

The Greens in the European Parliament: 2004-2009

The last few years have been crucial for the development of the European Union, as European integration has increased in speed, breadth and depth. The Greens are active supporters of, and participants in, the Union's strengthening and growth. Not because we view European integration as a goal in and of itself, but because we regard it as essential if the Union is to become more democratic and better able to confront the challenges of the forthcoming century.

All too often, Member States and political parties espouse the greater good of European integration and cooperation, only to lapse back into the traditional mindset of national rivalries. The Greens, in contrast, view the EU through a genuinely pan-European prism, pursuing policies that place the continent's citizens – not its governments, corporations, or special interests – at their heart, policies that seek to guarantee our democratic interests, hold accountable those in positions of power, and realise our vision for the future, of a peaceful and sustainable Union.

The world we live in

To be blunt, European Union foreign policy is inconsistent, incoherent – and frequently hypocritical. EU officials and leaders repeatedly assert that the role of Europe in the world is to promote democracy, human rights, peace and sustainable development. That's undeniably a laudable sentiment, and one we share. Unfortunately, the EU contradicts those values on a daily basis – through, for example, its efforts to build strategic partnerships with countries like China and Russia that systematically violate human rights and international conventions.

The Greens have consistently and loudly objected to the leniency shown by the Commission and the EU Council to such countries. It is largely through our actions, for example, that the issues of Chechnya and Tibet have been debated in the European Parliament.

At the same time, Greens have repeatedly pointed out that the EU is hamstrung by its reliance on fossil fuels, a reliance that makes it more vulnerable to and dependent on authoritarian regimes that undermine the basic values upon which the EU was founded. Reducing our dependence on gas, oil and coal is the only way to make our foreign policy consistent with the commitments and the principles enshrined in EU treaties.

The EU must make democracy, human rights, peace and sustainable development the centerpiece of a foreign policy that is *assertive*, *sustainable* and *ethical*:

- *assertive* because the EU cannot shy away from its responsibilities as a global player and must promote and support its founding values;
- *sustainable* because energy and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin and only an environmentally-friendly energy policy based on renewables can preserve the credibility and the independence of our foreign policy;
- *ethical* because the EU must be consistent with its principles and words must be followed by deeds.

On a practical level, the Greens support the involvement of EU troops as peacekeepers in such countries as Bosnia and Congo, provided their operations are conducted within the framework of the United Nations, are properly financed, prepared and equipped, and do not fall foul of national post-colonial foreign policy ambitions.

Thanks to pressure from the Greens, the European Parliament has insisted that such EU troops – and humanitarian workers - must not be sent to regions where depleted-uranium weapons are deployed. Indeed, Greens have worked hard to ensure the Parliament supports calls for such weapons to be banned.

The Greens have also been a major driving force behind collaborative efforts to combat the transfer of illegal light weapons, to expand the global treaty on landmines to cover anti-vehicle mines, and to ban cluster munitions.

We are fighting hard for nuclear disarmament to become a part of the European Security Strategy. European nuclear arsenals should be dismantled and Europe should become a nuclear weapon-free zone. We strongly support the European campaign to force the United States to withdraw its nuclear weapons and to scale down its bases from EU territory. In the European Parliament, the Greens are the driving force behind the demand that the US should give up its plan to deploy its anti-ballistic missile system on European territory; and we insist that all efforts to deploy such a system through the Alliance should be stopped. Furthermore, we are strongly opposed to the deployment of weapons in space.

Our rights, and those of others

In theory, respect for and promotion of human rights is a cornerstone of the European Union. Indeed, Article 11 of the EU Treaty recognises it as one of the aims of the common foreign and security policy. In reality, however, experience and practice has shown that respect for these fundamental principles is often trumped by political or strategic interests.

