



EUROPE, SOCIAL POLICY, AND JUST TRANSITIONS

FOR



AGAINST

SPECIAL REPORT: HOW DID BELGIAN EU PARLIAMENTARIANS VOTE ?

THIS REPORT WAS COMMISSIONED BY



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

Over the last 5 years the European Union faced several crises on different fronts. Among others, the Covid-19 crisis, the climate crisis and the surge in energy prices 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.

Introduction	1
A roadmap towards a social Europe.....	3
Quality traineeships in the EU.....	4
Single market emergency instrument.....	5
Revision of the European Labour Authority mandate.....	6
Revision of the European Works Councils Directive.....	7
Effective coordination of economic policies and multilateral budgetary surveillance.....	8
Social Climate Fund.....	9
Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence.....	10
Human rights protection and the EU external migration policy.....	11
Role of tax policy in times of crisis.....	12
A new trade instrument to ban products made by forced labour.....	13
Common European action on care.....	14
A strong social Europe for Just Transitions.....	15
Reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty.....	16
Adequate minimum wages in the EU.....	17
Collective bargaining (90% coverage target by 2030).....	18
Improving working conditions in platform work.....	19
Strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women.....	20
Challenges for urban areas in the post-COVID era.....	21
New own resources with redistributive effects.....	22
Corporate due diligence and corporate accountability.....	23
COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future	24
Digital Services Act (DSA).....	25
Conference on the Future of Europe.....	26
Legal references.....	27



A roadmap towards a social Europe (11 May 2023)

This key resolution on social policy addresses the growing issues of employment, training, and poverty in the EU and stresses that the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is fundamental to the future of Europe. Solutions include a stronger integration and regular review of the EPSR action plan and further legislative action by the Commission and the Member States to ensure the EPSR's full implementation, with a specific focus on childcare, social protection, housing and essential services. It also calls for the next EPSR action plan to be supported by an EU integrated anti-poverty strategy to tackle the multidimensional issue of social exclusion.

Most Belgian MEPs voted to support the initiative, showing support from the centre-right and left-wing parties. Opposition came from two N-VA members opposing and one member voting to abstain. The rest of the opposing votes came from the Vlaams Belang party.



Quality traineeships in the EU (14 June 2023)

This proposal seeks to improve conditions for young people participating in internships and traineeships in the EU. The Parliament calls on the Commission to propose a binding Directive setting minimum standards for traineeships and internships, based on the European Council's 2014 recommendation for a Quality Framework for Traineeships. The resolution aims to strengthen the standards set out in the QFT, for example contracts with transparent terms and a set duration, as well as a call for a minimum level of compensation for trainees and interns.

