

Statement in the EP on child poverty

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The fight against child poverty is not only a question of measures, but above all a question of mentality, of thinking. To this end, I would like to present three theses, drawing conclusions from them and combining them into a concrete action.

First thesis: Work is not equal to work.

"He who raises pigs is a productive member of society, he who raises people is an unproductive member of society". The problem to which the German economist Friedrich List referred with this sentence some 170 years ago is still unsolved today. Even today, bringing up children and housework are largely considered a private matter, rather than an economic contribution to the gross national product. However, more than half of gross value added in Germany today is provided free of charge, namely in private households, in the world of care - as Norbert Bolz calls it. And this is because, according to the cultural sociologist, "gainful employment is the social attractor that structures everything else".

First conclusion: As long as education and family management are not recognised as full-fledged work, and in our thoroughly economised society this usually takes the form of a fee in return for the outcome of work, families and children will only receive alms, and not get out of the poverty trap.

Second thesis: The work of the family cannot be replaced.

Family work and management takes place on three levels: an emotional, a manual and a cognitive level. The simplest is the manual - washing, cleaning, cooking. The most strenuous one is the emotional one, one has to balance and harmonise the sensitivities of the respective and often very different family members. This requires a lot of patience, endurance, empathy and mental flexibility. The most challenging level is the cognitive one: you have to be smart, parental skills require knowledge, instinct is no longer sufficient today, the keyword being smartphone.

Second conclusion: Good family management leads to the formation of human capital, to the skills of existence, to what the neoliberal Nobel Prize winner from Chicago, Gary Becker, called the ability to learn, to deal with each other, to classify feelings, to develop awareness of solidarity, language awareness, integrity, bonding, in short, social competence and emotional intelligence. And he said at a congress in Berlin: "School and state cannot replace the family in this task. The fifth family report of the Federal Government (1994) also writes: "The acquisition of skills of existence... is almost only possible in a family context."

Third thesis: Without family there is no state.

The social sciences call children a "mixed bag" because they fulfil functions both in the private sphere and in public or social space. Their very existence secures, projected into the future, the apportionment systems such as pensions, health insurance and care. For they are the future contributors and taxpayers. That is why the family is considered the nucleus of society. But it is not only demographically. With the formation of human capital, above all the awareness of acting in solidarity, the family also creates those conditions on which the state lives according to the well-known dictum of Wolfgang Böckenförde, but which it cannot create itself. The state does not love, it only functions. It profits from the free services provided by families. Heinz Lampert, the former nestor of family policy, therefore saw in the - quote - "production of solidary behaviour a reason for the constitutional protection of the family". According to Lampert, it is a service that

is provided in the family "in a way that cannot be achieved in any other way with regard to effectiveness and quality". This is of existential importance for a democracy and its capacity for consensus.

Third conclusion: Solidary behaviour is constitutive for every community. This applies not only to every nation building, but also to the consent to a larger community like the European Union. Without a family, there can be no "union of states" (Udo di Fabio) like the EU, and certainly not a federal state.

Conclusion: Family is a demographic and democratic necessity. But as long as starting a family is synonymous with potential poverty, there will be fewer and fewer families with children. The trends are well known. 90% of young couples who wish to have children and then decide not to have them do so for financial reasons. Nobody likes to become poor voluntarily. Anyone who wants to do something for this necessary institution must acknowledge its achievements. This is done today with a financial fee. This is common in several countries, such as Scandinavia or France. A recognition from Europe would not only help families in a concrete way, but would also increase the status of Europe itself within families. That is why the initiative for European government subsidized child maintenance money (payment to parents/'Kinderkostengeld'), which is paid in addition to national family transfers, makes perfect sense.