

Europe is crying out for a long term left wing vision based on job creation

Op-ed article by PES President Sergei Stanishev on POLITICO, June 2016.

Media reports of a decline of left wing socialist parties across Europe are well wide of the mark. Purely on a statistical basis, parties from the European Party of Socialists are either in power alone or in coalition in at least half of the governments in the European Union. That is not the sign of a political left in serious decline. Admittedly, right wing governments do hold the balance of power in the EU right now. But this can be an opportunity for the left as they are making a mess of things with a short-sighted obsession with austerity.

Greece is a classic example of this as the social fabric of the country is falling apart due to the budgetary straitjacket that the EU is imposing on it. Instead, there is a huge call for long-term solutions that can deliver a more inclusive, more equal and fairer society in Europe and that is exactly what the left is working on.

While political right wing parties apply or call for excessive budget cuts, do virtually nothing to deal with excessive bonuses and allow unemployment levels to go up and up, the political left has a longer term vision based on tackling unemployment with more investment. If Europe is not careful, long term unemployment among young people in countries like Greece, Spain, Italy but also others may end up dragging economic growth further down at best and ripping society apart at worst.

The truth is that higher employment levels are the only route to a truly sustainable and cohesive society. And to show that this is no pipe dream, there is a very practical example of a programme that the EU can build on. It's called the European Youth Guarantee and it is a fund that helps young people find training opportunities that can lead to full time work.

Currently the budget for the fund comes to six billion euro period for a three year period lasting until 2016. The International Labour Organisation has pointed to the need for triple that budget leading up to 2020, a call backed by the left wing President of France, Francois Hollande, and the left wing Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Renzi.

Where recent media reports have got it right is to point out that young unemployed Europeans with no prospects can easily drift into a life of crime and are vulnerable targets for recruitment by terrorist organisations such as ISIS. Unemployment leads to greater inequality in society, social fragmentation, disillusionment and potentially violence. Such a society would be a disaster for Europe and yet right wing parties do not appear to want to really tackle the unemployment issue head on.

The danger is that the right will continue to focus on excessive short-termist austerity and on spending more and more on higher security levels whilst neglecting the real needs of European society. Europeans need targeted investment programmes such as the European Youth Guarantee and long term programmes to improve education and childcare facilities. These are the kinds of policy that the left offers and the right does not. The current climate is a huge opportunity for left wing parties to lead Europe towards a fairer and more equal society.