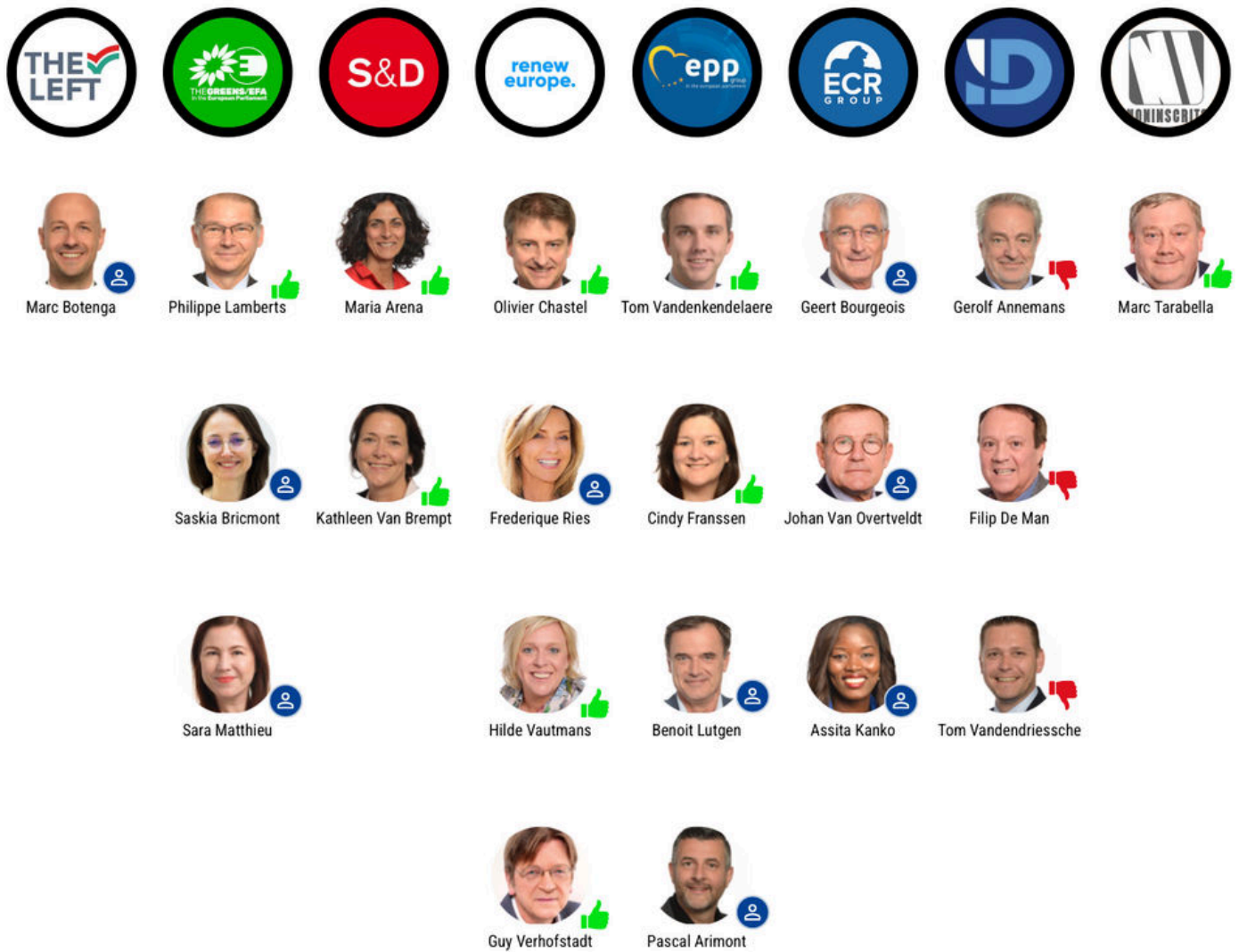
Belgian MEPs across the political spectrum voted overwhelmingly in favour of this proposal. Only some members of N-VA and Vlaams Belang voted to abstain.



Single market emergency instrument (13 Sep. 2023)

The initiative aims for the establishment of a Single Market Emergency Instrument (SMEI) for the purpose of ensuring the free movement of goods, services, and people in the single market in the context of an emergency. The SMEI is designed to improve several critical aspects of supply chains, including better coordination, monitoring and distribution of goods and workers, as well as give the Commission and Member States power to monitor and coordinate supply chains during emergencies. The proposal also safeguards the right to collective action, including the right to strike.

