Statement Beate Littig, Plenary “Facing the Multiple Crises in Europe and Beyond”

Addressing the following questions:

What, in your perspective, are the cause and the effect of the multiple crises in Europe and beyond?

- How do you analyze the economic, social, ecological and political dimension? How questions of labor, care and nature are concerned?

- How the actual development - the (discussion on) migration, social inequalities, protest movements from the right and left wing - are interfering?

- What alternative visions of a social and democratic Europe can be imagined? What is its responsibility in a global perspective?

- How alternative visions could be realized?

I agree with most of what has been said by the other speakers.

The statements focus on the economic crisis within Europe and the failure of the EU, which has been constructed primarily as a common European market led by the neo-liberal doctrine. That this increases social inequality within and between the European countries has been stressed.

Consequently the economic crisis is linked to the social crises, the unjust distribution of wealth and possibilities of social inclusion, which is worsened by austerity politics.

But there are other aspects of the multiple crises, which need to be discussed:

I want to highlight two:

Firstly, the crisis of representation:

Josef Weidenholzer talked from an inside perspective about the institutional problems of the EU. But this is just one side of the current problems of democracy in Europe.

A growing number of people do not find themselves represented by the traditional parties and the political elites. This manifests in the rise of right wing parties and movements in various European countries but also in leftist movements like Podemos in Spain. But there is also a growing number of totally apolitical people, who have resigned and do not even vote. Studies show that political representatives are mainly recruited from and voted by the middle class milieus and upwards. Poorer milieus quite often do not vote at all.

Consequently current democratic representation and the forming of the political will do exclude not just minority groups but a growing number of (poor) people.

Secondly, the economic crisis of capitalism is directly linked to the ecological crisis, or more precisely the crisis of the societal relationships with nature. Klaus Dörre has referred to that
already. In the end this means the traditional recipe of economic growth means labor means wealth will not work anymore. Due to inner-economic reasons (secular stagnation) but also due to ecological limits. The decoupling of growth and the consumption of natural resources and environmental degradation has not been achieved yet, not the least because of rebound effects. Green growth will not solve this problem.

I want to elaborate a bit more on the potential and critique of a green economy as it has been mentioned by Annamaria Simonazzi

Green Economy and Green Jobs have become new buzzwords in the international sustainable development discourse. Since 2008, after about 20 years debate, important supra- and international political actors (organization of the United Nations, the OECD, the EU etc.) try to steer the meanwhile too heterogeneous and vague notions of what a sustainable development actually could mean into a particular direction: Green growth by intensified investments into eco-efficient technologies and the economization of eco-system-services, in short the global greening of the capitalist economies are presented as the promising strategy, that could lead the way out of the global crisis. The promises of the green economy include the reconciliation of economy and ecology, the creation of new green jobs and the reduction of social inequalities on a global scale. The idea of green growth has been confirmed last year with the Sustainable development Goals by the UN General Assembly.

Green growth and green jobs are strategies which are promoted by various players, supranational (UN, OECD) as well as international (EU) and national players (trade unions, national ministries, environmental NGOs, some green parties).

Even if the jury appears to be still out on the Green Economy’s chances of becoming a reality, the green economy has been criticized fundamentally:

The Green Economy, as conceptualized by the UN and other international organizations, aims primarily to thoroughly modernize the capitalist economy and sees green technologies as new investment opportunities for surplus capital and might give way to a green capitalism. No matter how welcome the promise of a green economy might be, the skepticism remains with regard to the inconsistencies in the concept like unconsidered rebound effects, the rise of a global consumer middle class, the global production of regenerative energy and forced evictions and the expropriation of land, the economization of eco-system-services etc.

On the whole, it can be presumed that the green economy is an exclusive modernization project restricted to the global north and the emerging areas of the global south, which spawns new national and international forms of exclusion and is secured through imperialistic relationships to other parts of the world. There is much to support the notion that a green economy does not resolve the social and ecological contradictions of
capitalism, but at best makes them workable in a temporary and geographically limited context.

