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# **Feedback from the meeting between MEPs and Emmaus activists in Europe**

**Emmaus is a socio-economic model based on solidarity and peace.**

**We are a realistic and feasible alternative!**

**26 November 2014 - Strasbourg**



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## I. The preparatory morning at the Strasbourg European Youth Centre

### • Participants

- Mikel Azkona Huercanos (Emmaus Navarra)
- Micahel Barnett-Brecht (Emmaus Krefeld)
- Rodica Bizu (Amicii Emmaus)
- Patrick Cher (Emmaus Reims)
- Kathryn Earnshaw (Emmaus Royaume-Uni)
- Lydia Feghloul (Emmaus la Friperie Solidaire)
- Jean Luc Ferstler (Amicii Emmaus)
- Joël Jousseume (Emmaus Cernay)
- Roberto Lapia (Emmaus la Friperie Solidaire)
- Pascale Lepoutre Does (Emmaus Cologe)
- Jean Pierre Moritz (Emmaus Haguenau)
- Denise Ponsat (Emmaus Cernay)
- Hieke Pronk (Emmaus Cambridge)
- Gérard Racinne (Emmaus Reims)
- Massimo Resta (Emmaus Erba)
- Guy Rotureau (Emmaus Strasbourg)
- Olimpiu Roib (Frères Europa)
- Joseba Andoni Romeo (Emmaus Navarra)
- Maria Luisa Testori (Emmaus Erba)
- Hans Van Beek (Emmaus Cherbourg)
- Gaston Weber (Emmaus Frobach)
- Angelique Wenger (Emmaus Bourgoin Jalieu)

### Regional Executive of Emmaus Europe

- Julio de la Granja, President
- Xavier Vandromme
- Willi Does, secretary
- Alain Capmas, treasurer.

### Regional Secretariat:

- Gabriela Martin, coordinator
- Véronica Acevedo Caro, admin and finance assistant
- Marie Tixier, events assistant



### • Preamble

*Julio de la Granja explained the purpose of the meeting and how it would be organised: the aim was to focus on the presentations to be delivered by each of the participants at the meeting with the MEPs in the afternoon. A roundtable discussion reviewed the meeting and future prospects.*

### • The presentations

The first part of the morning was devoted to organising the presentations. During the presentations, the emphasis was placed on Emmaus' vocation: giving shelter and support to everyone, whatever their background. Through working, companions regain their dignity and a place in society. They also generate income by repairing and recycling goods in particular.

Both the unflinching commitment of the Emmaus activists and Emmaus' work to combat poverty underpin the projects and proposals mentioned during this morning session.

**The Emmaus groups take action by helping people to create economic activity, which is the diametric opposite of criminalizing them!** Emmaus' experience proves that the concept of a social and solidarity economy can be used to combat poverty and social exclusion. It helps to foster job creation, social

inclusion and has a positive impact on habits and behaviour. This observation is noteworthy in the current crisis context.

The Emmaus Europe activists stressed the Movement's contribution to social innovation in a world undergoing radical change. The exchanges promoted by the Movement and the positive use made of volunteering were also highlighted.

**This desire for peace and to live together in harmony is the very essence of our Movement and is the driving force behind our work.**

Examples of these concepts:

- o A textile workshop led to a clothing brand and range being created.
- o Car washing.
- o Creation of a mobile fast food restaurant.
- o Creation of affordable grocery stores.
- o Providing a support service for families whose asylum applications have been rejected and help with the formalities, working with other associations.

Appalled by the way that migrants are treated by the EU, Emmaus calls on the Member States and European institutions to take responsibility in order to ensure that migration policy respects human dignity.

**We are all duty bound to get outraged about issues such as social exclusion, poverty and human rights violations and we must carry on fighting to move towards a more humane society in which each and every individual will find their place and regain their dignity.**

All of these initiatives were mentioned during the afternoon meeting with the MEPs.

## **II. The visit to the European Parliament chamber to watch the day's voting taking place.**

The Emmaus activists entered the Parliament chamber at the end of the morning in order to watch the day's voting. The voting was preceded by the awarding of the **2014 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought** to Denis Mukwege (a Congolese human rights activist) in recognition of his unflagging efforts to provide physical and psychological care for thousands of women and young girls who are victims of the sexual abuse committed by the rebel forces in DR Congo.