For the Greens, there is no such equivocation. To us, supporting and promoting human rights should be the very bedrock of all external EU policies. It is a position we have backed with positive action, even when doing so discomfits our allies or EU member governments. For example, we have strongly expressed our full opposition to extraordinary renditions and the use of secret detention centres on European soil. Whether the issue is human rights in China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tunisia, Libya or elsewhere, we always adopt the same stance and urge the relevant governments to respect their international commitments. Double standards completely undermine the credibility of any stance on human rights.

What applies to other nations also applies to EU Member States, and those that aspire to be member states. To that end, Greens have contributed significantly to the “Progress Reports” that assess the human rights situation of EU candidates for accession. In the case of Bulgaria and Romania, which struggled to reach the required standards for judicial independence and the fight against corruption, the Greens proposed a follow-up mechanism in order to monitor progress after they acceded to the EU.

In a similar vein, the Greens supported the commencement of accession negotiations with Turkey; but here, too, those same conditions apply. The principal pillar of any policy regarding Turkey must be that country’s democratisation. Three times democratic life in Turkey has been shaken by military coups; the institutional consequences continue to reverberate to this day. We believe that engaging with Turkey and embracing it as part of the European family can only help to strengthen its democratic progress, to the benefit of the people of the country, the region, and the European Union.

The EU's treaty specifies its commitment to combating all forms of violence, including against women. Studies in Sweden, Germany and Finland show that at least 30-50% of women between 16 and 67 have at some time been victims of physical or sexual violence; if psychological violence is included, then Europe-wide the figures rise to between 45 and 50%. Repeated Green demands for European legislation finally resulted in the Parliament insisting that the Commission "identifies a legal base within current European legislation to combat violence against women". Additionally, we have continued to campaign for women's rights in third world nations – including in Central America, where in some countries murders of girls and women have undergone a sharp increase in recent years – and to draw attention to the issue of forced trade and prostitution of women, in Europe and worldwide.

Equal treatment for women is a fundamental right, and thanks to our pressure, the annual report on fundamental rights in the European Union, suspended since 2004, is now once again underway. This report had and will again have a major role in evaluating the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in Europe. In addition, the Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is conducting an investigation, as a result of our efforts, into the discrimination encountered by homosexuals in each Member State of the European Union.

Too often, human rights become an optional consideration in the face of economic or security concerns. That's why the Greens work to ensure that the necessary fight against terrorism is not conducted at the expense of other, often more serious, threats or by undermining fundamental freedoms. We have been guided in this effort by three main principles:

- *proportionality*, to guarantee that we strike the right balance between security and civil rights;
- *effective measures*, to guarantee that we do not undermine the very purpose of the laws we adopt;
- and that within police and judicial cooperation, *targeted investigation* is something the EU should always strive for when putting in place measures to fight crime.

Additionally, policies concerning immigration and control of our borders must be respectful of fundamental rights; they should recognise the very human element of immigration, and in many cases the genuine distress of those who knock on our door because their life is in danger. Their protection is a responsibility that we as Greens take very seriously and consider a priority for the EU.

Rights, protections and freedoms

Two of the fundamental freedoms of the EU are the free movement of workers and the free movement of services. In practice, this means that every EU citizen has the right to work and live in any other EU country, and every EU company has the right to sell its products throughout the Union, whether they be goods such as hair dryers, or services – for example, dry cleaning.

An essential component of these freedoms is the principle of "equal pay and equal conditions for equal work at the workplace." If, for example, a Portuguese company sends a worker to a construction site in Luxembourg, the Portuguese employee has the same rights with regard to, for example, minimum wage and working hours, as his Luxembourg colleague.

However, the European Commission sought to seriously weaken the directive that enshrines these rights, by arguing that the measures taken by Member States to ensure that it is enforced were hindering the free movement of services. The European Parliament, led by the Greens in concert with the Socialists and allied with trade unions and NGOs, fought back. We argued that, far from being watered down, the directive needed to be better implemented, guaranteeing the protection of workers' rights. Ultimately, the Commission relented and those rights were protected.

