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***Peace and Living Together in Europe* meeting between MEPs and Emmaus activists in Europe**

15 December 2015 - Strasbourg



The parliament chamber in Strasbourg, France.

CONTENTS

I. Internal preparation session at the Centre Culturel Saint Thomas for the meeting with the MEPs: a chance for activists from the participating groups to voice their opinions

II. The meeting at the European Parliament

- a. Presentation of the objectives of the meeting by Willi Does, the President of Emmaus Europe.
- b. Migration legislation. What humane solution for migrants can we put forward?
- c. The circular economy package. How can the social and solidarity economy be developed?
How can the future be people-focused?

III. Conclusions and prospects for the next meeting at the European Parliament

I. Internal preparation session at the Centre Culturel Saint Thomas in Strasbourg: a chance for activists from the participating groups to voice their opinions

• Participants

- Annie Bailleau (Emmaus Les Ulis)
- Cristian-Eugen Bazavan (Frères Europa)
- Pompic – Ciprian Afloaeri (Emmaus Iasi)
- Alain Capmas (Emmaus Bougival)
- Ionel Caslarou (Emmaus Iasi)
- Josef-Rolf Eisheid (Emmaus Cologne)
- Maryse Faure (Chalons sur Saône)
- Jean Luc Ferstler (Amicii Emmaus)
- Richard Herry (Emmaus Limoges)
- Marie-Thérèse Koheler (Emmaus Scherwiller)
- Jean Philippe Légault (Frères Europa)
- Paulette Larrieu (Emmaus Toulouse)
- Sophie Le Rendu (Emmaus la Friperie Solidaire)
- Nathalie Martz (Emmaus Solidarité)
- Jean Pierre Moritz (Emmaus Haguenau)
- Gélu Nichitel (Emmaus Iasi)
- Sorin Onica (Frères Europa)
- Daniel Pop (Frères Europa)
- Hieke Pronk (Emmaus Cambridge)
- Massimo Resta (Emmaus Erba)
- Blandine Roger (Emmaus Les Ulis)
- Jozef Seffer (Frères Europa)
- Anne Saingier (Emmaus La Halte Saint Jean)
- Maria Luisa Testori (Emmaus Erba)
- Gaston Weber (Emmaus Forbach)
- Pierre Wessbecher (SOS Familles Strasbourg)

Regional Executive of Emmaus Europe

- Willi Does, President
- Silvana Nogarole (EI Board member)
- Hans Van Beek (EI Board member)

Regional Secretariat

- Marie Tixier, events assistant
- Gabriela Martin, coordinator



• Introductory session

Willi Does explained the purpose of the meeting and how it would be organised: the aim was to focus on the examples provided by each of the participants before the meeting with the MEPs in the afternoon. A roundtable session enabled activists from the participating groups to voice their opinions and future prospects to be discussed.

• Presentation and collation of examples

Alain Capmas, the meeting facilitator, drew a parallel between Emmaus Europe's initiatives and the European Union's work. He spoke about the areas of migration policy which Emmaus Europe condemns, the European Commission's influence on European legislation to the detriment of the European Parliament, the EU's democratic body which represents Europe's citizens, the European Commission's ultra-liberal policy to the detriment of the common good and social equilibrium, and which leads to an overly large swathe of society being marginalized.

He reiterated the aims and objectives of the meeting: take advantage of the meeting with the MEPs to present our initiatives and champion migrants' rights, using concrete examples:

- Work-based inclusion
- Financial self-sufficiency.
- Knowing how to live together.

The meeting topics are aligned with current European legislative developments:

- Circular economy: incorporate our work and model in order to protect and promote them in Europe.
- Migration: the aim is to introduce amendments which would provide for a European *OACAS*¹ type status.

What do we want? A more social and humane Europe is needed. Emmaus has been implementing this ethos for close to 70 years by:

- Offering shelter and support for migrants and campaigning to ensure that their rights are protected and respected.
- The social and solidarity economy.
- Environmentally-friendly and sustainable consumption practices and methods.
- An austere and frugal lifestyle.

The participants discussed the two main topics: migration and human trafficking and the social and solidarity economy as part of the circular economy.

The central theme of the initiatives and proposals mentioned in the morning session is providing shelter and support to all people, irrespective of their background. Companions regain their dignity and a place in society through their work.