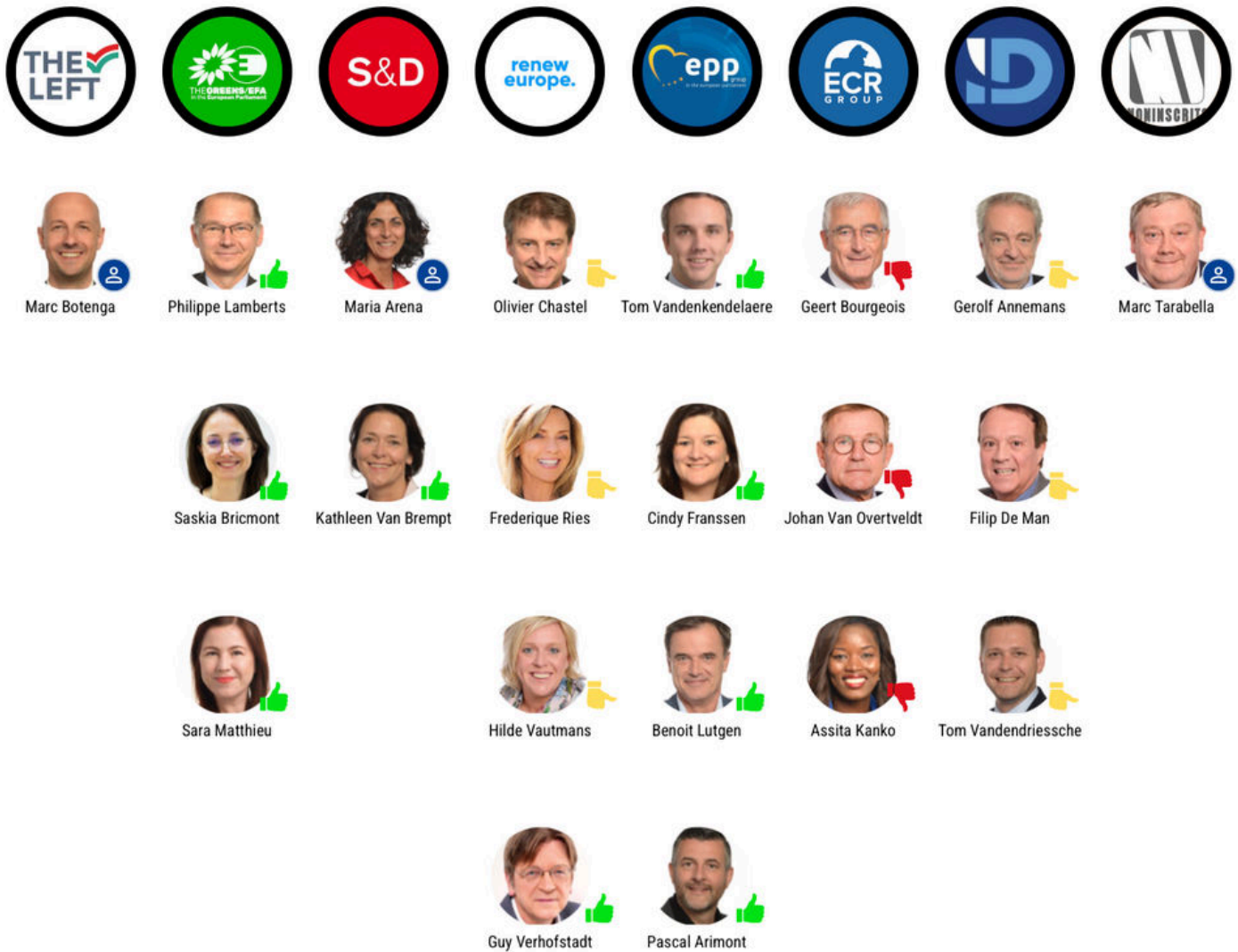
The majority of Belgian MEPs supported this proposal, with support coming from the greens, socialists, christian democrats and liberals. Opposition came from PVDA-PTB, Vlaams Belang and N-VA.



Revision of the European Labour Authority mandate (18 Jan. 2024)

This proposal seeks to strengthen the mandate of ELA in order to ensure a stronger protection for workers who are active in a Member State other than their country of origin. This includes an increase in staff and resources as well as strengthening the powers and competences of the ELA to investigate and carry out checks on its own initiative. Moreover, it seeks to extend ELA's mandate to cover third-country nationals working in the EU.

The majority of Belgian MEPs supported this proposal, although many of them were absent from the vote. As expected, support came from the left, greens and socialist with the Christian democrats and liberals voting in favour as well. Opposition came from Vlaams Belang MEPs.



Revision of the European Works Councils Directive (2 Feb. 2023)

This proposal calls on the Commission to revise the EWC directive by 2024. ECWs are responsible for informing workers and making sure they have a dialogue with central management on significant decisions at EU level that could affect working or employment conditions. The report by the Parliament proposes several changes, such as offering workers better access to consultations, an end to exemption for pre-Directive agreements, tougher penalties and assured access to national justice for EWCs.

Belgian MEPs were split on this proposal. Support came from the christian democrats, socialists and greens, with opposition coming from N-VA. Vlaams Belang and liberal MEPs voted to abstain, with the exception of one liberal MEP who voted in favour.



Effective coordination of economic policies and multilateral budgetary surveillance (17 Jan. 2024)

This proposal aims to modify the rules aimed at the monitoring and coordinating the budgetary policies of the Member States of the European Union. The regulation sets out rules to guarantee the efficient coordination of member states' economic policies, such as rules on the monitoring of national medium-term fiscal-structural plans, aiding in the attainment of the Union's goals for growth and employment.

Belgian MEPs are divided on this proposal, with support coming mostly from liberals, Christian democrats and N-VA. MEPs from PVDA-PTB, the Greens and the Socialists and the extreme right wing Vlaams Belang voted against this proposal.



