

Alter Summit: A People's Manifesto. Roll Back Austerity and Claim Real Democracy!

Our Urgent Common Priorities for a Femocratic, Social, Ecological and feminist Europe.

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[Socialist Project and Alter Summit](#)

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Europe stands on the edge of a precipice, looking into the abyss. Austerity policies drive the people of Europe into poverty, undercut democracy and dismantle social policies. Rising inequalities endanger social cohesion. Ecological destruction is worsening while acute humanitarian crises devastate the most affected countries. Women and young people are hardest hit.



The European oligarchy employs ever more authoritarian methods to prop up a failed neoliberal system – all this despite widespread protest and resistance. Democracy and peace are under threat. Discrimination, based on religion, racism, homophobia or sexism and nationalism are on the rise and the crisis is deepening daily. The very existence of the European Union is now at risk while current policies weaken solidarity among European people.

Our most urgent priority is to build Europe on the basis of equality, solidarity, and authentic democracy. EU institutions and European governments now serve the interests of financial markets, with no respect for popular sovereignty. They must be brought under democratic control, just as the public interest must prevail and ecological and social needs be met. We base our demands for a democratic, social, ecological and feminist Europe on these principles, in solidarity with the people of the world.

I) End Debt Slavery

Public debt stems from economic and political choices still on the agenda of EU institutions and European governments. Decades of regressive tax policies have consciously and outrageously enriched a small minority whereas public revenues have declined and public entities using public money have bailed out failed banks. Austerity policies have drained household and small business resources and made the recession worse. Speculation on government bonds is commonplace for private banks while public finance has been tainted by corruption and collusion between politicians and private economic interests.

Moreover, in many countries private, as opposed to national debt, is due to household borrowing, aggressively promoted by the financial sector and governments in order to compensate for the stagnation of real wages while prices were rising.

The measures imposed by European institutions and governments are designed to make the

people pay for this debt. However, in large part, this debt can be considered illegitimate since it was amassed with no regard for the common good. It is now clear that some countries will never be able to reimburse their debt.

Human rights must come before debt service and human needs before profit. As a matter of urgency, we demand European-wide measures to free people from the pressures of financial markets and austerity policies. Fiscal, tax and monetary policies must be changed so as to defuse the debt trap.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Cancel immediately the 'memoranda' imposed by the Troika upon over-indebted countries. Cancel as well a considerable share of the public debt without harming the interests of small bondholders, savers and pensioners. Banks and the financial sector must take their share of the losses. Specific amounts to be cancelled should be defined democratically. In this regard, citizen debt audits can serve as a useful tool.
2. Suspend repayments until populations are protected against worsening poverty and employment and until economic development and ecological transition are ensured, public services strengthened and social and economic rights consolidated.
3. Target the richest segment of the population with a one-off wealth levy.
4. Mandate and oblige the European Central Bank and other public European banking institutions to lend directly to states at low interest and under democratic supervision without neoliberal "reform" programme conditionality.

II) Toward an Ecological and Social Europe: Roll Back Austerity

Throughout Europe, particularly on its southern and eastern rims, harsh austerity policies are imposed, supposedly for the sake of debt repayment and reduction. Entire populations are overburdened, public spending is cut dramatically in essential areas, valuable investments in research or industrial activities are downgraded although they could contribute to a social and ecological transition.

These austerity policies enforced by EU institutions and European governments create a downward spiral, destroy economies, add to deficits, debt, unemployment and poverty and intensify the ecological crisis and the looting of the environment. Meanwhile, a small minority continues to enrich itself unduly.

Today, more than half of European wealth is captured by 10 per cent of the population. Present policies are intentionally designed to maintain these inequalities as well as the neoliberal model which is devastating the planet and undermining democratic and social rights.

We demand a complete reversal of these policies and a different model of society that ensures social justice, equality, a fair distribution of wealth, ecological sustainability and protection of the commons.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Roll back austerity now: it is driving Europe deeper into recession. Cancel or veto the treaties and regulations that underpin it, such as the Fiscal Pact, the Six-Pack, the Two-Pack or the Pact for Competitiveness currently negotiated. Trade imbalances within the Monetary Union must be reduced by adjusting surplus country policies, not by imposing austerity on the deficit countries. Fiscal policy should remain a democratic choice.
2. Ensure tax justice with a just, progressive and permanent taxation system on revenues, wealth and corporate profits, with effective minimum rates applied in all European countries. Revoke increases of consumption taxes such as VAT and drastically reduce those on basic goods. Outlaw tax havens and strengthen measures against fraud and tax avoidance and evasion.
3. Develop public, Europe-wide investment programs under social control for a social and ecological transition. This transition should be based on an industrial and agricultural policy that addresses the ecological crisis as well as the need to create millions of quality jobs and should rely on ecologically sustainable and socially useful activities in the public interest. Among these would figure increased investment in education, energy transition, public transportation, and food sovereignty. It would simultaneously require cutting military spending and socially and ecologically harmful expenditure. EU and national budgets should also be reoriented in this direction.
4. Strengthen and develop the social and ecological commons, redefine and expand public services, including health, scientific research, education, early childhood nurturing, transport and energy, water, information and culture, public housing, credit and so on. Stop all privatization of these services, establish their public or cooperative ownership and manage them democratically.

