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For a better tomorrow

Why basic values are essential
for Social Democracy

good society –
social democracy
#2017 plus



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Social Democracy stands for freedom, justice and solidarity and guarantees basic rights for everyone: rights that protect and empower. Basic rights that are enshrined in the Constitution and function in practice. Basic rights in political, social, economic and cultural life. A society that guarantees such rights is a Good Society.

A Good Society requires progress, for simply to accept the status quo would be to perpetuate injustice and lack of freedom – and to preserve this state of affairs.

For more than 150 years now, the labour movement has repeatedly drawn strength and hope from the certainty that a better tomorrow, a better future are possible. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's project "A Good Society 2017plus" is contributing to this cause in the here and now.

It asks: Where do we as a society stand on the road to a Good Society? Are we on the right road? Where do we need to steer in a different direction or even make a U-turn? What are the next steps on the road to a Good Society and to Social Democracy – until 2017 and beyond? These are the central questions of this project. One thing is clear: a Good Society requires greater equality. For equality is socially just, politically imperative and economically necessary.

BASIC VALUES

The basic values of Social Democracy are freedom, justice and solidarity. "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" (Freedom, Equality, Fraternity) was also the slogan the French revolutionaries inscribed on their banners back in 1789. These values have always been central to the labour movement and have been expressly enshrined in the SPD's Basic Programme – to which the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung subscribes – ever since the adoption of the Godesberg Programme in 1959. One thing that distinguishes Social Democracy from other political movements is that it accords the three values of freedom, justice and solidarity equal importance and seeks to realise all three equally. It believes that none of these basic values can be realised without the others, for each is limited and conditioned by the others.

Freedom means having the chance to shape one's life according to one's own ideas. Willy Brandt spoke on the one hand of "freedom of conscience and opinion" and on the other of "freedom from want and fear". Protective basic rights – such as the inviolability of the home – shield the individual from state interference. Empowering basic rights, on the other hand, ensure, for example, that everyone at least has a roof over their heads. They enable participation and secure the material basis for a free life. Willy Brandt emphasised "freedom for many, not merely for a few". What he meant was that the chance to live a self-determined existence should be available equally to every man and woman. Income, background, gender, religion, sexual orientation and skin colour should not decide whether a person can lead a free life.

Justice means in the first place equality before the law, but it is important in other areas too: for example, there should be no arbitrary pay discrepancies between women and men, and making a career and gaining access to social positions of power should not depend on gender.

At the same time, justice also means that those who have special needs – who are sick, for example – require more than others. Those who achieve a lot in their lives can expect to have more. But those who start out in life with fewer chances must be helped along the way. What is appropriate in each case can only be decided and negotiated by society as a whole. So justice does not simply mean claiming one's piece of the cake in the redistribution process. It also includes the principle that everyone must be enabled to shape this process. Justice, democracy and participation are closely bound up with one another.

Solidarity means people engaging themselves for others. The strong for the weak, the healthy for the sick, the young for the old, the old for the young, those in work for those without work, those in safety for those who are fleeing, the rich for the poor. Solidarity is a value whose spirit carries us beyond that which is enshrined in and regulated by law.

Former president Johannes Rau described solidarity as the glue that holds society together. A Good Society cannot do without solidarity – who would want to refer those in acute

need to abstract ideas about justice? Policy-makers cannot force or demand solidarity. But they can create the spaces in which solidarity can develop.

Solidarity is a force that can change society. The principle of supporting one another in times of need has shaped the labour movement and made it strong.

The path of progress from early capitalism with its structures of exploitation and from the authoritarian German Empire to a modern welfare state was fought for by a labour movement based on solidarity.

BASIC RIGHTS

Alongside these basic values, the second pillar of Social Democracy is basic rights. Fundamental political, economic, social and cultural rights were laid down in two UN Covenants adopted in 1966.

The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerned basic political rights, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of religion or the right to political participation. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulated rights to such things as a reasonable standard of living, good healthcare provision, the right to found a trade union and the right to work.