Social Climate Fund (22 June 2022)

The aim of this proposal is to establish a fund to help EU citizens meet the social and economic costs of the climate and energy transition. Member States may use the SCF to support structural measures and investments in energy efficiency and renovation of buildings, clean heating and cooling and integration of renewable energy, as well as in zero- and low-emission mobility solutions.

The majority of MEPs voted in favour of this initiative, showing support across the political spectrum. The only opposition came from the extreme right-wing groups, represented by the N-VA and Vlaams Belang national parties.



Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (1 June 2023)

This proposal aims to enhance the protection of the environment and human rights in the EU and globally. The due diligence directive will oblige large companies to identify and prevent, bring to an end, or mitigate actual and potential adverse impacts on human rights and the environment, with respect to their own operations, those of their subsidiaries, and those carried out by their business partners.

The majority of Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, including the left wing faction, the greens, socialists, liberals, and Christian democrats. Conversely, MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA voted against the directive.



Human rights protection and the EU external migration policy (19 May 2021)

This proposal supports a human rights-based approach to the whole migration policy cycle, with specific attention to migrant women and unaccompanied minors. The report recommends increasing resettlement pledges, strengthening safe and legal pathways of entry and preventing forced refugee returns from hosting countries. It also calls on the Commission and Member States to enhance dialogue with third countries on migrants' rights as an integral part of the EU's human rights policy.

The majority of Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, including the left wing faction, the greens, socialists, liberals, and Christian democrats. Conversely, MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA voted against the directive.



Role of tax policy in times of crisis (12 Dec. 2023)

The report focuses on solutions to remedy the effects of the Covid and Ukrainian war crises on EU companies through a stronger and fairer tax system. The report recommends, among others, that the Commission should assess the effectiveness of temporary tax incentives applied in Member States, phase out fossil fuel subsidies through tax measures, review the taxation of air and sea transport to align them with the Green Deal objectives and introduce minimum carbon price standards.

The majority of Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, including the greens, socialists, and liberals. The left-wing faction and some of the Christian Democrats abstained. MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA voted against the final resolution.



A new trade instrument to ban products made by forced labour (09 June 2022)

This proposal seeks to address the adoption of an mechanism for an effective traceability for goods produced through forced and child labour. In order to achieve this, there needs to be an extension of the regulation to activities linked with the transport, storage and distribution of products, with the inclusion for products coming from high-risk areas, such as Xinjiang and other regions with state-imposed forced labour, and also a remediation is also a condition to lift the ban on products found to be tainted by forced labour by the investigating authorities.

All the Belgian MEPs from different political factions, including the left-wing faction, the greens, the socialists, the liberals, the Christian democrats, N-VA and Vlaams Belang MEPs, supported this proposal.



Common European action on care (5 July 2022)

The resolution calls on the Commission to present an ambitious, robust and sustainable European care strategy that builds on everyone's right to affordable, accessible and high-quality care. The report calls for funding all types of care services more effectively, as well as investing in childcare, care for older people and others in need of support. It also supports legislative measures and investments at the EU level to promote decent working conditions and to make work in the care sector more attractive.

The majority of Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, including the left wing faction, the greens, socialists, liberals, and Christian democrats. Conversely, MEPs from Vlaams Belang and N-VA voted against the final resolution.



A strong social Europe for Just Transitions (17 Dec. 2020)

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.



Reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty (9 Feb. 2021)

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.



Adequate minimum wages in the European Union (25 Nov. 2021)

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.



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.



Improving working conditions in platform work (02 Feb. 2023)

This proposal seeks to ensure that people working through digital labour platforms benefit from the labour rights and social benefits they are entitled to and to support the sustainable growth of platform work in the EU. The initiative provides indicators to determine whether a platform qualifies as an employer and to assess the employment status of platform workers in order to grant them labour and social rights. It also improves transparency and traceability of platform work by requiring platforms to declare work and to provide information about their activities and the people working for them to national authorities and by requiring human oversight of the automated systems. The directive also aims to strengthen collective bargaining and social dialogue.

The majority of Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, including the greens, socialists, liberals, Christian democrats and the nationalist Identity and Democracy. Only the members of the extreme right-wing nationalist N-VA party opposed the initiative.



Strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women (05 Apr. 2022)

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.



Challenges for urban areas in the post-COVID era (15 Feb. 2022)

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.



New own resources with redistributive effects (16 September 2020)

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.