The Greens also fought against the adoption of the "Bolkestein", or services directive, which seeks to create a single market within the EU for services, similar to the one that presently exists for goods. Our opposition was motivated by two unacceptable provisions. One was the "Country of Origin" principle, which would have opened the door to "social dumping" – companies operating in one Member State, using workers from a poorer, less-regulated State where wages are cheaper, and by-passing many of the legal requirements and standards of the host state. The second was the inclusion of "services of general economic interest" under the directive, which would have effectively subjected public services to the same regulations as, for example, real estate agents and advertising companies. Although we were unable to prevent this provision from being included in the final directive, we were able to ensure that a number of vital services – for example, healthcare and most social services – were excluded. Our fight against the "Country of Origin" principle was almost wholly successful, and that clause was dropped.

We campaigned to end opt-outs on the working time directive – opt-outs that allowed companies to compel employees to work more than the EU-wide agreed average maximum, to the detriment of workers' health and safety. At our urging, the European Parliament agreed to vote in favour of ending these opt-outs, to keep the maximum average working week at 48 hours, and to calculate that average over a period of 12 months, allowing employers and employees the flexibility they need to work longer and shorter hours as and when needed. EU governments in Council however refuse to accept this position.

We have also campaigned for rights outside the workplace, and to ensure that equal protective rights apply to all. At present, discrimination based on race or ethnic origin is prohibited in employment, occupation, vocational training and a range of areas of non-employment; discrimination based on gender is prohibited in the same range of areas with the exception of education and media and advertising. However, discrimination based on age, religion or belief, sexual orientation and disability is only prohibited in employment, occupation and vocational training. Following pressure from the European Parliament, led by the Greens, the European Commission has agreed to a new draft directive that will bridge this gap in anti-discrimination protection, and will put into effect the principle of equal treatment for all, outside the workplace as well as inside. The Parliament report on the new directive was drafted by a Green MEP and adopted by Parliament despite reluctance from Conservatives.

Digital rights are also dear to the Greens. The Greens welcome the enormous potential of the global information society. As well as offering a new era of innovation, creativity and communication, the digital age can make a substantial contribution to reducing our carbon footprint. However, vested economic and political interests stand in the way of a free flow of information and knowledge.

Greens want an open Intellectual Property (IP) policy. Access to internet content and knowledge should not be subject to unreasonable restrictions or irrational privatisation. Greens have promoted the interests of small businesses, notably by proposing funding SME research support for ICT: a total of € 1336 million is now earmarked for this purpose in the current EU research framework programme. Greens also defend the rights of individuals. A Parliament-approved Green amendment to telecommunications legislation asserted that internet users, for example accused of copyright breach by downloading, should not have their connection withdrawn without a judicial decision.

Our environment and health

The idea that the air we breathe could poison us seems far-fetched; it evokes images of developing nations with little government oversight, or of the early days of the Industrial Revolution. And yet, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, poor air quality results in 350,000 premature deaths annually in the European Union, and costs the EU between €276 and €790 billion in health impacts. That's as much as nine percent of total GDP for the EU25.

Clearly, the controls and regulations presently in place supposedly to guarantee clean air are wholly inadequate. And yet, some members of the European Parliament sought to water them down. It took rearguard action by the Greens and our allies to keep the laws intact.

Such regulations as do exist are all too frequently and flagrantly flouted. Offences such as the illegal emission of hazardous substances into the air, water or soil, the illegal shipment of waste, or the illegal trade in endangered species can have devastating effects on human health and the environment. The Greens strongly support a proposed Commission directive requiring Member States to provide for criminal sanctions, including imprisonment, against those who commit certain environmental crimes.

Because knowledge is power, the Greens have been leaders in improving public access to information on the environment, be it regarding dioxin levels in emissions or knowing where on the Internet to find information about polluted areas near where you live.

For example, have you ever wondered whether your flooring or your mobile phone contains very hazardous substances? You may have done, but you had no way to find out - unless the manufacturer or retailer had the means and the inclination to tell you. Thanks to work by the Greens, consumers will in the future be entitled to request information about the use of certain toxic substances in consumer products. The request is free of charge, and retailers are obliged to respond within 45 days.

