

Overcoming inequality as a political challenge
African- European party dialogue of socialists and democrats
Windhoek – Namibia 4 – 5 September 2017

The way forward – Conny Reuter, Secretary General of SOLIDAR

It is a pleasure and I feel much honored to be asked to draw some conclusions at the end of this important dialogue. Thanks to FES Namibia and SWAPO-P for inviting me.

What is the link of a progressive civil society network with the political family of socialists and democrats? In fact SOLIDAR has been created under the name of International Workers Aid by the predecessor organization of the Socialist International in 1948 whose ambition was to offer a platform for the so called “fore front organisations”. IN 1995 the secretariat was established in Brussels and the name changed to SOLIDAR. We are a European network with international outreach and many of us and of our members have been actively supporting the struggles against apartheid and colonialism. Actually SOLIDAR counts 62 organisations in 25 European countries and has a global outreach in 90 countries. In a way it represents the non-governmental progressive civil society. We work closely with the Party of European Socialists, the S&D group in the European Parliament as well as with Global Progressive Forum and the Progressive Alliance. Furthermore we campaign together with ETUC and ITUC on promoting Decent Work, Social Protection and federating domestic workers.

In itself the dialogue conference is a success as – based on our memories – we have to exchange for reaching a better mutual understanding and debate on equal footing. Taking the time like here in Windhoek, is a step for preparing joint action at global level. Relaunching the dialogue, rethinking our strategies and choices as well as reconnecting amongst us were at the core of our conference. Although we have to engage to continue a real decolonization process, there is much common ground although the colonial past of the European countries like the UK, France, Spain and Germany is different. When Jules Ferry, who launched in 1875 the public, obligatory and non-confessional school system in France, he was at the same time minister of the colonies whereas August Bebel in Germany already insisted on decoupling the colonization issue.

On this continent liberation movements, which we Europeans supported, were successful and had to face a new challenge: building democratic and socialist societies in difficult times. Whereas until 1990 the block confrontation had a huge impact in the developments on this continent, the fall down of the wall opened a new area. Also a new kid is around the block: China. In 2008 we thought that this was the beginning of the end of casino and turbo capitalism, but conservative forces have managed to keep power and to sell remedies which were those having led to the crisis. For us it shall not be the financial consolidation which counts, the social consolidation for building fair, just and inclusive societies. Within the social-democratic family there is a common bond between socialists, social-democrats and democrats.

What might be the way forward? Before developing some ideas, it will be necessary to clarify if there is a general agreement to continue this form of dialogue. If there is a general understanding on continuation, we shall see in which format, on which topics and where it shall take place. Exchange, mutual learning like we also practice in the frame of the Progressive Alliance facilitates a better coordination at global level will facilitate a common agenda setting for a real paradigm shift. There are many international occasion where socialists and democrats could better work together to really impact, like the different summits, the international institutions like UN, ILO and WTO. Alliance building is the pre-condition for putting in place a transformative agenda around trade, investment, youth and migration – as we discussed here - and gaining new majorities.