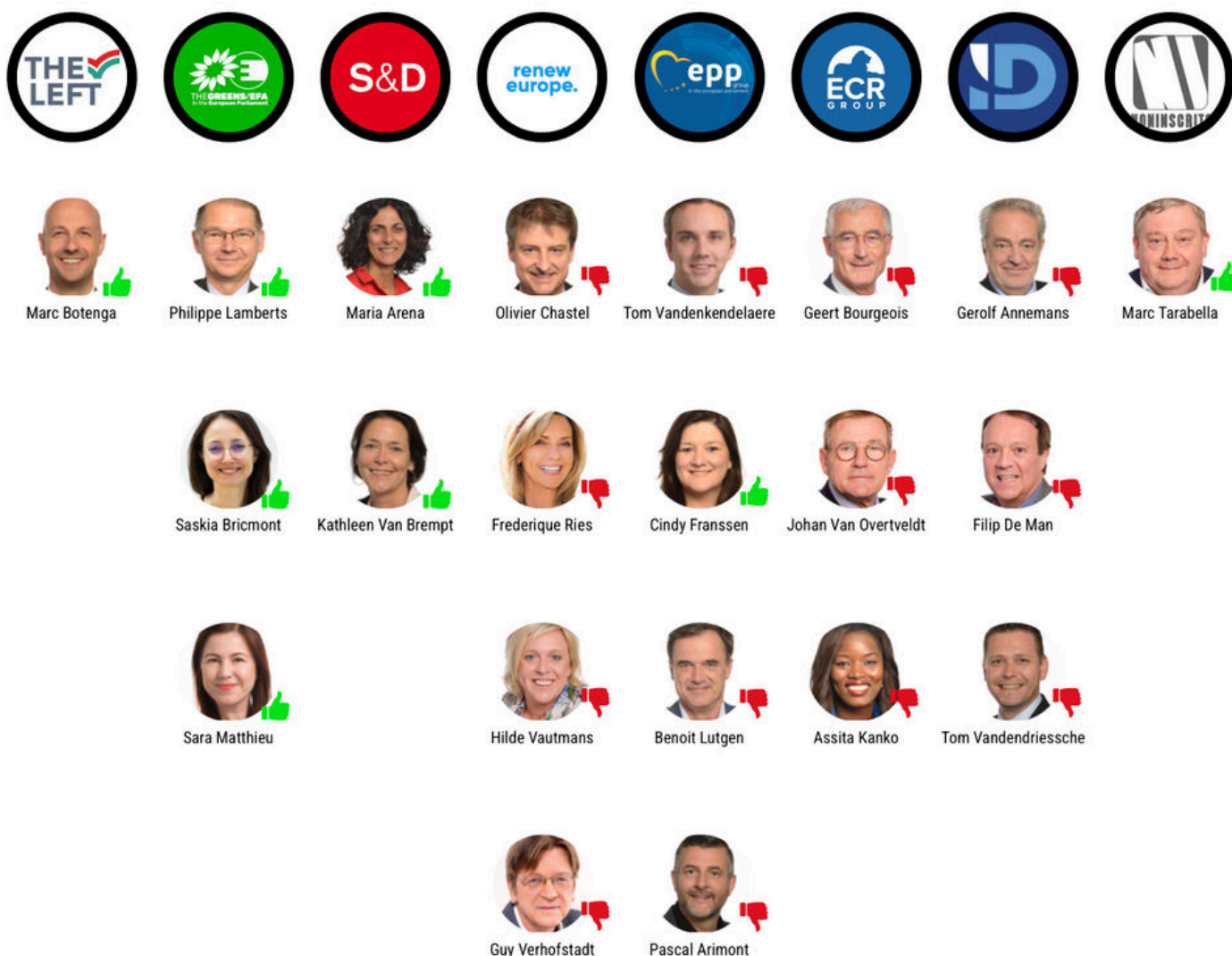
This initiative draws the support of most Belgian MEPs, including the greens, the socialists, the liberals, the Christian democrats and N-VA. It was opposed by the members of Vlaams Belang, while the representative of PTB - PVDA abstained.



Corporate due diligence and corporate accountability (10 Mar. 2021)

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.



COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future (12 July 2023)

This resolution addressed the response of the EU to the COVID-19 pandemic and provided recommendations for the prevention and containment of future health emergencies. Amendment 70, in particular, calls on the Member States and the Commission to actively support negotiations for extending the MC12 TRIPS decision to cover therapeutics and diagnostics. It supports a more extensive TRIPS waiver in the future to ensure fair, universal, and affordable access to essential medical treatments and to tackle potential production and supply challenges during pandemics.