On the European level, the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Human Rights Convention are two further places where basic rights are set out. Basic rights are not always legally enforceable, but their realisation is a political imperative of a Good Society. A Good Society requires all basic rights to mesh together. Basic political rights cannot be placed above social rights and vice versa. This is what distinguishes Social Democracy from a libertarian, defective democracy reduced simply to the ballot box.

THE GOOD SOCIETY

Germany is a wealthy country offering prosperity and opportunities to many – but not to all. Our society is becoming increasingly unequal in terms of income, wealth and opportunities and the gap is widening between one region and another. This inequality harms both our economy and our democracy. A change of course will require strength, and political strength is generated by strong political ideas, by a vision of the future. Political visions are like a compass. They allow us to check whether policies are aiming in the right direction. The task is not for society to muddle along but instead to become better for everyone. Above and beyond that, political visions are a strategic resource. Only those who know where they want to go will be able to convince others that their path is the right one and mobilise political majorities. A vision for our time, a narrative that can awaken and gather strength for more social democracy is the Good Society.

The Good Society is a society that is just and shows solidarity and in which people are free in the broadest sense of the word. A society in which fundamental rights are established and function in practice. A society that does not drift apart but which brings poor and rich, young and old, men and women and different regions together. A society with

strong local government, with a strong and sustainable economy in which democracy does not stop at the factory gates. A society that tames the centrifugal forces of capitalism to allow work for all. The Good Society is built on a comprehensive welfare state that provides for its citizens and opens up opportunities and participation and on an education system that leaves no one behind. In a Good Society ethnic, religious, sexual and cultural differences are recognised and respected.

The Good Society is built on giving priority to politics over the market and on a state with strong democratic institutions.

The Good Society has many imperatives. It is not just about the economy, politics, the education system, civil society etc. in isolation, but about how all of these things come together as a whole, creating a Good Society that must constantly change and progress.

For more information see:

Hamburger Programm 2007: The basic Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, adopted at the Hamburg Party Conference of the SPD on 28 October 2007.

Tobias Gombert et al. 2009: Foundations of Social Democracy, Social Democracy Reader 1, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Political Academy, Bonn.

Kurz und Klar 1 2015: Einstieg in die Soziale Demokratie, Werte die verbinden, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Political Academy, Bonn.

Christian Krell and Meik Woyke 2015: Die Grundwerte der Sozialdemokratie. Historische Ursprünge und politische Bedeutung, in Christian Krell and Tobias Mörschel (ed.): Werte und Politik, Wiesbaden, pp. 93–138.

Christian Kellermann and Henning Meyer 2013: Die Gute Gesellschaft. Soziale und demokratische Politik im 21. Jahrhundert, Berlin.

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What is a Good Society? For us this includes social justice, environmental sustainability, an innovative and successful economy and an active participatory democracy. The Good Society is supported by the fundamental values of freedom, justice and solidarity. We need new ideas and concepts to ensure that the Good Society will become reality. For these reasons the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is developing specific policy recommendations for the coming years. The focus rests on the following topics:

- A debate about the fundamental values: freedom, justice and solidarity;
- Democracy and democratic participation;
- New growth and a proactive economic and financial policy;
- Decent work and social progress.

The Good Society does not simply evolve; it has to be continuously shaped by all of us. For this project the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung uses its international network with the intention to combine German, European and international perspectives. With numerous publications and events between 2015 and 2017 the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung will concentrate on the task of outlining the way to a Good Society.

For more information on the project:

www.fes-2017plus.de

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition dating back to its foundation in 1925. Today, it remains loyal to the legacy of its namesake and campaigns for the core ideas and values of social democracy: freedom, justice and solidarity. It has a close connection to social democracy and free trade unions.

FES promotes the advancement of social democracy, in particular by:

- political educational work to strengthen civil society;
- think tanks;
- international cooperation with our international network of offices in more than 100 countries;
- support for talented young people;
- maintaining the collective memory of social democracy with archives, libraries and more.