As a reminder, the meeting between the Emmaus activists and the MEPs was held during the 5<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the 2014-2019 parliamentary term. The MEPs voted on:

- o The collection of statistical information by the European Central Bank.
- o The European Central Bank's powers to impose sanctions.
- o The 2014 UN climate change conference in Lima, Peru (1-12 December 2014)



The parliament chamber in Strasbourg, France.

### III. The meeting at the European Parliament

60 years ago, on 1 February 1954, our founder **awakened the conscience of the general public and politicians** in France by launching an appeal to help the most deprived members of society. We are keeping this appeal alive as the situation remains as critical as ever today.

Our stated mission is to ensure that **people stay aware, focus our action on human beings** and to see in them an infinite wealth and the promise of people thriving in a fraternally supportive environment.

#### a. Presentation of the objectives and background

**Julio de la Granja** welcomed the MEPs and the grassroots Emmaus activists from Germany, Spain, France, Romania, UK and Italy.

Emmaus has member groups in the EU as well as in Switzerland, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. In Europe, Emmaus comprises 304 groups, 17 countries and over 20,000 people. Socially-excluded and deprived people find refuge in our communities. People find a place, recognition and have their dignity restored by working in this society that has lost its bearings.

At a time when our groups witness first-hand the distress and failings of society, Emmaus, boasting over 60 years of commitment to the cause, embodies a **true economic, social and environmental alternative**. The solutions they offer differ from one Member State to another. The Movement's grassroots capacity for action and diversity is undeniable.

Emmaus Europe's work with the institutions, including the European Parliament, the democratic heart of the European Union, involves:

1. Publicizing all the activities and success stories generated by the Emmaus groups in Europe.
2. Monitoring legislation and negotiations about draft directives and regulations on the topics of migration, the social and solidarity economy/employment, and the environment.
3. Mobilizing the Emmaus groups and alerting European and national political representatives about any legislation that could potentially jeopardize human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In accordance with these principles, Emmaus Europe, a continental region of the international Emmaus Movement, invited MEPs to **come and dialogue with Emmaus activists**.

Julio de la Granja, the president of Emmaus Europe, mentioned his support for the human chain initiative at the *Droits de l'homme* tram stop to restore human rights to its rightful place at the heart of Europe. The initiative was run by the *Pour une autre politique migratoire* collective.

Finally, he mentioned the Emmaus Movement's gathering in Calais on 18 December to protest against the building of a wall to prevent migrants from reaching the UK because nowadays migration policy causes thousands of deaths at our borders.

The presence of the MEPS depended upon the plenary session's agenda. A list of the European political groupings to which the MEPs belong can be found at the end of the document.

- **Present:**

- Sylvie Guillaume  
(Centre, S&D: vice-president of the Parliament)
- Pervenche BERES (France S&D)
- Jean Marie CAVADA (France, ALDE)
- Nathalie GRIESBECK (France, ALDE)
- Jean Paul DENANOT (France S&D)
- Édouard MARTIN (France S&D)
- Guillaume BALAS (France S&D)
- Anne SANDER (France, EPP)
- Constance Le GRIP (France, EPP)
- Philippe JUVIN (France, EPP)
- Dennis DE JONG (Netherlands, GUE)
- Julie WARD (UK, S&D)

- **Excused**

- Martin SCHULZ  
(president of the German parliament, S&D)
- Karima DELLI (France, Greens)
- Fernando LOPEZ AGUILAR (Spain, S&D)
- Michel DANTIN (France S&D)
- Christine REVAULT d'ALLONNES BONNEFOY  
(France, S&D)
- Louis MICHEL (Belgium, ALDE)
- Ska KELLER (Germany, Greens)
- Claude MORAES (UK, S&D)
- Simona BONAFE (Italy, S&D)
- Jean LAMBERT (UK, Greens)
- Judith SARGENTINI (NL, Greens)
- Malin BJORK (Sweden, GUE)
- Marie Christine VERGIAT (France, GUE)
- Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (France, EPP)
- Alain LAMASSOURE (France, EPP)
- Gérard DEPRESZ (Belgium, ALDE)

## **b. The meeting**

- **Emmaus Europe's film<sup>1</sup>**

**Migration: are there any solutions?** This film sheds light on the range of practical ways in which Emmaus helps the most socially-excluded people in Europe. By screening this short film, Emmaus Europe was able to convey to the MEPs the words, life stories and testimonies of people affected by migration issues and the social innovations championed by Emmaus.

The participants were then invited to share their opinions following the screening of the film.

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<sup>1</sup> The video made and then screened during the meeting is available on Emmaus Europe's website.