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. The Emmaus activists shared their experiences:

- Emmaus Cologne is located in one of the 16 German regions which are taking in the millions of refugees who have arrived in 2015. Emmaus is working in partnership with grassroots stakeholders to help the refugees to integrate into German society.
- One of Emmaus Solidarité's services in Paris offers shelter and support to migrant families. The number of shelters being opened is still inadequate. The right to housing is necessary and needs to go hand-in-hand with obtaining the right to work.
- In the Satu Mare region of Romania, a support service is delivered to young people experiencing difficulties/homelessness. The income generated from receiving lorry loads of goods has enabled the group to increase its residential capacity, rising from four in late 2010 to 28 in late 2015. The local Emmaus group also contacted the Ministry of Immigration and volunteered to house migrants. However, the authorities rejected their proposal. Moreover, in September 2015 Romania opposed the relocation/quota system.
- Still in Romania, it must be noted that Emmaus applies a social ethos by taking in people experiencing difficulties. National legislation has no social ethos, even for the poorest segments of society.
- In Italy, local councils sometimes ask the Emmaus communities to take in migrants so that they can work there for a while.

¹ OACAS: Residential and non-profit organisations. Since 2010, OACAS status officially recognizes the alternative mechanism offered by the Emmaus communities in France (112 across the country).

- In the UK, communities only take in UK citizens, not migrants. However, there is a need to highlight the solidarity practice of those who live in the communities funding their places through housing benefit.
- In France, undocumented migrants have been able to volunteer and therefore help others. The importance of working with other complementary associations and the authorities was stressed.
- All the Emmaus groups in Northern France have founded an association which puts together people's applications for submission to the prefecture. 10 residency status regularisation applications are permitted per month. Only three are submitted at the present time and the situation is worsening.
- In Southern France, some Emmaus groups are seeing that applications submitted to the prefecture are being turned down, even when they meet the requirements of the Valls circular on regularising the status of undocumented migrants. The Emmaus community in Toulouse works in partnership with FNARS (National Federation of Support and Social Reintegration Associations), CIMADE (support organisation for migrants) and Amnesty at the local level. Some migrants have returned home thanks to the support of the community in a number of different areas. Emmaus adapts to each situation and attempts to find a solution.
- Some communities in France promote learning about French culture in order to help migrants develop a plan for their lives.
- Trialling an OACAS type status across Europe can only be positive if it applies to people and not the host organisation. If the focus is placed on the person, they are able to access training, for example, which is vital for personal development.
- Trialling a 'charity sector worker' type status could be an option in the future for our groups in which the following situation is sometimes found: 26 migrants of whom 17 are undocumented and five children.

These experiences raise the issue of the official status of the people living in Emmaus communities and their individual life plans. These issues were raised.

The aforementioned initiatives were talked about at the meeting with the MEPs in the afternoon. The MEPs were asked to make two main undertakings. 1. Create an official status for people who find refuge at Emmaus. At Emmaus, we do not differentiate between people and we are calling for a status for them in order to protect them and enable them to "get involved in work". 2. Ensure that work on the circular economy package focuses on helping the weakest members of society and does not benefit lobbyists of any kind.

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.

A look back at the last plenary session of 2015 in Strasbourg, France

The meeting between the Emmaus activists and MEPs took place during the last plenary session of 2015 of the 2014-2019 parliamentary term. Voting on 15 December took place between 15:00 and 23:00 when the Emmaus activists were at the parliament and focused on:

- **Decision adopted on European border and coast guard package, European Commission statement.** More information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2015/2961%28RSP%29&l=EN>
- **Outcome of COP 21 climate talks, Council and Commission statements [2015/2960(RSP)]**
- **Bringing transparency, coordination and convergence to Corporate Tax policies in the Union.**

- **Preparing for the World Humanitarian Summit: challenges and opportunities for humanitarian assistance.**
- **Labour mobility *Commission statement*** [2015/2931(RSP)]

II. The meeting at the European Parliament

Almost 70 years ago, on 1 February 1954, our founder **awakened the conscience of the general public and politicians** by launching an appeal to help the most deprived and forgotten 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

Willi Does welcomed the MEPs and the grassroots Emmaus activists from Germany, France, Romania, UK and Italy.

