

Rebecca Harms: the Green way for Europe

The European Union always stood for three great promises: The promise of freedom, the promise of democracy and the promise of a better life. In times of crisis, many Europeans are losing faith in the EU's latter promise(s). Differences between member states, which have always existed, are becoming a burden. North and south, east and west are drifting apart. The idea of community is beginning to crumble, a process fostered by the schoolmasterish style of German Government during the euro crisis.

That is why I want to make another German voice heard during the European Greens' election campaign. I want to show that there are alternatives to Merkel's from-the-top-policy. I want to carry on developing what we have achieved and continue to learn from each other. We do not need yet more Eurogroup meetings or even an exclusive parliament just for Eurozone countries. What we need are strong common institutions and a European Parliament that provides democratic control. Participation and transparency are indispensable to help people understand Brussels and European democracy and to be a living part of it.

As a candidate in the EGP Primary, it is my objective to reduce the gap between us – the European politicians – and you. I want to build renewed trust and understanding in EU politics and in the Green way for Europe. There is still a lot of 'good life' to hold on to, to build on and to fight for.

The Green way for Europe: overcome the crisis

Economic and fiscal policies must be built in equal measure on solidarity and healthy national budgets. Only robust regulation of financial markets and a well-functioning European banking union will create safeguards against a global financial crisis.

Many people I met – in Greece, for instance – want a new beginning in their country and for their country. But they must be given the opportunity to make this happen. Given that there is mass unemployment, which has hit young people particularly hard, we urgently need the means to help those countries. We have to make European money available for micro credits for startup businesses, to support national programmes, to create new perspectives for the future.

Also in the agriculture sector we need true reforms. Support must be shifted to sustainable farming and away from the agro-industry. We need to lessen our dependence on feed imports, pesticides and antibiotics. Organic farming has pioneered the change, but must not remain a privilege for the few. Good healthy food must be affordable for all.

The Green way for Europe: ambitious energy and climate policies!

It is high time to stop the rollback in European climate policy and to gather new momentum to restructure the energy sector. The European energy transition can reinvigorate the economy. It can reduce our dependence on Gazprom and oil sheiks. The energy transition can be a new rallying point for Europe, a project the entire Union can identify with. The expansion of renewables, systematic energy conservation and exploiting the immense efficiency potentials are significant steps on the way towards a sustainable economic system.

I have attended many international climate conferences. The next crucial meeting will be held in Paris in 2015, where a new global climate agreement should be adopted. Now is the time to put increased pressure on the protagonists in Brussels to make that summit a success. The EU's 2020 climate target needs to be raised to at least 30 percent without delay. Ambitious binding targets for 2030 for renewables, emissions reductions and energy efficiency must be agreed and a swift and comprehensive reform of the emissions trading scheme implemented. The chance for success in Paris depends on our ability to show that an ambitious climate strategy is not a burden but the key to innovation and a solid economy.

The green way for Europe: Nuclear phase-out

I fight for a Europe-wide nuclear phase-out. It is plain folly to keep on promoting this high-risk technology. Out of responsibility for the safety of its citizens, the EU must enforce the highest safety standards as long as nuclear power plants are in operation. The polluter-pays-principle must apply for nuclear accidents as well as for the nuclear waste.

The Green way for Europe: defend democracy and human rights

The uncovering of the US intelligence services' spy programmes by Edward Snowden made it painfully clear: Today, the right to data protection and privacy exists only on paper. That is why legally binding standards for reliable data privacy must be secured anew for all citizens of the EU. Without these guarantees, there can be no Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The EU must not trade away our values.

But data protection is only one example for a fundamental right at risk. In Hungary, Italy and Bulgaria, fundamental rights such as the freedom of the media have fallen victim to power politics. Minority rights still have not been asserted, or are even being curtailed further in quite a few European countries. This is a call for us to take action. The EU must stand up for human rights within and outside its borders.

The asylum and refugee policies are a shame for the EU. The tragic fate of the Mediterranean refugees concerns all EU states; we must jointly assume responsibility. We must implement the already existing asylum standards in all EU countries. We need legal ways of immigration for those who are ready to risk their lives to find a safe and better life. Furthermore, we have to invest in the African countries to help to improve living conditions in the countries of origin.

The Green way - shape Europe's future!

My political work began in 1975 in the German anti-nuclear movement. The continuing dispute over the energy transition and nuclear phase-out tells me that we need a lot of patience to implement our ideas and visions. This also applies to Europe. We want and we need to take new steps on the path towards a political union! We must use patience and passion to gain the trust of the people for this idea! Europe is the best political experiment the world has ever seen.