



## A MORE SUSTAINABLE PATH FORWARD

The first meeting of Progressive Society's Independent Commission for Sustainable Equality ([ICSE](#)) on April 26th marked the start of a six-month lab to bring about a meaningful contribution for an alternative model of growth and development in the EU. The foundation for the upcoming months' work on combatting inequalities has been laid out successfully.



*Fighting Inequality: the first meeting of the Independent Commission for Sustainable Equality (ICSE)*

The ICSE consists of [well-respected experts from politics, civil society and academia](#) and will after six months present a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for EU and national lawmakers to push our society in a more sustainable direction.

Led by the co-chairs Louka Katseli (former Greek Minister of Labour) and Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (former Danish Prime Minister), the Commission commenced its work, discussing both the current state of inequalities and setting out an agenda for the coming months. The Commission is deeply committed to move forward quickly on this massive task by tackling the growing gaps between rich and poor, men and women, north and south, labour and capital and many other cleavages head-on.

After all, a more radical strategy of decisive action to eradicate these persistent inequalities is desperately needed. "The growing gap between rich and poor in our society is [poisoning](#). It is sucking the energy from our societies," said S&D-Group President Udo Bullmann.

Unequal societies are fragile societies, as the former Italian Minister of Labour, Enrico Giovannini, warned in the beginning of the debate: "We have to be



prepared for a future that may be full of shocks.” Therefore, “we have to battle not only for equality of opportunities, but also for equality of outcomes.”

Jesus Gallego Garcia of the Spanish Confederation of the General Workers’ Union urged to find solutions to the task of shaping “an inclusive labour market that will not be divided into winners and losers,” while Europe is “heading for a new disruption of the labour market caused by the digital revolution,” as Nicolas Schmit (Luxembourg’s Minister of Labour) put it.

In order to prevent instability and crisis, the link between growth and wealth distribution needs to change. Co-chair Louka Katseli pointed out: “We the need to move away from a growth paradigm that only enhances the incomes of the very few. We need to go beyond the growth paradigm to a sustainable development paradigm.”

Concluding from a productive exchange of opinions and approaches to battle social, economic, environmental and territorial inequalities, there is a take-away-message from this meeting. A progressive society must champion the idea that politics and the economy must work for the well-being of the people and the planet. It does not work the other way around. The persisting exploitation of labour and natural resources just for financial gains of a selected few can no longer stand.

On this basis, the ICSE agreed on formulating a broad strategy to fight poverty and inequality, targeting material change in a wide range of areas, such as tax policy, regional policy or labour and environmental protection.

This, of course, is still work in progress and the ICSE will elaborate on these issues in its next meeting, to be held on June 26th.

In addition to this work for an equitable society, Progressive Society has also increased its efforts in its work regarding

- the European Semester,
- collecting best practices on ecological transformation across Europe, and
- our financial plan to move Europe forward.

Here’s a quick round-up of our recent work on these three topics:

**Transforming Governance - Going beyond GDP in the European Semester**

On April 24th, Progressive Society hosted an explorative seminar of 16 experts and stakeholders regarding the reform or removal of the European Semester. The European Semester is the [European Commission’s current monitoring tool](#) for economic policies across member states.



Progressive Society has identified it as a flawed and insufficient assessment tool to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development on our continent. We particularly oppose the Semester's reductionist paradigm that focuses [almost entirely on growth in terms of GDP](#) as a measure for human well-being; we contest its obsession with fiscal discipline; and we criticise its obsolete decision-making that leaves social partners out of the dialogue and creates only limited national issue-ownership.

In the light of this, the explorative seminar contemplated to either substantially reform the European Semester or replace it with a new framework with stronger focus on sustainability. Interesting ideas on reform included to supplement the dominant fiscal targets with binding social and environmental benchmarks to ensure compliance. This should entail a new set of indicators for measurement to balance and combine with GDP and other macroeconomic parameters with the SDGs at the heart of this approach. Furthermore, the Semester's top-down-approach (resulting in country-specific recommendations) could be complemented by a member-state-driven process, allowing also for Union-wide recommendations, in order to create more involvement and issue-ownership by member states.

Progressive Society will continue its consultation with experts on this topic and work towards political solutions.

#### Ecological Transformation as a Social Lever

In the beginning of April, Progressive Society launched a [call for projects](#) in order to collect best practices on an ecologically and socially sustainable transition in Europe. We asked not only the Coordinators and Heads of National Delegations in the Parliamentary Group of Socialists and Democrats, but also the wider public of stakeholders and citizens for their input.

We aim to build an interactive platform of information and exchange on this topic. For the moment, we would focus on projects in the following five areas:

1. Energy efficiency and fighting energy poverty
2. Socially fair transition of energy production in coal-dependent regions
3. Innovative mobility and transport solutions to ensure a cleaner air in urban and rural areas
4. Circular economy as a tool for job creation and change in production and consumption patterns
5. Pesticide-free and sustainable agriculture



We are still open for your input! If you know of any remarkable project in those areas (or maybe beyond them), however big or small, get in touch with us on our [website](#) or on [social media](#). We will then go on and publish the best practices from all around Europe in an interactive map on this website and present the projects in special issues of this newsletter.

#### Financing the transformation

In the meantime, Progressive Society is keeping an ongoing dialogue with NGOs on sustainable finance measures to ensure that the private sector does contribute to the financing of this much needed societal transformation. With regard to our work on this issue, we will focus our attention in the next weeks on the proposed post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), in other words the long term EU budget. Progressive Society aims to reverse the declining investment trend in Europe.

We want to ensure that the next EU long-term-budget will be a key driver towards a sustainable and equitable society for all in Europe. We are listening to all stakeholders to consider their views on the proposed EU spending programs with the objective to achieve a decarbonised society, transform production and consumption patterns, support a digital revolution benefitting everyone, and overall, to create a society for the many, not the few. We will keep on campaigning for an overhaul of the financing of the EU budget, an objective closely intertwined with our long-standing fight for fairer taxation policy in Europe.

This holistic approach is our path forward. We will continue our work by increasing the sustainability of Europe's political, economic and eco-systems!

*You would like to learn more about our work towards a truly progressive Europe? Be sure to subscribe to our [newsletter](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#)!*