III) Rights for All: No to Poverty and Precariousness

Austerity policies attack economic and social rights and dismantle social protection. They lead to a drop in the standard of living and in many countries to acute humanitarian distress. The consequences are massive unemployment as well as a serious downgrading of working and living conditions. These, in turn, lead to unacceptable increases in poverty: today, 120 million people in the EU are poor.

In the present context of the crisis, these measures are taken even further. They attack labour rights and the role of unions, including their capacity to organize and bargain collectively. They impose competitiveness as a principle in order to divide people, increase profits, lower wages, and turn nature and human activities into commodities. Free trade agreements also foster social, ecological and fiscal dumping.

People living in precarious conditions, unemployed, disabled and pensioners are hardest hit. Among them, women, young people and migrants are first in line. Women are particularly affected by attacks on labour rights and are also obliged to compensate for the demolition of public services with unpaid care work; migrants' basic rights are denied and an entire generation of European youth is subjected to unprecedented joblessness and social decline.

We demand that every person enjoy effective democratic, economic, environmental and social rights.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Restore the right to bargain collectively and the right of collective action; Safeguard or reinstate collective agreements and labour rights under threat from austerity packages. Guarantee democracy inside the work-place as a fundamental workers' right. ILO standards and the European Social Charter must be applied to all workers, including migrants. Put a stop to precarious work.
2. End social and wage dumping in Europe and in the world, including through international agreements; promote a common ground of collective guarantees in Europe that can ensure high-level social security systems and economic rights.
3. Increase wages, establish an adequate minimum wage for every worker set by law or binding collective agreement in each country and a minimum income sufficient for a dignified life. Decrease working hours without decreasing wages and ensure a just division of unpaid care work; promote quality and sustainable employment for all with decent working conditions. Decrease radically salary differentials in the same company.
4. Protect security of tenure of indebted households and generally the right of all people to decent housing. Ensure effective access to prevention and quality healthcare for all.
5. Impose equality of wages, pensions and career development between women and men and outlaw discrimination at work based on gender, ethnic origin, nationality or sexual orientation. Vigorously oppose violence against women.
6. Strengthen the social and political protagonism of migrants. Oppose the politics of criminalization of migrants and refugees. Secure equal rights for migrants and the granting of asylum, close detention camps, close the FRONTEX Agency and end its EU border operations.

IV) For a Democratic Economy: Make Banks Serve the Public Interest

The collapse of the private banking system in 2008 was not an accident but rather a direct consequence of finance serving only shareholders and speculators to the detriment of the public interest. In recent decades, governments have both authorized and encouraged this system by consenting to every demand of the financial industry. Many public or cooperatively-owned credit institutions previously devoted to financing useful regional activities have been privatized. Meanwhile, the absence of regulation has allowed criminal organizations worldwide to launder money and invest their huge profits freely.

Governments responded to the crisis by injecting hundreds of billions of euros into bank rescues at the expense of taxpayers and provided financial interests with unconditional guarantees, thereby strengthening the private banks even further.

In order to make the banking sector and the financial industry serve the public interest, society and the environment from now on, the disproportionate power of financial institutions must be curbed through strict regulation and public and democratic control over banks.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Review the extensive guarantees granted to private finance and exercise public control in the event of bank failures so as to avoid negative impacts on society. The shareholders of failed banks as well as their creditors must take their share

- of losses. Bailed-out banks must be socialized.
2. Impose effective and strict regulation of banks and other financial institutions. Enforce complete separation of commercial and investment banks. Prohibit the use of tax havens and off-balance sheet activities. Abolish bank secrecy rules. Tax financial transactions and restore control over capital inflows or outflows. Break up “too big to fail” banks.
 3. Enforce democratic and social control of banks and financial institutions. Orient credit toward job-creating activities that encourage social and ecological development. Give priority and incentives to publicly and collectively owned cooperative public credit systems.

STAND UP FOR DEMOCRACY!

Current developments in Europe represent an outright denial of democracy. Democratic debate is silenced, repression against social movements is increasing and divisions are encouraged between people and between countries. The predictable outcome is the rise of racist, right-wing or fascist movements as resentment is partly directed against migrants, poor people, minorities, foreigners, and/or other European people. The best way to defeat these movements is to get rid of austerity.

Alternatives exist: our responsibility is to change the balance of power in order to impose them and build genuine political, social and economic democracy in Europe.

Because we refuse to be governed by a self-appointed European oligarchy,

Because we refuse the exploitation of people and nature in Europe and in the rest of the world,

Because we reject the European Union's contribution to conflict and militarization,

Because we call for an end to the exploitation and the oppression of women and for a break with the patriarchal system,

Because we want real democracy, real participation and popular sovereignty,

Because we want a society that gives priority to ecological and social needs,

We are building a united movement for a democratic, social, ecological and feminist Europe!

We are supporting and strengthening each other's struggles;

We pledge to join forces and to fight together to make our demands a reality through national and European actions.

The [Alter Summit](#) in Athens on June 7 and 8, 2013 is an important step in this direction. •

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