



The choice between a social Europe – and no Europe at all

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Many people are currently following the process of European unification with fear rather than expectation. They feel that the “social Europe” is in a state of crisis and that the emphasis on “liberalisation” and pan-European “competition” is benefiting profits rather than the ideas of peace and international understanding. The opportunities provided by the peaceful coexistence of so many different nations and cultures are too often overshadowed by purely economic considerations.

Many of the worries are focused on the permanent calls for ever more drastic cuts in corporate spending – which do not gain in plausibility through constant repetition. People feel they are being abandoned in their need of defending themselves against the risks of illness and old age. Europe is being identified with all the negative effects of “globalisation”.

On behalf of these people, one has to raise some serious questions about the social security systems: Is the level of pensions really high enough? Do our healthcare and nursing care systems reach the levels of quality appropriate for a wealthy society and adequate for the needs of the people who rely on them for their physical well-being? Even if we take into account the need for increased spending, our growing economies will create a cornucopia of private and social wealth. Our societies have become very wealthy indeed, and we can continue to grow as societies which can well afford sufficient welfare provisions.

While considering to restrict the first (contribution-funded) pillar of our social security systems to basic levels of provision, the EPP holds the opinion that this basic level must still allow people to lead their lives in self-respect and dignity.

The discussion about the distribution of costs will need to measure public and private systems by the same criteria, foregoing any ideological prejudice: the focus must be on cost control and the stimulation of the employment market. Cost analyses must not be limited to the costs shouldered by the enterprises, but take in the financial contributions of ordinary citizens. A re-distribution of costs from one level to the other does not constitute a substantial improvement of the system.

- 2 -

The EPP holds the view that an economically sensible balance between public and privately funded social security systems must be struck.

If we succeed in converting the positive aspects of the European unification process – in particular of the European social model – into practical policies, we may also succeed in converting today's "Eurosceptics" into tomorrow's pro-Europeans. The protection of the European social security systems and the commitment to the ideals of European integration are walking hand in hand.