



## **Statement of the ILRS-conference, 27-29 September 2018, Utrecht, The Netherlands**

### **A NEW NARRATIVE ON EUROPE**

We, as social democrats and democratic, religious socialists propose a new narrative on Europe focussed on social issues and the needs of ordinary people.

As of today, the debate on the future of the European Union is dominated by the conservative ideals of Europe as constituted by economic cooperation in favour of a stronger internal market on the one side and the populist rhetoric of loss of sovereignty and dictates from Brussels undermining local political power on the other. Because of this, debate on Europe, European cooperation and European politics is now simplified as a choice between the current technocracy of Brussels and the internal market on the one hand and the cheap tales about bringing the power back home by leaving the European union or at least prune back its responsibilities in favour of member states on the other.

We as religious socialists believe that politics should not be technocracy. We believe socialism to be a value based movement and we strive for a policy that is about hope, connectedness, social justice and solidarity.

We see a world rapidly changing. After the last presidential election in the United States, after Brexit, after the hardening of dictatorship in Russia and growing political turmoil along European borders, and with basic human rights and the rule of law under duress in several

European countries, the geopolitical considerations to be taken into account have changed dramatically.

We see the devastating results of Climate Change all over the world. We know the images of drought and flooding from the Third World, but after the unregular high temperatures of the last decade, Europe now is having a taste of them as well. We know that we have a solemn responsibility towards people everywhere in the world and next generations to preserve our planet, nourish our natural resources and make the transition towards sustainable energy and a clean economy. But as of today, the emission of carbon dioxide is still at the same level as it was in the 1990s, while we know we need a strong reduction.

We see the devastating consequences of global economic inequality, conflict, unfreedom and war. As of today, more people than ever have left their homes and their countries to seek refuge. We know we have a humanitarian duty towards them, as they look for safety and opportunity. But as of today, families are stuck in the mud in Greece and Italy, children are drowning in the Mediterranean and people have to live in dehumanizing circumstances in Refugee Camps in the Middle East.

We see the anxiety and fear for the future in our countries, where the rights of working people and fair and just economic policies have been immolated on the altar of neoliberal economic policies. People are feeling left alone in a harsh world in which the strong are becoming stronger, the wealthy are becoming wealthier while the uncertainty of common people has not been addressed at a sufficient level. Debates about the future of our welfare state are continuously about economic considerations instead of about human dignity and the rights, opportunities and safety of all members of our society. After the devastating economic crisis, ordinary families have paid more than their fair share, whilst multinational cooperation's and the financial sector again are looking for ways to undermine rules and regulations and evade taxes.

We, as religious socialists, discussing European politics at our triennial congress in Utrecht, believe that we need a new narrative on Europe. We need to talk about the ways European political cooperation can work for our families, in granting protection from the sometimes harsh economic climate in a globalizing world. We need to discuss new European social policies, that give every single member of our society the opportunity to live their lives with

their heads held high, free from want and fear. We need to reassess our policies on climate change and have to further discuss how to build a stronger economy for all without ruining our planet for generations to come. We need to reconnect with our humanity when addressing the problems we face with irregular migration and have to find an answer to the so-called refugee-crisis that is in line with our values. We cannot accept people to be stuck in camps or drowning at sea and at the same time make statements about Europe as a community of values. We refuse the discrimination on birthplace and ask for a discussion about the European border regime.

In order to come up with such a narrative, we as religious socialists look back to the early foundations of European cooperation. After the horrors of the First and Second World War and the biggest economic crisis ever seen, the political leaders of Europe got together to find ways to prevent such horrors for generations to come. We have a solemn responsibility to honour that inheritance by once again formulating a positive outlook on Europe that is inclusive and makes use of the common understanding of love that is in all world religions.

We are in need of a new political ethic, a new narrative on why European political cooperation is needed to ensure social security, to build a green economy for all and to find a solution for the humanitarian crisis that is the day to day reality of refugees all over our planet.

As social democrats and democratic socialists of Europe, we should firmly defend the necessity of European cooperation against those who claim that we are better off on ourselves. And we should maybe even more firmly defend the necessity of European cooperation against those who believe it to be in the best interest of our economy alone, driving down the rights of workers and hollowing out our welfare state. Europe, as a social and democratic union of states, is not just an economic technocracy nor is it an impediment factor in building a better world for all. It is a political necessity facing the challenges.

Therefore, the International League of Religious Socialist urges social democratic and socialist parties all over Europe to strongly speak up against those who are destroying the European project, to have the courage to speak up against those who try to divide us. We stress for a new political narrative that rests upon the key values of social democracy: solidarity, kindness, inclusion and dignity for all.