

EUROPE, EQUALITY & JUST TRANSITIONS

FOR



AGAINST



SPECIAL REPORT: HOW DID BELGIAN EU PARLIAMENTARIANS VOTE ?



THIS REPORT WAS COMMISSIONED BY



ABVV/FGTB
Samen sterk | Ensemble, on est plus forts



LEGEND

How did MEPs vote?



For



Abstain



Against



Absent

European political groups in the European Parliament



The Left in the European Parliament GUE/NGL



Renew Europe



The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament



European People's Party



Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats



European Conservatives and Reformists



Identity and Democracy

INTRODUCTION



The European Union is currently facing several crises on different fronts. The Covid-19 crisis, the climate crisis and the surge in energy prices have put a strain on the European economy and on the European social fabric, with the potential of increasing inequalities across the continent. Therefore, EU decision-makers have been urged to take the social dimension into stronger account when developing the EU response to these challenges, including in the context of the green and digital transitions.

The outcome is a new set of unprecedented initiatives, including the Recovery Fund, the EU package to regulate digital platforms, new social funds to cushion the impact of the green transition, as well as a growing focus on employment and working conditions.

These proposals have been met with mixed feelings across the political spectrum, with one side praising the European Union for developing a more social union, and the opposite side expressing concerns over the growing competences of EU institutions, while also criticising the economic impact of strengthened social measures.

This report aims to analyse the behaviour of Belgian Members of the European Parliament on the latest EU initiatives with social implications, thus assessing which political forces have been more supportive of this renewed social focus.

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Pascal ARIMONT



A strong social Europe for Just Transitions

This initiative addresses the major challenges that labour markets and workers will face in the next ten years, including the switch to a greener and digital economy, which will unevenly affect workers from different sectors. MEPs propose a number of targets to be achieved by 2030, among which: ensuring decent living wages for every worker, increasing the coverage ratio of collective bargaining, cutting youth unemployment and eliminating the gender pay gap, and ensuring affordable housing for every person.

Belgian MEPs from N-VA and Vlaams Belang voted against this resolution, in line with the critical positions of their European groups. The other Belgian MEPs from the left-wing factions, the liberals and the Christian democrats are backing this social initiative.



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Reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty

This initiative addresses the problem of in-work poverty. In-work poverty happens when a person does not have sufficient disposable income, despite having a stable job. The report sets out a list of measures to counter the problem, including the strengthening of collective bargaining systems and of the frameworks on minimum income, minimum wages and minimum pensions.

As with the previous proposals, a large coalition of Belgian MEPs from different political families support the initiative. Opposition is limited to the MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA.



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Adequate minimum wages in the EU

This proposal aims to introduce minimum criteria for adequate minimum wages across the EU. It would follow the international reference values of 60% of the median gross wage and 50% of the average gross wage in a country. Furthermore, MEPs want to ensure that public money only goes to companies respecting minimum wages and collective agreements.

15 Belgian MEPs supported the initiative on minimum wage while MEPs from N-VA were opposed, even though their European group was in favour. Vlaams Belang members also voted against it.



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Collective bargaining (90% coverage target by 2030)

Collective bargaining is a key component of the European social market economy. By joining forces, workers' representatives have a stronger power to negotiate with employers concerning remuneration and working conditions. As part of the report on the just transitions, MEPs voted on the target of a collective bargaining coverage of 90 % by 2030, at least concerning those national systems that combine statutory and social partners' regulation of employment and working conditions (paragraph 19/1 - 16/12/2020).

This initiative is supported by most Belgian MEPs, namely those belonging to the left-wing factions, as well as the liberals and the Christian democrats. Conversely, this proposed objective is opposed by the nationalist Flemish from N-VA, while Vlaams Belang abstained.



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Fair working conditions, rights and social protection for platform workers

This proposal addresses the working conditions of platform workers, i.e. those who find work through intermediary digital platforms. Most MEPs believe that the existing legal framework is not sufficient to address this new form of employment, and that platform workers should enjoy the same level of protection and opportunities as the workers in more conventional fields.