<http://www.emmaus-europe.org/rencontre-au-parlement-europeen-26-novembre-2014-strasbourg-17428.html>



- **Viewpoint of the MEPs who attended the meeting**

**Sylvie Guillaume (vice-president of the Parliament, French MEP, PES)**

Firstly, Sylvie Guillaume apologised for having to leave the meeting early because she had to take part in a meeting on Dublin III.

She stressed the symbolic aspect of the short film about how the Emmaus Movement helps migrants. Although anger in the face of injustice is undoubtedly an issue, the quest for solutions for people, wherever they come from, is just as important. She consequently praised the work of Emmaus, which places a real concern for human beings at the heart of its work. She explained that the MEPs try to do their work in the best possible way. She stressed the need not to use migration issues like a red rag to a bull during political debates: these issues are not about rejection and defiance. Several MEPs work to counter these practices and she called for increased collaboration with associations like Emmaus both at national and European level.



**Edouard Martin** praised the benefits of the circular economy promoted by Emmaus and which is good for the planet (restoring men and women, recycling and selling on second-hand goods). He also hopes that the €315 billion investment plan presented by Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, will benefit the real economy. In his eyes, the main challenge is to sustainably establish the social and solidarity economy, which is an incarnation of the European idea. Europe needs to become a supportive region which develops thanks to mutual aid in order to achieve this aim.

**Jean-Paul Denot** reminded the meeting that Emmaus does not solely deal with migration related issues but first and foremost works with people who are ‘victims of life’ irrespective of their origin. The fundamental issue raised by the association is therefore that of respect for human beings. He praised Emmaus’ objective of putting people back on their feet.



**Dennis De Jong** mentioned the importance of developing a Europe with a social slant. In his eyes, the right to dignity should be applied to all, without distinction. This debate, which is ongoing in the Netherlands, needs to be transposed to European level.

**Nathalie Griesbeck** highlighted the originality of Emmaus, an organisation that promotes inclusion via sustainable income-generating activities. The association also champions a long-term vision, offering housing to former companions. The ‘experiments’ conducted in Emmaus enable respect for human beings to be put back at the heart of people’s concerns, without any political, partisan or religious labelling. In keeping with this week’s European events (the Pope’s visit to the European Parliament and the awarding of the Sakharov Prize), Griesbeck exhorted her colleagues to combat poverty and exclusion, these scourges that violate European values. **Mentioning the crisis situations in the Mediterranean and Calais, she stressed the ‘shared responsibility’ of the various stakeholders, while encouraging the Member States to work together on the migration phenomenon. As a member of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee, Griesbeck said she was willing to pass on Emmaus’ views on the current issues.**

### c. The future of the social and solidarity economy in Europe

One of the Emmaus activists stressed the importance of restoring the poor’s dignity. It was highlighted that it is not just a question of talking about it; there is a need to take action and be active. Emmaus' three core values are respect, social justice and commitment, which enable concrete action to be taken to improve the fate of the most deprived people.





One of Abbé Pierre's maxims was shared with the meeting at this point: "***a new war now needs to be fought, this time against extreme poverty***". The Movement's founder stressed that war was often waged against the poor and not against poverty.

**Julie Ward** spoke about her 30 years of experience as a social worker in a cooperative. She stressed the importance of enabling the most deprived people to speak out, notably via art, just like the Streetwise Opera programme in the UK.



**Edouard Martin** called for people to go beyond conventionalized utterances and put solidarity into practice. For example, he observed that Germany is plundering Romania's IT experts and engineers and criticized this brain drain which maintains under-development. He also observed that the increasing number of people who vote for extreme right wing parties are completely against practical solutions for integrating migrants. In his view, the risk is making life even harder for migrants who are already socially 'dead'. **He suggested creating a working group in the European Parliament, potentially in conjunction with Romanian elected representatives, in order to progress these issues.**

**Guillaume Balas** praised the fact that Emmaus has set in motion the circular economy with the neediest members of society. This is a case of trialling a model that comes from the grassroots.

Free movement of people within Europe has already been achieved but he called for reflection on the issue of how to manage migration flows in Europe, including the problem of the UK. He deplored the fact that national policies are either extremely repressive or extremely laissez-faire on these issues in order to appeal to a certain electorate. Balas invited the participants to debate how migration flows should be controlled, while calling for a measured and legal approach to migration in order to welcome new arrivals, as Frontex is not a solution.

