

George Papandreou, SI Council, Istanbul, 2013

Dear friends, dear comrades,

First, I would like to thank Kemal Kilicdaroglu and the CHP for hosting our Council in Istanbul.

On behalf of all, I thank him and his party for the warm hospitality you have extended to so many friends.

And I am happy to see all the friends and comrades who have come from far and wide to this historic and inspiring city.

I am especially happy to be here as I am a Greek, and a neighbor. Only some years ago it seemed impossible that our two countries could find any basis for cooperation.

Today we cherish a new friendship - despite the fact that unresolved issues remain, such as Cyprus - and it heartens me that thousands and thousands of Turks come to our islands today as warm and friendly tourists. Exchanges, trade, from joint ventures to sports and joint cookbooks - much has changed.

Yesterday as I was returning to ATHENS to vote on a no - confidence motion in the Greek parliament, I sat next to a professional Greek dancer who had been here to teach Greek dances to enthusiastic Turks.

None of the above could we even dream of a few years ago.

Let me once again honor a politician and foreign minister, who came from the ranks of the CHP, and became a close friend of mine over the difficult first years of Greek Turkish rapprochement, ISMAIL Cem, who is no longer with us.

But it was not only our common commitment to peace that energized our work but also the fact that we were merging into a common family of values - of democracy, human rights, the social contract and peaceful resolution of conflict - which Europe represented.

My wish would be then that that exact spirit could today prevail in our most troubled region.

But today, even the project called Europe is facing a crisis. Yet the crisis in Europe is wrongly labeled as financial. It is deeply political. As Elio Di Rupo said, "Europe cannot be a single market without human values."

It highlights a deeper political division challenging our democratic tradition.

On the one hand, the need to work more with trust and solidarity, together, pooling our resources and, on the other, a deep mistrust and retreat into nationalistic and tribal politics.

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On the one hand, a belief that together we can change the world, regulate markets, deal with climate change, create jobs for the youth, protect our freedoms, our values. On the other hand, a belief that each unto his own, alone, must face the strong winds of a globalizing economy, which pushes us all into a race to the bottom.

On the other side of the Atlantic, we have seen a US government shutdown, as a well-financed minority tried to hold the democratic process to ransom to push their own reactionary agenda.

Our democracies function at a local or national level, but cannot deal with global capital. If our democracies attempt to reorganize our economies at the local or national level, we find ourselves impotent to deal with the global economy.

An example: Around \$32 trillion in hidden financial assets are held offshore or in tax havens, robbing our peoples from vital revenues. Rather than reforming global finance, conservative Europe has embraced the dogma of austerity. The burden of adjustment is carried by middle and poorer classes. Cuts to social welfare are pushing parts of the society into poverty and despair.

Furthermore, the power of unelected international organizations or rating agencies raises very serious questions about democratic legitimacy.

Because our citizens don't feel like they own solutions, or don't feel that solutions are fair

In the end, in this global economy, the democratic challenge is whether both the state and the markets are held accountable towards the needs of the public.

Serving the best interests of the people.

And whether our citizens own the decisions, the projects, the plans often otherwise imposed on them.

I was recently on a speaking tour in the USA.

I spoke to publics of up to 2500.

In the question session many asked why I am a socialist.

A difficult question to answer in the US.

I was pleased that I had warm applause when I talked of our movement and the four basic values we represent.

- Democracy and human rights
- Social justice
- And sustainable green growth
- Peaceful resolution of conflicts

But, since we last met, the challenges to these four values have intensified.

Those are just a few examples of today's challenges.

As the world is facing unprecedented and often violent change, our challenge is how we articulate these values in today's context.

Our movement is called upon to conduct a struggle on multiple fronts.

**Democracy is a struggle on many fronts**

- **Fight for freedom, overthrow authoritarian leaders** or dictators

**Transitioning to democracy**, strengthening the foundations and practices that preserve and nurture these freedoms / staving off new authoritarianism or absolute dogmas that enslave rather than liberate.

**Reclaiming democracy** where even in developed economies and mature democracies we witness the capture of politics, the undermining of our democratic institutions / where concentration of wealth and power is unprecedented and overwhelms, influences or corrupts our democracies / where populists, authoritarian political or religious leaders undermine basic values and achievements, such as women's rights or minority rights. And I would like to grab the opportunity for expressing my solidarity to the Turkish women who are fighting for their rights.

**Democratizing globalization** / our global economy allows for capital to move beyond national borders, avoiding norms and rules that pertain to us. Our challenge is to bring our democratic norms to a global economy.

Regulating financial capital, tax havens, off shores,  
Dealing within cross border phenomena that are increasingly beyond our national control, our capacity to manage, drugs - human trafficking, refugees,  
And of course, climate change.

**Rethinking / reinventing democracy :**

How do we have democracy beyond borders / in a way that will allow for legitimate representative decisions for a larger planetary public good?

Can we have democracy in an ever more diverse society / how can we unite people, citizens in solidarity with each other? How can cultural and religious differences could be used to unite rather than divide?

**Fight for - Social justice as part of a basic bargain** in our societies that guarantees cohesion, security, participation, equality. How do we guarantee social justice, a social contract, a basic bargain that social democracy always supported?

We guaranteed that, in our collective bargaining, employers and workers would share the burden in favor of basic social rights - health, education pensions, labour standards. But global capital has escaped national borders. So, who do we bargain with?