Remarkably, most of the chemicals on the marketplace have never been tested to ascertain their environmental impact or potential toxicity to humans – simply because there has been no legal requirement for them to be. Work by the Greens has also led to a change in this situation; testing of many chemicals will now be mandatory, and the Greens are also leading efforts to develop alternatives to animal testing for these and other products as soon as possible. Greens have also pushed the European Parliament to agree that Member States are obliged to prevent and limit inputs of hazardous substances into groundwater, including under agricultural areas.

Greens also work for the protection of biodiversity. At our urging the European Parliament has called for a moratorium on the deployment of military high-intensity active naval sonar threatening whales, dolphins and other marine life; drafted the legislative report to ban import of illegally logged timber; and for EU support of an ivory trade moratorium, to name but a few successful initiatives to help protect the nature and wildlife of our planet.

Climate change, energy and transport

Melting ice caps and glaciers, drought, floods, storms, rising sea level, shortages of freshwater, record temperatures, loss of animal species ... these are just some of the numerous consequences of climate change as a result of the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil.

Global climate change is arguably the single biggest challenge humanity faces worldwide in the twenty-first century. Its impacts are already outpacing even the most dire predictions made by scientists. It is not too late to bring global warming to a halt, but we must act soon. We must reduce our energy consumption and move to an economy that is based on renewable such as wind and solar, not fossil fuels. There is no other option.

It is now widely acknowledged that increased efficiency is the cheapest and most effective means of addressing the various energy challenges facing Europe, including reducing our carbon emissions, while creating added value and jobs. That's why the EU has passed a series of legislative measures governing buildings, energy-efficient appliances and energy services, and why EU Heads of State and Government agreed in March 2007 to a target of a 20 percent reduction in overall energy use in the EU by 2020.

That same summit also set a binding target for 20 percent of EU energy generation to be met by renewable by the same date. The Commission has since translated this political demand into a proposed law. This followed strong action by the European Parliament, led by the Greens, which culminated in a report that urged that one-quarter of energy use in the EU be provided by renewables by 2020, and prompted resolutions requesting a roadmap for achieving 50 percent energy use from renewable sources by 2040.

We are practicing what we preach. The Greens managed to push the Council to agree that the public sector must set an example and be obliged to buy the most energy-efficient office equipment; and, since the end of 2007, the EP's buildings have been supplied with green electricity.

Some areas continue to present particularly strong challenges to efforts to stop global warming, in particular the transport sector. Greenhouse gas emissions from aviation alone have doubled since 1990, and are projected to double again by 2020. The Greens have been at the forefront of building majorities in the European Parliament to insist on rigorous measures to address aviation impact on climate, including placing firm caps on permissible emissions from airplanes. Private motor vehicles, too, continue to be a significant contributor to greenhouse gases, which is why the Greens support infrastructure for other forms of transport, from railways to bicycle lanes.

The 2007 summit agreed that 10 percent of overall EU transport fuel consumption should come from biofuels, but although they can help, it is important that we not solve one problem by causing another. The Greens have been almost alone in resisting the siren call of biofuels as the perfect alternative to fossil fuels, because the first priority of agriculture must be feeding people and not fueling cars.

It is important also not to fall into the trap of believing that a decrease in reliance on fossil fuels inevitably must lead to renewed emphasis on other, environmentally damaging and inherently risky forms of power generation. Nuclear power is not the answer, but the nuclear industry sees global warming as an opportunity for expansion. And it has met with some success: construction of a new nuclear reactor is underway in Finland; a decision has been made to build a similar type of reactor in France; and there is a clear push from the British and some Eastern European governments for nuclear power. All of these are worrying signs of a possible nuclear 'renaissance'.

We have managed some victories in the face of this would-be renaissance. We succeeded in ensuring that neither the European Parliament nor the Council regard nuclear power as "renewable" energy. But we must remain vigilant to keep the nuclear genie in its bottle.