The Emmaus representatives reiterated that the social and solidarity economy model creates jobs for all types of people, including the most socially-excluded people. It creates economic, social, environmental and political wealth. In France, it accounts for close to 10% of all employment, and close to 14% of private sector employment.

The risk of the model being misused, hijacked and trivialized is real. Indeed, in France, politicians created a social and solidarity economy law and ministry in 2012. However, by 2014, the ministry had disappeared and the number of 'social entrepreneurs' had greatly increased, without any means of measuring the actual impact having been identified or implemented. Some Public Investment Bank funding facilities that are supposed to facilitate the development of social and solidarity economy organisations, which are excluded from mainstream finance, do not in fact benefit them.

Emmaus reiterated that the responsibility for ensuring that this model stands the test of time and is still able to develop socially innovative solutions lies with both those actively involved in the model and politicians at national and European level.

#### **d. Emmaus: a social laboratory for over 60 years.**

The Emmaus representatives highlighted Emmaus' initiative to address the issue of substandard housing and its root causes, both with regard to the technical aspects and the very essence of these issues.

The case of a social grocery store created and linked to Emmaus was also highlighted at this point, as around 20 tonnes of food distributed each year by the store were from the EU. Stressing the need to listen to and support food aid beneficiaries, the new Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was criticized as it stops food banks from receiving surplus European food. Although these foodstuffs were sold on to a minority of beneficiaries (40%), they did provide an income for food banks. Today, France only compensates this loss to the tune of 50%, which represents some €18 million.

**Pervenche Beres** told the meeting that she had been the rapporteur for a text on the circular economy on the European Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy Committee. Acknowledging that European legislation had changed, she noted that some of the food aid programme had been maintained following a long battle with the Member States. Indeed, food aid was created at the instigation of Coluche and Jacques Delors at a time when the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) produced a significant surplus, which no longer exists. Food aid is now funded by the European social policy (and not the agricultural policy). Moreover, the Court of Justice of the European Union has banned selling or receiving payment for European food aid. Beres **suggested considering ways of compensating social grocery stores and food banks for this loss.**



**Anne Sander** stressed Emmaus' principal characteristic: social reinclusion through employment.

The Emmaus representatives reminded participants that for every €1 invested in the association, €10 of wealth are created. While noting that each group is unique, they praised the members' ability to contribute to social innovation.

Along these lines, the **Emmaus representatives asked the MEPs in attendance to ensure that European structural funds are returned to the people who need them.** Investment at the base of society urgently needs to be supported.

Confirming the important role played by the social and solidarity economy in Spain, for example, despite the unemployment rate, the Emmaus activists praised the values that this type of activity promotes and

the local and sustainable impact generated. The MEPs were exhorted to develop the full potential of the social and solidarity economy by legislating on the issue.

#### **e. Concerns about Frontex and its remit**

The Emmaus stakeholders highlighted the dramatic situation experienced by migrants, who are regularly stigmatised when they arrive in Europe. In this period of instability and uncertainty, undocumented migrants cannot even work in the social and solidarity economy in order to get by.

The members of Emmaus then showcased their grassroots experience, coupled with the Emmaus Universal Manifesto<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was also mentioned at this point: *“Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”* Up to 17 different nationalities live in some Emmaus communities, rubbing shoulders with each other and contributing via their work to the organisation’s own resources.

This is why Emmaus deplores the building of a ‘new wall’ in Calais, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall; this time to prevent migrants from reaching the UK. This measure contradicts these people’s human rights. Rather than continue spending €300,000 a day to maintain Europe’s border agency Frontex, our society needs to be rethought.

The concept of sharing was nevertheless championed, while recognising the need to inform migrants in their home countries about the vulnerability that awaits them in Europe. Exchanges of best practice at European level, but first and foremost at local level, should be promoted. Arguing that migration is rarely a choice, the Emmaus activists at the meeting invited the MEPs to visit the groups and see the human impact of their daily work.

Eva Otadi, the representative of the Frontexit campaign – which Emmaus Europe supports – has stated that migration policy in developed countries such as Australia is scandalous, while stressing that the European Union (while being a Nobel prize winner) takes measures that are equally as negative via Frontex<sup>3</sup>. Denouncing the enforced cooperation of non-EU member countries for migration flow regulation, she stressed the importance of analysing the risks involved in these bilateral agreements which flout migrants’ fundamental rights, and notably the absence of any democratic control of the agency.