Belgian greens, socialists and the left wing faction voted in favour of this amendment. Conversely, the majority of MEPs from the the extreme right parties, liberals and Christian democrats voted against this proposal.



Digital Services Act (DSA) (20 Jan. 2021)

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.



Conference on the Future of Europe (18 June 2020)

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.

Legal References

1. Roadmap on a Social Europe: two years after Porto - 11 May 2023 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
2. Quality traineeships in the EU - 14 June 2023 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
3. Single market emergency instrument - 13 Sep 2023 - vote: Commission proposal
4. Revision of the European Labour Authority mandate- 18 Jan 2024 - Amendment 4
5. Revision of the European Works Councils Directive - 02 Feb 2023 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
6. Effective coordination of economic policies and multilateral budgetary surveillance - 17 Jan 2024 - vote: decision to enter interinstitutional negotiations
7. Social Climate Fund - 22 June 2022 - vote: Commission proposal
8. Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence - 01 June 2023 - vote: Commission proposal
9. Human rights protection and the EU external migration policy - 19 May 2021 - vote: AFET resolution (as a whole)
10. Role of tax policy in times of crisis - 12 Dec 2023 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
11. A new trade instrument to ban products made by forced labour - 09 Jun 2022 - vote: Resolution (as a whole)
12. Common European action on care - 05 Jul 2022 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
13. A strong social Europe for Just Transitions - 17 Dec 2020 - vote: resolution (as a whole)
14. Reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty - 09 Feb 2021 - vote: EMPL resolution (as a whole)
15. Adequate minimum wages in the European Union - 25 Nov 2021 - vote: decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations
16. A strong social Europe for Just Transitions - 17 Dec 2020 - paragraph 19/1
17. Improving working conditions in platform work - 02 Feb 2023 - vote: decision to enter interinstitutional negotiations
18. Strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women - 5 Apr 2022 - vote: decision to enter interinstitutional negotiations
19. Challenges for urban areas in the post-COVID-19 era - 15 Feb 2022 - vote: Motion for resolution
20. Draft Council decision on the system of Own Resources of the European Union - 16 Sep 2020 - Council Draft Act
21. Corporate due diligence and corporate accountability - 10 Mar 2021 - vote: Resolution (as a whole)
22. COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future - 12 July 2023 - Amendment 70
23. Digital Services Act - 20 Jan 2021 - Vote: Commission proposal
24. Conference on the Future of Europe - 18 June 2020 - vote: Resolution (as a whole)

GLOSSARY

TRIPS - Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights

DSA - Digital services act

MEP - Member of the European Parliament

RELATED LINKS



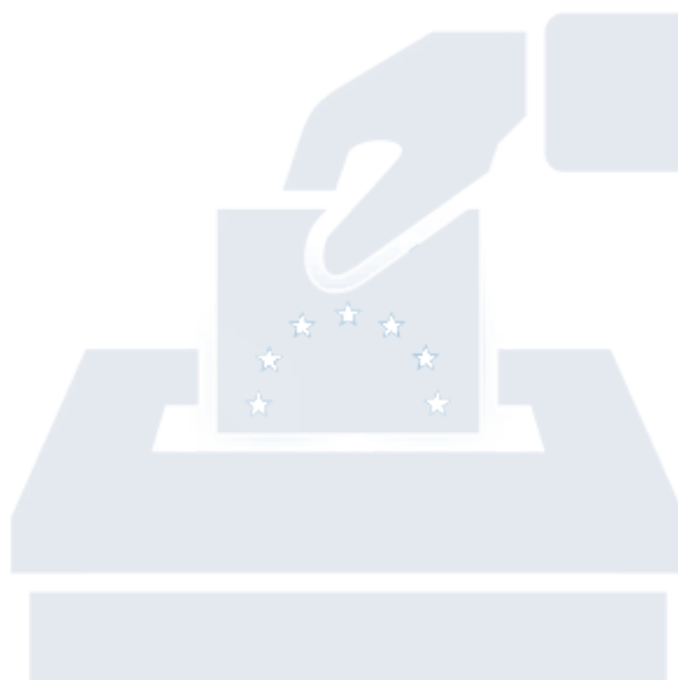
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