result in job creation for young people across Europe. It is also crucial for the democratic viability of our societies. Two major instruments of redistribution are the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax and Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base.

## **Re-Regulation**

The economic crisis is the result of a profit-maximisation-based economical system and deregulation of financial markets which allow unsustainable and antisocial development and speculation. We need to stabilise our economy and that means re-regulating it in order to safeguard it.

The programmes outline above need a solid financial basis. Perennially mounting public debt is not a sustainable situation. Ecological financial reforms are at the heart of economic plans to counter the crisis. Justice in the European tax codes, abolishing tax havens and prosecuting tax evasion must be part of our strategy. We want to get rid of environmentally damaging subsidies.

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## **Action!**

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Youth need concrete action and measures that provide perspective and hope for the future. Here is our list of priorities:

### **1. Youth Guarantee**

A Youth guarantee is the minimum measure we need to see in every European country. It must ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. However, this is not enough: the Youth Guarantee should ensure inclusiveness within the labour market. Job offers, education and training programmes should be individually tailored to the needs of the individual young person - including those with special needs. Social businesses with diverse workforces should get extra support.

A Youth Guarantee Scheme should provide sustainable and long-lasting solutions for job creation. The gains in terms of learning opportunities for young people are high if they are empowered to try out their own ideas. The Youth Guarantee should provide special support in case young people want to establish their own projects. The founding of social enterprises, start-up businesses and non-profit NGOs should be equally supported.

The Youth Guarantee has been agreed upon on the European level. Now every European country needs to implement it in a concrete policy.

### **2. Youth fund**

We demand a Youth fund within the EU budget. It should provide financing for young people's social entrepreneurship, Youth civil society, for mobility of non-academic youth and for the European Volunteering.

### **3. Dual system of vocational training and education**

We advocate the dual system of vocational training and education. In terms of transition rates, of reducing the rate of youth unemployment, of salaries and of skills building, it is the most successful in Europe. If embedded into the framework of social partnership it can help to foster a more socially responsible economy.

#### **4. Quality Internships and Apprenticeships**

European states should ensure the quality of internships and apprenticeships. Young people engaged in internships and apprenticeships need to be protected from exploitation. Internships should be limited to a maximum of 6 months, provide decent financial compensation and should be closely linked to the educational system and be labour market neutral. Interns and apprentices must be covered by social protection and labour market protection measures already in place for regular employees.

#### **5. Empowerment through languages**

Language education provides young people with power to communicate, express themselves, understand others and contribute in various conditions and societies. Therefore, we call for scaling up European language education curricula and programs open for pupils, students, apprentices, workers, and volunteers.

#### **6. Voting from 16 years of age**

We ask for a reduction of the voting age to 16 years in order to involve young people better in the democratic decision-making at all levels. This measure must go hand in hand with a strengthening of political education in both formal and non-formal education.

#### **7. European Volunteering**

We support European volunteering as expressed in the appeal "We are Europe! Manifesto for rebuilding Europe from the bottom up". It would offer a European Year of Volunteering for Everyone. We Greens already proposed a similar initiative in 1999 in the Gahrton Report of the European Parliament.

#### **8. Youth Convention**

In order to make young peoples' voices heard better as part of the process of shaping the future of Europe, we demand the establishment of an EU Youth Convention for people under 30 years of age, representing both organised and non-organised youth.

#### **9. Empowerment through decent living conditions**

If not supported by parents, young people have to bear huge costs of living. An affordable quality of life is a justified demand for young people. Being entangled in a credit-dependent system is not an option. We call for the support of youth housing schemes, affordable public transport and affordable food for the youth. Social youth centers that provide spaces for self-organised living should be further supported.