Food, agriculture and fisheries

Our view of food is simple. It should be healthful, nutritious, and sustainable, not unhealthy, toxic, and environmentally destructive.

We believe that sustainable food production does not use genetically manipulated plants, does not contaminate the environment with pesticides, does not decimate fish stocks, and does not destroy the rainforest to produce soy for cattle.

It is absurd that food, the very thing that nourishes and sustains us, should damage our environment in its production and make us unhealthy and obese in its consumption. All too often, however, consumers are unaware what they are buying and eating, or are misled as to its true nature, which is why the Greens supported a regulation on food advertisements that make health or nutrition claims. The food industry attacked the proposal and sought to delete its core provision: the establishment of nutrient profiles that will prohibit manufacturers from marketing junk food (high in sugar, salt or fat) with advertisements praising its health benefits (like "rich in calcium, good for your bones.") It took three years, but thanks to the Greens in the European Parliament, a solid piece of legislation was eventually adopted.

Even food that, on face value, is healthful and nutritious can contain unseen substances that threaten us and our environment. We want to see an end of the presence of harmful pesticides and toxins in our food. Dangerous substances should be replaced by safer alternatives and the overall use of pesticides must be reduced.

We believe also that given the uncertainties about the risks involved with genetically manipulated food, such food should not be produced. But while it is allowed, consumers should have the right to know what they are being offered and how their food is produced. Since 2004, food and feed producers have had to label their products if they include elements of genetically manipulated plants. This label offers farmers and consumers the opportunity to say no to manipulated plants. However, animal products, like eggs, milk and meat, are not required to carry labels advising whether the animals were fed with GE plants. The Greens, representing the wish of millions of European citizens, are the only party in the European Parliament fighting for the labelling of animal products.

Industrial-scale food production invariably impacts the environment and relegates fishers and farmers to cogs in giant, faceless wheels. We have supported reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) where it has developed the scope for more responsibility for farmers over their local and regional markets. Nevertheless, we have strongly opposed efforts to weaken the existing relatively high level of environmental and consumer protection that the CAP provides. We have also made legislative proposals to cut payments to big landowners and farms which do not respect environmental laws and to increase spending on those farms which employ people through processing of local and regional products.

In the ocean, an increasingly industrialised global fishing fleet plunders the world's fish stocks while reducing employment and income for coastal communities in desperate need of both. As the world's largest market for fish and with one of the biggest fleets, the EU should be playing a leading role to combat destructive fishing. All too often, however, the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament apparently sees its role as defending the industry at all costs rather than protecting the environment that makes that industry possible. The Greens, in contrast, continue to be the only political group in the Parliament that fights to improve the way EU fleets behave in the waters of developing countries; for example, we campaigned to keep EU fleets out of the Western Sahara in the fisheries agreement with Morocco. And Greens have taken the lead in attempting to reduce the wastefulness of fishing by developing financial incentives to reduce and ultimately eliminate the practice of "discarding", or throwing overboard, unwanted fish.

Trade and development

The EU is the biggest trade bloc in the world. Indeed, reducing barriers to trade among its members was the *raison d'être* of the Union's progenitors. Needless to say, then, trade is a subject of great importance and much discussion in Brussels. Yet very little of that discussion challenges the fundamentals of free trade, or questions how the present global trading system can be fixed – or even acknowledges that it needs to be.

Greens are critical of many aspects of trade as presently practiced, of the extent to which it can be environmentally damaging and to the social and economical disadvantage of those who are supposed to benefit from it. We are, for example, especially critical of trade that is conducted over ever-greater distances, particularly if the traded products can be produced closer to where the consumers live, not least because the long-distance movement of goods contributes to climate change. Following the release of a report by the Greens on "Trade and Climate Change," the European Parliament demanded an end to public spending on fossil fuel projects involving our trade partners. As a result, public banks such as the European Investment Bank, or the Export Credit Agencies of the EU Member States, may no longer give foreign loans that finance projects based on old energy technology.