Regarding concrete solutions to these issues, it was suggested that the MEPs could work on a study analysing the work of Frontex and could organise hearings of non-profit organisation activists at the

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<sup>2</sup> The 24 May 1969 Universal Manifesto of the Emmaus Movement can be downloaded from: [http://www.emmaus-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/FR\\_Manifeste\\_universel\\_du\\_Mouvement\\_Emmaus.pdf](http://www.emmaus-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/FR_Manifeste_universel_du_Mouvement_Emmaus.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Frontex regulation: The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) is set up in response to the need to improve the integrated management of the external borders of the European Union (EU).

Although responsibility for the control and surveillance of external borders lies with Member States, the agency will facilitate the application of existing and future EU measures relating to the management of these borders.

In this context, “external borders” means Member States’ land and sea borders, airports and seaports to which the provisions of EU law on the crossing of external borders by persons apply. [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/free\\_movement\\_of\\_persons\\_asylum\\_immigration/133216\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/133216_fr.htm)

For more information about Frontex: <http://frontex.europa.eu/>

European Parliament. Finally, the appeal to abolish Frontex via the Frontexit<sup>4</sup> awareness raising campaign was mentioned.

**Jean-Marie Cavada** questioned the participants on how best to coordinate the member states in order to help Emmaus (via an agreement, for example). He also mentioned creating a form of citizenship (a European passport entitling the holder to freedom of movement) aimed at working migrants and itinerant Roma.

Thierry Kuhn (the president of Emmaus France) reiterated that combating exclusion is everyone's responsibility. He asked the MEPs to take into account the impact of the current trade negotiations (TTIP) on the social and solidarity economy and the Emmaus model. He also asked them to see the economy as a tool for the benefit of social justice and the environment. In fact, it is the situation of the migrants, who are left to their own devices, which is problematic. He concluded by inviting those present to take part in a protest in Calais against the construction of a wall and a day shelter (18 December 2014).

**Philippe Juvin (French MEP, EPP)**



Philippe Juvin had suggested that an annual meeting should be arranged between MEPs and Emmaus activists when visiting a group in May 2014. These meetings would take the form of an annual session to work on the issues and share the real-life situations and difficulties experienced by the Emmaus groups in Europe. He expressed his delight at having been involved in arranging the meeting between the Emmaus stakeholders and the MEPs during the November 2014 session in Strasbourg, the seat of the European Parliament. He wants to organize such a meeting again in a year, and dialogue with Emmaus.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Frontexit campaign, follow the link: <http://www.frontexit.org/fr/>

#### IV. Conclusions and prospects for the next meeting at the European Parliament

Combating poverty is a priority for the European Parliament but not for the Council of the European Union. Whereas the European Parliament and Commission believe that the EU should be based on solidarity and cooperation, the Member States use their national interests to justify border closures. They are calling into question the founding philosophy of the European Union by doing this.

This generates a social divide and works against social cohesion. On the other hand, the Emmaus model demonstrates that offering shelter and support to the most excluded people, while also enabling them to regain their dignity via the economic, social and environmental alternative espoused by Emmaus, is possible.

The commitment of the MEPs who attended the meeting to the issues dear to Emmaus reinforces the idea that Europe will move forward thanks to its elected representatives and therefore democracy: the call is going out to our Movement, which is present in all the countries of the EU, to strengthen its links with MEPs.

The root causes of poverty in Europe are intensifying, the austerity plans implemented by governments are widening the gap between the haves and have-nots, and policies that are increasingly devoid of a human focus are gaining ground. Emmaus Europe will remain attentive and will closely monitor the legislation devised by the MEPs in the European Parliament, notably with regard to the social and solidarity economy, in order to alert people about the growing social fracture and get its proposed solutions heard.

**In conclusion, Julio de la Granja (president of Emmaus Europe) stressed the importance of human dignity and encouraged the MEPs to debate European social directives with Emmaus. Throughout the European parliamentary term, a tailored annual event could maintain the link between the representatives of civil society that we embody and MEPs.**





*The afternoon ended with a photo session, with the entire Emmaus delegation being photographed by the Parliament's services.*



*Photo "© European Union 2014"*

Appendix:

Full names of the political groupings of the MEPs who attended our meeting:

EPP: European Popular Party – 221 members, of whom 20 are French.

S&D: The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament – 191 members.

ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – 67 members.

GUE /NGL: European United Left / Nordic Green Left – 52 members.

Greens/EFA: Greens/European Free Alliance - 50 members.