He reiterated that the aims and objectives of the meeting were to ask decision-makers to facilitate the work of the Emmaus Movement across Europe, notably by providing support for the most deprived people in their quest to reintegrate society. This could take the form of obtaining official recognition of a European status for the people working in our groups. Finally, he provided some context for our concerns about the future of Europe based on the European institutions' programme for 2016.

Willi Does reminded the MEPs attending the meeting that we at Emmaus are most definitely not lobbying experts. However, the activists attending the meeting are firmly rooted in Abbé Pierre's tradition: we are activists for peace and justice and we work for change.

Consequently, the experience of the Emmaus Movement built up over time compels us to be the **voice of the voiceless and condemn the decline in solidarity, justice and freedom coupled with the rise of individualism, the selfishness of certain countries, racism and xenophobia.**

People who are fleeing conflict and the most excluded members of society need a supportive Europe and need to feel that they can become a part of society. They need to have the hope that living together in harmony is possible.

The phenomenon of population movements and the ensuing issues require a European response, even though the migration crisis is not solely European in nature. Current trends are not aligned with this ethos as the concept of a physical border around national territory seems to be re-establishing itself in some European countries. This leads to walls being built to separate us. Fortress Europe is opting for security to the detriment of fundamental rights

At a time when our groups witness first-hand the distress and failings of society, Emmaus, boasting over 70 years of commitment to the cause, embodies **a true economic, social and environmental alternative.** The solutions the Emmaus groups offer differ from one Member State to another. The Movement's grassroots capacity for action and diversity is undeniable.

We have come to the European Parliament today to talk about the Emmaus groups' activities and success stories in our residential and working communities, social and inclusion enterprises. We wish to provide MEPs with practical and robust examples and experiences from our groups so that the MEPs make a commitment.

Finally, Willi Does mentioned that we need to realize that peace and the means of living and working together are becoming 'endangered species'! The Emmaus Movement is calling upon the members of the European Parliament and Commission to make a resolute commitment to peace and to including and integrating those who live and arrive in Europe.

- **Attendance sheet**

- Pervenche Berès (France S&D)
- Jean Paul Denanot (France S&D)
- Guillaume Balas (France S&D)
- Christine Revalut d'Allonnes Bonnefoy (France, S&D)
- Marc Tarabella (Belgium, S&D)
- Marian Jean Marinescu (Romania, EPP)

Excused:

- Martin Schulz (President of the European Parliament, Germany, S&D)
- Sylvie Guillaume (France, S&D, vice-president of the Parliament)
- Heidi Hautala (Finland, Greens)
- Malin Bjork (Sweden, GUE)
- Marie Christine Vergiat (France, GUE)
- Dominique Riquet (France, ALDE)
- Monica Macovei (Romania, EPP).
- Ulrike Lunacek (Austria, Greens)
- Esther De Lange (Netherlands, EPP)
- Sipa Pietikainen (Finland, EPP)
- Anne-Marie Mineur (Netherlands, GUE)
- Nathalie Griesbeck (France, ALDE)
- Édouard Martin (France S&D)
- Anne Sander (France, EPP)
- Philippe Juvin (France, EPP)

b. Migration legislation. What humane solution for migrants can we put forward?

Potential initiatives and legislative proposals on this topic

- **The Emmaus Europe film²**

Migration: are there any solutions? This film sheds light on the devastating work done by Frontex and the range of practical ways in which Emmaus helps the most socially-excluded people in Europe. By screening this short film, Emmaus Europe was once again 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. Proof of this is the fact that one year after the film was made, Souleyman is still working, Feroza has found work in local government, and Mario has been able to buy a house, which is a major achievement for him and his family.

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

- **The views of the MEPs attending the meeting**

Marian Jean Marinescu (Romania, EPP)

Firstly, Marian Marinescu praised Emmaus, as the organisation places people at the heart of its work. He called for increased collaboration with associations like Emmaus both at national and European level.

² 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>

Migration is a complex and sensitive issue in Europe because of the current crisis. This crisis can be likened to a war given the number of arrivals. Although it is true that helping the weak is a European value, in his view, it is not possible given the sheer numbers of people involved. He believes that the relocation mechanism is futile. He supports action in migrants' home countries. In the same vein, he referred to the agreement with Turkey to stop the influx of refugees. The European Commission is currently presenting a package to protect Europe's borders.