The proposal received wide support from a majority of Belgian MEPs, including those from Christian democratic, liberal and socialist parties. Only the MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA abstained from the vote.



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Strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women

This proposal aims to enforce equal pay for equal work between men and women by strengthening existing enforcement mechanisms, introducing reporting obligations for larger companies, introducing a right to ask employers about sex-disaggregated information on the average pay of other workers performing similar work and facilitating access to justice for victims of pay discrimination

This proposal on the application of the pay transparency principle for employees was supported by all left, green, socialist, liberal and christian-democrat Belgian MEPs. Only the right-wing nationalist N-VA and Vlaams Belang voted against and abstained, respectively.



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Challenges for urban areas in the post-COVID era

This initiative aims to address long-standing vulnerabilities that cities face and that have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the issues that need to be addressed, affordable housing, pollution, unemployment and the digital divide are notably mentioned. This report calls for a new model for the Urban Areas of the EU, including further funding opportunities for local authorities and minimum standards for partnerships involving local and urban authorities.

This initiative received large cross-party support from Belgian MEPs, including the left, the greens, socialists, the liberals and the Christian democrats. However, the members belonging to N-VA and Vlaams Belang opted for abstention.



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New own resources with redistributive effects

This proposal raised the ceiling of EU's own resources in order to allow the EU funding of the economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to this, the European Parliament called for the introduction of new sources of revenue for the EU with redistributive effects, such as a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, the new Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, a digital services tax and the Financial Transaction Tax, among others.

This initiative draws the support of most Belgian MEPs, including the greens, the socialists, the liberals, the Christian democrats and N-VA. It was opposed by the members of Vlaams Belang, while the representative of PTB - PVDA abstained.



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Corporate due diligence and corporate accountability

This proposal by the European Parliament aims to redress the negative impact of EU production and consumption patterns, especially concerning the degradation of the environment, human rights and labour conditions across the world. MEPs call for legislation setting out new due diligence requirements on products placed on the internal market to ensure their conformity with environmental and human rights criteria.

The new framework is supported by a large coalition of Belgian members from the left, the greens and the socialists, as well as the liberals, Christian democrats and Vlaams Belang. Only the members of N-VA opted for abstention.



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Temporary waiver from TRIPs for Covid-19 vaccines

The full recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic hinges upon the vaccination of the populations of developing countries. In order to increase access to Covid-19 vaccines in the poorer countries, India and South Africa called for a temporary waiver from certain provisions of the WTO framework on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS agreement) with regards to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. However, several governments from the EU are opposing this initiative.

Belgian Members are divided on this initiative. When voting in November, the Belgian members of the left wing faction backed the proposed waiver, while the members of the other parties rejected it, with a few exceptions. Former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt voted in favour of the proposal, while CD&V Tom Vandenkendelaere opted for the abstention.



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Digital Services Act (DSA)

The fast growth of the online sphere led to concerns regarding the spread of counterfeit goods, hate speech and disinformation online. The objective of the Digital Services Act (DSA) is to make digital corporations take more responsibility for the content they host and to increase transparency and scrutiny of content moderation by digital platforms, especially concerning their use of algorithms.

The proposal was supported by Belgian MEPs from different political factions, including the left-wing faction, the greens, the socialists, the liberals and the Christian democrats. Only the nationalist MEPs from N-VA party and Vlaams Belang voted against the proposal.



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Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe was a citizens-driven debate about a future of the EU project. EU institutions allowed and facilitated the participation for all EU citizens through a multilingual digital platform. The final recommendations of the conference include, among other things, a number of measures to make the EU labour market more inclusive, such as by giving the EU more competences in social policy legislation and harmonisation and a social progress protocol (SPP), which indicates that workers, trade unions and social rights must have priority over economic freedoms and other EU policies whenever conflicts arise. The resolution also calls for a livable minimum wage and more work opportunities for young people and disadvantaged people.

A majority of Belgian MEPs, especially from the centre and left parties, support the implementation of the conference proposals. Conversely, MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA voted against the final resolution.

GLOSSARY

TRIPS - Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights

DSA - Digital services act

MEP - Member of the European Parliament

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