Is socialism still relevant in the 21st century?

Can we really make a difference? Can we mobilise to bring about the respect of basic values, change that is so badly needed, both at the national and global level?

Yes, we can.

Yes, we must.

Not only is socialism relevant, but it is more so than in the past.

As today, what is at stake is global peace and the existence of our civilization.

We have always pushed for a progressive alternative to global governance – new policies that can humanize, or democratize, globalisation.

The fact remains that globalization may have brought us all closer together in many ways, but ultimately has created increasing inequalities in and between our societies. It has led to a sense of helplessness, insecurity, fear and alienation from politics as we know it. Inequality has become the burning issue of the day.

It's not only the Occupy Democracy movement – the 99 percenters - who are taking a stand against the concentration of power that allows strong lobbies and special interests to capture democratic politics. This year, inequality was cited as the number one challenge at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Not exactly a radical leftist group.

As our individual nations try to outsmart others in competitiveness, we face growing inequality within our societies.

We have come up with many innovative ideas and proposals. Some of these policies, such as the Financial Transactions Tax, a Co2 tax, have now been adopted.

But such projects are an uphill battle.

Our power is when we unify progressive, democratic, socialist forces around the world.

Our power is to give a real voice, a real sense of empowerment to our citizens.

Democracy is a continuing struggle.

It is obvious that simply holding elections does not constitute a functioning or healthy democracy.

Democracy in our political parties is crucial for the proper functioning of our democracies.

We have a responsibility to make our parties more open, more inclusive to attract new members and voters.

We have a responsibility to make parliaments stronger and more vocal.

We have a responsibility to promote fair and transparent electoral systems and independent monitoring of state institutions

We have a responsibility to develop innovative tools that bring all our citizens into the political debate and empower them to shape public policy.

We have a responsibility to work for equal opportunities.

Equal opportunities are part of democracy from a progressive point of view.

Empowering women has become key in the struggle for democracy.

Our movement, alongside Socialist International Women, has always fought for women's rights.

There is still a gender pay divide, limited representation of women in decision-making bodies, endemic violence against women, and inadequate policies that support working mothers.

We desperately need a change in mentality to break this glass ceiling. Equal opportunities also applies to non-discrimination regarding race, ethnic origin, religious affiliation or sexual orientation. This is what democracy is all about.

I know that here in Turkey citizens are very sensitive to this issue and are fighting to protect democratic values.

In Europe, we are facing a crisis of democratic legitimacy.

The decision-making process increasingly favours the most influential member states, to the detriment of smaller, weaker or poorer nations. Decisions are often taken behind closed doors, without much deliberation.

Our movement needs to fight for a democratic socialist Europe.

This is an additional reason for our Movement to be united and strong.

Fragmentation and initiatives such as the Progressive Alliance, will not help us win elections, nor strengthen our values.

We not only need to protect the diversity of opinions in our movement.

At the same time we must be exemplary in accepting the democratic processes in our movement and the outcomes of our democratic procedures.

This is a fundamental, deeply political issue.

All topics of our agenda today are connected with the issue of democracy.

The conflict in Syria erupted, as the Syrian society had no democracy. The Arab Spring was a reaction to authoritarian regimes.

But even in more mature democracies, the demand for greater participation, more equality, fighting corruption, establishing a more transparent and representative system has become a mobilizing demand.

The Gezi protests reflect this need for a more open and democratic society.

Coming back to Syria, as mandated by our Presidium, I have recently exchanged views with many of our parties and also Antonio Guterres and Lakhdar Brahimi.

In the last months, we have seen the civil war escalate and an unthinkable attack on innocent civilians using chemical weapons. The agreement on the destruction of chemical weapons was a very positive step. We all hope that an agreement will be reached for a successful Geneva 2 conference.

We support, as does the UN, a political process that will lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The future of Syria must be decided by the Syrian people.

But, in parallel, with diplomatic efforts, we need to put urgent pressure for the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, the protection of minority rights and the cultural heritage of Syria.

And we need to assist neighboring countries affected by refugee flows.

Turkey is the country accepting the biggest number of refugees. Jordan, Lebanon, Iraqi Kurdistan see daily Syrian refugees entering their borders.

This burden should be shared.

As Socialist International we have always been present in the broader Middle East, working for peace and we will continue to do so.

Our Presidium yesterday decided to strengthen our work with Palestinians and Israelis.

We are also in solidarity with our comrades in Lebanon who face a dire socio-political situation.

A positive outcome in the actual talks over Iran's nuclear program could be an important step for stability.



It could become a cornerstone and revive the historic efforts of our movement for disarmament and for a planet without nuclear weapons.

Let this region become a positive precedent.

Talking about peace, Africa must be at the top of our agenda. The African continent suffers from the biggest number of conflicts and terrorist groups.

We have seen positive developments like the successful democratic elections in Mali.

But what about Central African Republic?

About Somalia?

About Mauritania?

About Eritrea?

To name just a number of countries that are suffering, but seem neglected by the international community and the media.

They must be part of our agenda.

I would like to end by paying a tribute to the journalists, who pay with their life or their freedom in the effort to keep us informed.

My thoughts go to, amongst others, the two French journalists killed few days ago in Mali. The more than fifty journalists held in prison in Turkey.

To all who are covering the Syrian conflict in inhuman conditions.

We have a lot of work to do.

And if we are to succeed, we must stand united.

And succeed we must!