



EuroElections 2009 : Greens-EFA

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This round through the European political landscape now leaves the parties more used to power and starts dealing with those found more often in the opposition. [The Greens – European Free Alliance](#) (Greens-EFA) is the fifth largest political block at Parliament, with little over 5% of the seats. Greens-EFA is a coalition largely composed by state-level Green Parties plus a small number of Regionalist deputies. After an all-time high close to 10% in 1999 the party had what can be called a disappointing result in 2004. Embarking on a worldwide effort to promote its ideologies by the midst of the current term, it is quite possible that the Greens-EFA may reach a relevant stake at Parliament this time.



The Green ideology is possibly the most complex political philosophy in Europe today, a sort of definition can be attempted at, but with the due reserves. The roots of the Green movement can be traced back to the late XIX century when Naturist Anarchism emerged in France, Spain and Portugal. Among other things it advocated for an ecological relation of Man with Nature, reducing or even annulling the impact of the former on the latter. It was a rather individualist philosophy, underpinned on self-sufficiency. Throughout the XX century these ideas evolved into modern Green Anarchism, that embraced community with the development of the eco-village concept (units of no more than a few hundred folk living from subsistence agriculture). It brought about the idea that modern realizations of primitive social structures would allow a way of life in harmony with Nature, repudiating larger power hierarchies. With the debate about limits to growth and the oil crisis unfolding in the 1970s the Green ideology made it into larger sections of the political landscape, with movements emerging aiming to push those ideas through the established Democratic process.

By 1979 the German Green Party developed the Four Pillars of the Green Party: Ecological wisdom, Social justice, Grassroots democracy and Nonviolence. These are still today the main guidelines followed by most Green parties around the world. In Europe, Green Parties started reaching parliamentary representation during the 1980s and from that time, the most important legacy they left was the halting of further developments to the European Nuclear Programme (facilitated by the tragic events at Chernobyl in 1986). Early on, Green Parties were composed by activists that could be identified both with the traditional right and the left and for some time this created internal tensions and some splits. To their aid came the establishment of Liberalism and the revival of pure Monetarism in Europe, especially from the second half of the 1980s onwards. Appealing to individualism, Liberalism wasn't that far from the Greens' roots and the merging of these two philosophies happened rather naturally. With the approach of Socialists and Conservatives to Liberalism, a fertile political landscape was set for the Greens to flourish, not by alternative social policies, but by presenting the differentiating element of Environmentalism. This allowed the German Green Party to reach a government backing coalition in 2002. In other states, albeit their increasing popularity, Green parties have remained in the opposition invariably with single digit electoral results.

As happens with Liberal parties, the Greens haven't so far been able to fully capitalize on the

electorate closer to the traditional parties. Nonetheless, their activism have been having a crucial role in shaping politics in Europe, especially in the field of Energy.

The [party's website](#), although simple and low budget, is quite straightforward and presents the visitor with plenty of information on its activities and ideas. In the [Who we are](#) section comes a synthesised political presentation:

Our project is to :

- build a society respectful of **fundamental human rights and environmental justice**: the rights to self-determination, to shelter, to good health, to education, to culture, and to a high quality of life;
- increase **freedom** within the world of work, not only by tackling unemployment but also by widening people's choices, releasing human creative potential ;
- deepen **democracy** by decentralisation and direct participation of people in decision-making that concerns them, and by enhancing openness of government in Council and Commission, and making the Commission fully answerable to Parliament.
- build a European Union of free peoples based on the principle of **subsidiarity** who believe in **solidarity** with each other and all the peoples of the world.
- re-orientate the European Union, which currently over-emphasises its economic conception at the expense of **social, cultural and ecological values**

And then comes a section headed with “The Greens/European Free Alliance is working for:” that includes the incredible statement:

[...] economic and social reforms to **make development sustainable** for both human beings and the natural world;

Just to remind the inattentive reader that the Greens-EFA is a party like any other, with growth at the front of its concerns.

Like in the case of the liberals, Greens-EFA doesn't have any election specific content summarizing the party's policy proposals for the next term. Moving around the website a thorough Energy Policy stance is no where to be found. In the [Documents](#) subsection there is a long list of essays and news that can be organized thematically, being possible to access a list of those tagged with [Energy](#); this is a long list of articles going back to 2001, that present a sort of recent history of the party's vision on this field. These articles are almost exclusively dedicated to dismiss Nuclear Energy, with the occasional promotion of Natural Gas.

But there's more to the website. Another section is called [Campaigns](#) where the party lists special policy programmes, each one with its own website. Two of these are worth a closer look: [E-Polis](#) and [TEN-T](#). The first is dedicated to Urban Planing, the second to Transport.

E-Polis is not a real political programme or a formal policy, it is more of communication and experience-sharing platform:

E-Polis - European Sustainable Cities Network

E-Polis was founded by 4 Green Members of the European Parliament in 2006: [Gisela](#)

[Kallenbach](#), [Monica Frassoni](#), [David Hammerstein-Mintz](#) and [Michael Cramer](#) - all driven by the need to involve citizens in local decision-making and to promote sustainability in urban development.