He stated that it is currently impossible to take in refugees and displaced people in Europe, even if we wanted to do so.

Youth unemployment is very high in some countries – up to 40% - and poverty-related issues are also a problem. Mr Marinescu does not believe in giving benefits to poor people, instead he wishes to generate jobs. He reiterated his praise for Emmaus' work. However, he does not believe that the concept can be rolled out everywhere.

He believes that Emmaus should be a 'halfway house' on the pathway to integrating people into society. In the first instance, the economy needs to be developed.

Jean-Paul Denanot

He praised Emmaus' objective of putting people back on their feet.



A real positive at Emmaus in his view is that no requirements are placed on those living in the communities. This is a 'win-win' situation for migrants wishing to take part in community life. He praised both the unselfishness of the Emmaus companions who ask nothing of no-one and the remarkable work done, both in terms of professional inclusion and to save the planet. As the former president of the Limousin Region of France, he referred to the fact that 11% of all jobs in the region are employment inclusion posts.

He stressed the symbolic aspect of the short film about how the Emmaus Movement helps migrants. In a context in which people are becoming inward-looking, some countries are being selfish and there is rejection of others championed by the extremes in society, offering shelter and support to migrants is vitally important. He referred to the EU's decision to focus on enabling migrants to stay as close to home as possible so that they can return home if they so wish.

Finally, he drew the meeting's attention to the need to relax convergence criteria in Europe. The austerity plans are widening the gap between the haves and have-nots, and policies that are increasingly devoid of a human focus are gaining ground. Austerity will not sort out human problems. Human beings should be the priority.

One of the Emmaus activists stressed the importance of discussing human rights, above and beyond money, politics etc. She felt that there is a need to discuss the very values that make us human. If we are not able to provide the most deprived people with the basics for living, this calls into question whether in fact we are a civilized society. We need the MEPs to help in order to ensure that we can do our work.



Offering shelter and support to undocumented migrants is an issue for the Emmaus groups, as it is impossible for some groups to do so.

Systems differ greatly from one country to the next. In France, communities have had an official status since 2010 (OACAS status). However, this is not a Europe-wide status.

Emmaus asked the MEPs attending the meeting to pledge to develop an amendment to European legislation enabling undocumented migrants to work in the social and solidarity economy. This official legal status would give the people living in the Emmaus communities a certain sense of security and would enable Emmaus' work to be developed because the legal framework would recognize it.

Emmaus is duty bound to alert people about the fate of the most socially-excluded members of society. This is why a social laboratory type space is needed. This space would enable people with talent, albeit talent that goes unrecognized by today's society, to continue living dignified lives. We also need to protect this place of freedom from violence. The MEPs are responsible for providing this protection.

Denanot thought it would be worthwhile developing European legislation in this area and offered to help.



Marc Tarabella also stated that he was willing to help Emmaus. Paying visits and taking part in work sessions are tasks undertaken by MEPs. He could travel to Belgium, France or other countries.

In this respect, two proposals struck a chord with the MEPs who attended the meeting. The first proposal involves inviting them to visit Emmaus groups in the Alsace/Lorraine Region close to Strasbourg or in constituencies such as the Paris Region or in Romania. The second proposal would involve arranging an afternoon meeting at which the issue of the status of those living in the Emmaus groups in Europe would be addressed.

b. The circular economy package

How can the social and solidarity economy be developed? How can the future be people-focused?

Background

On 2 December 2015 the European Commission³ adopted a new Circular Economy Package⁴ to stimulate Europe's transition towards a more ethical and circular economy in which resources are used in a more sustainable manner and generate new jobs in the regions.

MEP **Guillaume Balas** praised the fact that Emmaus has set in motion the circular economy with the neediest members of society.

He also thanked Emmaus for getting in touch with the MEPs. Plenty of solidarity economy experiences are under development at the present time. Things have moved very quickly and initiatives are sprouting up everywhere. The capital markets are also showing an interest in it. Balas stressed that the circular economy should not become a means of generating income. Just like any new process, the way in which politicians, associations and local government act will determine the way in which the circular economy develops.