As far as the gender perspective is concerned, the Green Economy concept must give explicit consideration to gender inequalities and establish concrete objectives and measures to overcome them. The question rarely addressed is whether green jobs are also jobs for women. Due to the technical bias of these jobs, skepticism remains regarding the global North. In the global South green jobs often means to include people who have worked in the informal or subsistence economy into the formal markets. Micro-credits are a means to do so. This can lead to empowerment, especially of women, but it can also lead to high levels of debt and the total pauperization of families.

Summing up:
Of course we do need a greener economy, with green production and green products. But this must be part of a more fundamental socio-ecological transformation.
If we talk about a European model, we have to talk about a democratic eco-social European model.

**Future Visions?**

I am not always pessimistic regarding alternative developments. Especially not today, after I have seen the documentary “Tomorrow”¹ last week. The film presents various socio-ecological alternative projects and movements, which try to better the world.
These niches of socio-ecological transformation have gained attention in both scientific and public debates. The changing power of these projects is unclear. But innovative social experiments are perceived as lighthouses or pioneers of change, which could foster learning processes and might disseminate into the wider society. They can contribute to what John Dewey called experimental democracy.

Thinking about the refugees coming to Europe we can observe a polarisation: On the one hand the growth of right wing movements and resentment against migrants. But on the other hand a strengthening of the civil society who tries to compensate the failure of the state. I do not justify this failure. But I see a great potential of new forms of practical solidarity here.

Alternative projects often have strong normative implications. To give an example for that: A feminist understanding “... of a green economy means prioritising a socially and environmentally just society and a corresponding economic system that will facilitate a 'good life for all'. ... Thus, it is essential to acknowledge the multifaceted and productive care work that is overwhelmingly

---
¹ [http://www.tomorrow-derfilm.de/](http://www.tomorrow-derfilm.de/)
performed by women, as well as the productivity of the natural environment, as the basis of any economic activity.” (Genanet: http://www.genanet.de/en/home.html)

This feminist understanding of a green economy has explicit normative implications, since it seeks to make care – in the taking care of and providing for sense – the maxim of all economic activity. It also has conceptional implications for the definition of work: (productive) work should no longer just include paid work, but also the work of providing for and taking care of others that is carried out in the home mainly by women. Or in taking care for others through civil engagement.

The concept of a care-based economy is echoed in many, not only feminist critiques of the capitalist system, which were already discussed in the sustainability conference in Rio in 1992, where feminist groups from the global South in particular demanded an economy of livelihood (survival). All of these approaches call the profit-based market economy into question. They take a critical view on gendered power relations and relate this with the capitalist domination of nature. They also advocate the preservation of reproduction and the integrity of nature. Summing up, there are three main strands to the international, alternative sustainability debate: (1) The reassessment and redistribution of the work that needs to be done in society; (2.) A united approach to common goods like education, social security, health, mobility and an undamaged environment (far removed from neoliberal privatization and marketization); and (3) the escape from the growth paradigms of the capitalist economy at the expense of nature and based on an unjust North-South divide.

These demands require not only an economics of sufficiency, but also a visionary model of society which meanwhile is presented as a possible utopia grounded in the idea of “a good life for all” based on existing practices. It is a counter draft of development, which is directed against the dominant neoliberal model and its green economy, characterized as an attempt to fully control the entire biosphere.

It is difficult to predict what chances alternative concepts like the economy of care mentioned above will have. They are, however, reflected in many social ecology experiments, like the Global Ecovillage network, urban and community gardening projects (some of which even strive for nutrition autarchy or the Transition Town Initiative (to set up and expand local supply structures and support the transition to a post-fossil fuel world) or initiatives within the Solidarity Economy. Or think about the new political bottom-up movement, heterogeneous but unified under the umbrella of “Degrowth”, that has started to grow.

While it might be easy to question the generalizability of such projects, they are still significant, because they represent the kind of social innovations which are needed more than ever in times of crisis.

Yet, it remains to be seen whether or to what extent critical voices who demand for fundamental socio-ecological transformations will find an ear in the current array of crises. After all, it is economic growth that takes precedence on the political center stage.