The same report contained a number of innovative proposals for tackling climate change via the mechanisms of international trade. For example, the Greens succeeded in coalescing the entire European Parliament around a proposal to reward developing countries such as Ecuador for not extracting their oil if they thereby avoid destruction of their forests. The Greens secured European Parliament support for a reform of the "anti-dumping" rules, so that imports into the EU from countries like the USA or China that do not adhere to Kyoto climate goals can be punished for "ecological dumping". And the Greens also succeeded in convincing the Parliament that technical innovation for climate-saving devices ought to be shared as widely as possible with poorer countries.

But as well as its contributions to climate change, international trade falls short of its idealised image in many other ways. Although it is frequently touted as a means to inject wealth into, and spur development in, developing countries, it can actually have the contrary effect. For example, many developing countries and particularly those in Africa are very rich in natural resources. And yet, the population is relegated to a permanent state of material deprivation and debilitating poverty. Much of the reason is that not all policies prepared by donors were meant to improve the standard of living of the population.

For most African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries agriculture is a vital economic sector. It provides food, employment, and income. Employment in agriculture represents 60% in all ACP countries. Despite the fact that the majority of the poor live in rural areas, neither national government nor EU development cooperation policy give priority to this vital sector. Instead of being encouraged to produce for the local market, ACP countries are pushed to produce for the international market and import subsidised staple food for their own consumption from rich countries. In Cameroon for example, 87 percent of rice is imported, to the detriment of local producers. In that same country, imports of frozen chickens from the EU increased by 2100 percent in 2004, throwing thousands of local farmers out of work. Following a campaign from the Greens, which included offering support and advice to local NGOs, the Cameroon government decided to limit the import of frozen chickens and to eliminate Value Added Tax on chickens produced locally.

Unfortunately, such situations are widespread. To prevent them from being so, this situation a radical policy change is needed. Development policy has to shift from free trade solutions towards a Greener approach. Fair, equitable, coherent, socially and environmentally sound policies must replace the current “free trade only” policy.

Democracy in action

Perhaps the biggest difference between the Greens and other parties in the European Parliament is our attitude to the democratic process. Whereas many others ask for votes at election time and then dole out information to voters on a “need to know” basis, the Greens work tirelessly to promote truly participatory democracy in the EU, by encouraging citizens’ use of their right to petition the European Parliament, notably in the field of environmental protection. This we have done by building and working with a broad network of citizens and nongovernmental organizations concerned by inaction on the part of their governments. This is particularly the case in new member states, where the lack of a culture of environmental protection often leaves the EU as the only hope for citizens and NGOs against unsustainable projects and policies.

The campaign against routing the Via Baltica Transport-TEN highway through Rospuda Valley is perhaps the best known recent example of a successful campaign to save a major site of European biodiversity. The Polish NGOs working on the issue have said that they found the Greens’ role to be decisive in blocking the project.

But there have been others. For instance, more than 400,000 Europeans signed petitions protesting illegal hunting of migratory birds in Malta, resulting in resolutions presented by the Greens and passed by the European Parliament in March 2007. We have also helped save the Albufera wetland in Valencia, Spain from being drained by a diversion of the Jucar River, an example of our work to protect biodiversity and ensure sustainable water management.

Following on from that campaign, a key focus of our work in the near future will be to defend the Habitats and Birds Directives of the European Commission against current attempts to weaken them radically.

Massive urban development projects in Spain have been the subject of tens of thousands of petitions from citizens of various member states, including Spain itself. The petitioners seek help to protect their homes from being appropriated, without due compensation, by private speculators, aided by corruption within local authorities. The European Parliament has denounced these practices as violations of the petitioners' human and fundamental rights; at the same time, such massive urbanisation projects pose major threats to the environment.

It is safe to say that the interest in this matter on the part of the European Parliament, led by the Greens and combined with grassroots mobilisation on the ground, has been key in ensuring the topic of abusive urbanisation has received near-constant attention in the Spanish media. As a consequence of such attention, national authorities have sought to take control of the situation and find a solution.