E-Polis supports and inspires local initiatives and NGOs whose purpose is to promote sustainable development and participation of civil society in urban development processes. E-Polis aims to create and establish a European-wide network of such local initiatives/NGOs in order to share experiences and find partners for joint activities.

E-Polis launched with selected local initiatives/NGOs from different European countries. The activities stimulated by E-Polis cover a broad range of issues, although there is particular focus on activities raising environmental awareness and empowering citizens in local decision-making processes.

The main networking tool is this e-polis website with a forum and a NGO data base, allowing to get in touch with persons and organisations that share the same idea: a better city is possible.

It is time to network!

It is always awkward to read the oxymoron “sustainable development” in a text supposedly inspired by Environmentalism. Nowhere in the website is it made clear what the Greens understand by “sustainability in urban development”, so the E-Polis campaign can be actually promoting practices that increase energy use. Notwithstanding, the Greens seem to be concerned with a matter that is unfortunately missing from the big parties' scope.

TEN-T is originally an European programme dedicated to develop an [trans-European transport network](#), that the Greens-EFA regard as being a failure at the moment. The website the party dedicates to it is a reformulation of this plan, a serious attempt at a Transport Policy capable of changing Europe's direction on the matter. While energy is not at the root of this campaign, this is one of the areas where emissions reduction and Energy easily overlap:

Transport in Europe is unsustainable at the moment. Although there are huge investments in infrastructure like the TEN-T program, it is quite evident that especially for the environmental harmful modes of transport such as road and air borne transport are constantly increasing. We want to propose some solutions in order to make transport more sustainable and to allow for the climate effects of transport

This Policy is laid down in three stages: Ad-hoc measures, Medium-term measures and Long-term measures. Below is a synthetic list of the tactics proposed in each scope. For each one the website goes into great detail, with much information worthy of a closer look, especially for those working and/or researching in the field.

[Ad-hoc measures](#)

These measures comprise some ideas and practical advice that could be easily and immediately implemented without changing the legal basis at the European level. Due to reluctance from the member states these opportunities are not utilised on a broad scale.

- **Additional inspections** - controlling of compliance with social and employment standards for truck drivers and the compliance with general rules;

- **Cross financing for rail** - due to the new directive on the "Eurovignette" (Directive 2006/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council) each member state is allowed to levy tolls and user charges for vehicles over 3.5 t (from 2012 onwards) for the use of certain infrastructure.

Medium-term measures

These measures are intended to change transport policy in the medium term. In order to tackle the problems of climate change, as well as other environmental problems, changes in the legal and policy basis are necessary

- **Internalisation of external costs** - will help to abolish distortion of competition between rail and road;
- **Climate change** - shift money from prestigious projects to upgrading on a large scale within the period 2007 - 2013 especially in the context of climate change;
- **Intelligence for rail** - improving cross-border rail transport through Europe-wide technological and regulatory harmonisation under the flagship ERTMS/ETCS;
- **Funding preferences** - shifting funds from huge infrastructure projects to efficient multimodal nodes - new funding programme (amendment to TEN-T);
- **Alpine crossing exchange** - recognizing transport opportunities as a limited good especially in areas with geographical constraints like the Alps, the trading of transit rights could bring a solution: "The Alpine Crossing Exchange";
- **Transport Subsidies** - cut transport subsidies for environmentally harmful modes in order to facilitate the shift towards rail;
- **Kerosene tax** - introduction of a European tax on kerosene in order to support the realisation of the TEN-T rail links;

Long-term measures

These measures are intended to sustainably change the direction of European transport policy over the long-term. New strategic approaches, as well as reconsidering existing programmes, could help to make transport greener in the future.

- **Strategy for intermodal logistics** - development and implementation of a European strategy for intermodal logistics, enlarging combined traffic etc;
- **Big projects** - realisation of huge infrastructure projects that are proven to have a long-term economic viability and that are indispensable;
- **Inland Waterways** - the use of inland waterways could help to make freight transport more sustainable but only if strong environmental concerns are respected and resolved: fit the ships to the rivers and not the other way round!

Much could be discussion on each of these tactics, but the most important thing to note is that the programme is congruent with itself and throughout compliant with the vision of an infrastructure shift away from fossil fuels towards electricity. Where a shift to electricity isn't immediately a goal there are proposals for taxing fossil fuels or to use more efficient modes of transport. All that is left to say is how that shift will be accomplished in the short/medium term with the decommissioning of the Nuclear Park taking place simultaneously.

One thing is certain, Greens-EFA is so far in this round up the party dedicating more resources to Energy related issues and the one willing to go more deeply in its proposed polices. Unfortunately, that is not happening by the acknowledgment of impending Fossil Fuel shortages, which leads to an incoherent message. Although not openly proposing one, the Energy Policy emerging for the party's websites' is the most ambiguous of those reviewed so far. Greens-EFA should try to bring about a thorough and integrated realization of such policy and seriously reflect on the consequences of deactivating the European Nuclear Programme at this stage, or at least provide a realistic and comprehensive road map to achieve such goal.

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