Balas provided some context for the Circular Economy Package adopted by the European Commission. Looking back, the Barroso Commission (2004-2014) devised an ambitious circular economy package with several strategic areas, even going as far as eradicating landfill and setting a very high level of recycling. This package was dropped from the programme for year one when the Juncker Commission took over. In late 2015, a new package of circular economy measures was submitted to the MEPs. However, Balas believes that the measures in some of the strategic areas have been watered down, notably landfill, which will no longer be completely eradicated (instead being limited to a maximum of 10% of all waste disposal). The debate on the package at the European Parliament will soon be getting underway, notably but not exclusively in the Environment Committee, as the economic facets of the underlying measures are very important.

He stressed that national governments are not the best planners for the circular economy. The local level seems to be the most appropriate because outcomes are generally more convincing than government

³ [MEMO: Circular Economy Package: Questions & Answers](#)

[Annex to the communication on the Circular Economy](#)

⁴ There is currently no 'standardized' or even 'stable' definition of the circular economy concept. According to ADEME (French Environment and Energy Management Agency), **the circular economy is an economic trade and production system which aims to increase the effectiveness of resources and reduce environmental impact while enhancing individual wellbeing at all the stages of the product lifecycle (goods and services)**. The overall aim of the circular economy is to significantly cut resource wastage in order to disconnect resource usage from the growth of GDP while reducing environmental impact and increasing wellbeing. The idea is to do more and do it better with less. Circular Economy Factsheet: The Basics. October 2014 version, ADEME Angers (in French).

action. Consequently, there is a need to link up the European, regional and local council levels, public and private sector stakeholders, and those who are going to put in practice the initiatives (associations, social and solidarity economy enterprises).

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.

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.

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.

The Emmaus groups in Europe contribute to awareness-raising initiatives via their work, making people aware about living a simple life and everyday interactions. **The Emmaus groups therefore contribute to local economic development and help create jobs for all types of jobseekers. They help to collectively develop a sustainable balance while devising multi-faceted solutions tailored to local needs and resources. We are grassroots activists and have been implementing this model for almost 70 years, drawing inspiration from each other, pooling our practices, bringing stakeholders together and getting people back on their feet.**⁵



Pervenche Berès reminded the meeting that manufacturers have lobbied hard about the Circular Economy Package and this led to the package disappearing from the agenda during the Barroso Commission.

The new package of measures adopted in December 2015 focuses on two core areas: water and waste. The directives place the emphasis on recycling but do not make it legally binding. Berès believes that these proposals have survived because there is a capitalistic approach at play.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to protect the concept of a **social and solidarity economy** within the Circular Economy Package (2016) proposals.

She **mentioned utilizing a strategy of ‘taking ownership’ in order to protect the non-profit associations working in this area.** In this specific case, working in partnership with other social and solidarity economy stakeholders is important.

⁵ The European Emmaus groups’ environmental practices. <http://emmaus-europe.org/enviroennements/emmaus-et-lenvironnement>
Factsheets handbook - Practical tips to improve everyday actions. <http://emmaus-europe.org/enviroennements/un-enjeu-de-societe/guide-des-fiches-techniques>

There is a lot at stake for the Emmaus organisations and their work in this context. The risk of the social and solidarity economy model being misused, hijacked and trivialized is real. Providing grassroots feedback is a good way of contributing to the work of the MEPs.

Berès has suggested drafting a special paragraph on this issue and submitting it to the European Parliament in order to safeguard the concept of the social and solidarity economy. If we take this initiative, we will make our voice heard during the discussions set to take place in the various parliamentary committees which will deal with the package.

III. Conclusions and prospects for the next meeting at the European Parliament

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.

Emmaus' own experience shows that the social and solidarity economy concept can be used to help create jobs, foster social inclusion and have a positive impact on habits and behaviour. This observation is noteworthy in the current crisis context.

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.

Emmaus Europe plans to carefully monitor the European Parliament, notably with regard to the Circular Economy Package, and will advocate the introduction of the concept of the social and solidarity economy in order to get its proposed solutions heard.

In conclusion, Willi Does (President of Emmaus Europe) encouraged the MEPs to develop legislation which does not imperil human rights and fundamental freedoms. 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. The full Emmaus delegation is pictured with Pervenche Berès in this photograph.

