



FROM A SUPPOSEDLY CRAZY IDEA TO A PIONEER

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THE GREEN BUTTON AS A PIONEER IN THE CHANGING TEXTILE INDUSTRY

A colourful collection of evidence from the last five years still hangs on the wall: ‘Let’s change fashion – for good’ and ‘Fashion without victims’ are written on postcards and stickers with the Green Button logo. Where counselling sessions and the very first licensing of textile companies with the Green Button used to take place, numerous moving boxes now dominate the Green Button Secretariat. In the midst of all the moving boxes, head of the secretariat Christine Moser-Priewich stands in the room and discovers a white T-shirt, which she packs into one of the boxes – sustainably produced, government-approved, with the Green Button.



Christine Moser-Priewich packs the last things from the old Green Button Secretariat into the moving box

For most people, a shirt starts with a shop purchase and ends with its disposal in the recycling bin. But it has much more to tell - by the time a conventional T-shirt reaches a shop in Germany, it has often travelled a long way, sometimes up to 18,000 kilometres. The supply chain begins in the cotton field, for example, then passes through the spinning and weaving mills to the dye works and finally to the sewing room. Around 75 million people

worldwide work in the textile supply chain, the majority of them women. Many of them work without social security or maternity protection, but with toxic chemicals and often without protective clothing. Their wages are often not enough to survive - and certainly not enough to feed their families. Five years ago, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) therefore introduced the Green Button as the first

German label of its kind in order to make the textile supply chain more just and sustainable. Today it is celebrating its fifth anniversary. But what makes the label different and what has it achieved? On the occasion of the fifth anniversary, the head of the Green Button Secretariat, the scheme owner BMZ and other supporters of the Green Button look back on the eventful early days, lessons learnt and an increasingly changing corporate and legal landscape.

LOOKING BACK AT THE START OF THE GREEN BUTTON

In the meantime, the postcards and stickers on the wall have also been taken down and packed in the boxes. There is a hint of nostalgia as Moser-Priewich closes the door to the old Green Button Secretariat one last time. She still remembers the early days of the Green Button: 'Even if not everything was perfect. Five years ago,

there was simply no label that checked whether brands and retailers were doing their bit for sustainability in the textile supply chain. At the same time, there was no label that used other recognised labels to check whether companies were complying with human rights and environmental standards in their production processes'.

According to Moser-Priewich, this dual approach is still not fully understood in some cases. This is one of the reasons why the Green Button was heavily criticised even before it was introduced. 'It's a crazy idea' or 'The Green Button can't deliver what it promises.' was the response from NGOs, the media and textile

associations at the time. In particular, the due diligence as the subject of audits and the certification of brand and trading companies were often scrutinised at the time. However, audits, assessments and certifications are essential in order to take just and sustainable action against the lack of maternity protection, poverty wages and the use of harmful chemicals. 'Our aim is to offer companies an incentive to actively and systematically take responsibility for compliance with human rights and environmental standards in their supply chains,' emphasises Christine Moser-Priewich as she leaves the now former Green Button Secretariat with the last moving box in her arms.

Dr. Bärbel Kofler has followed the development of the Green Button from the very beginning



Just a few hundred metres further on, in the time-honoured Europahaus, is the birthplace of the Green Button, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. On behalf of the Ministry, Parliamentary State Secretary Dr Bärbel Kofler addresses the injustices and abuses in the textile industry. She also remembers the doubts and criticism at the time but draws a positive conclusion: 'When the Green Button was introduced, there were major doubts from politics, business and civil society about the feasibility of the label. It is now clear how important the Green Button was and is. The label has provided impetus for the entire textile industry and, above all, has helped to shape the legal landscape. As a pioneer, it has shown that corporate due diligence can be implemented. It thus served as a role model for legislation on due diligence in supply chains at German and European level.'

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The Europahaus – the birthplace of the Green Button

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE AND SETTING THE TONE

The companies themselves also quickly recognised the added value of the Green Button. At the start of the label in 2019, 27 pioneering companies were the first to be certified with the Green Button. With these certifications, the Green Button has also gathered experience and has now evolved into a standard that places even higher requirements on fair working conditions and sustainable production processes than it did at the beginning. Michael Windfuhr, then chairman of the advisory board for the further development of the Green Button, holds an old group photo of the former expert advisory board in his right hand. The

photo shows him and the other former advisory board members discussing and advising in the Marie-Schlei-Saal at the BMZ. 'The many advisory board meetings on the further development of the Green Button were quite intensive - it was a productive and transparent process. It has not only shown that the Green Button has learnt from its previous experience with the first Green Button Standard. We worked together to ensure that the Green Button now sets important and ambitious requirements for corporate due diligence,' recalls Windfuhr, human rights expert and Deputy Director of the German Institute for Human Rights

» Together, we have ensured that the Green Button now places higher requirements on corporate due diligence. «

(DIMR). 'The intensive monitoring by the advisory board and the public consultation process speak in favour of the transparency and robustness of the Green Button. The dialogue with the Green Button has been very helpful to BAFA in the implementation of the Act on Corporate Due Diligence in Supply Chains. I was able to take it with me in my new role as a member of the advisory board of the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA).'

THE NEW GREEN BUTTON STANDARD

The current Green Button Standard is accompanied by increased requirements, such as the gradual introduction of living wages, the gradual expansion of the risk analysis to the entire textile supply chain and the increased involvement of people such as local textile workers. In the five years since the Green Button was launched, more than 100 companies have been certified with the government-run label. More than 60 of these companies already fulfil the stricter requirements of the enhanced Green Button standard, which has been in force since August 2022.

Friederike Boll provides a look behind the scenes at company level. She is Sustainability Manager at **Tchibo**: 'The Green Button has led to us standardising and improving our internal processes, for example in the area of human rights. In my view, the Green Button has also made a major contribution to ensuring that several companies adhere to the same standards, thereby strengthening the credibility of the Green Button and other Green Button-certified sustainability standards.' In addition to the increased corporate due diligence, the further

development has also made the Green Button's verification system even more robust. 'Independent certification bodies were and are responsible for auditing companies for their compliance with due diligence under the Green Button. Over the past five years, the Green Button has aligned its audits with internationally recognised standards and is accreditable. Since the introduction of the new Green Button standard, these certification bodies have therefore also been monitored by us at the German Accreditation Body (DAkKS),' explains Raoul Kirmes,

Head of Accreditation Governance, Research and Innovation at the DAkKS. The Green Button is therefore the first DAkKS-accredited sustainability standard. For Head of Secretariat Moser-Priewich, this is an important honour: 'DAkKS is known for its high quality standards. The Green Button accreditation confirms our work. It proves that the structures and processes of the Green Button are robust, that the certifications are carried out independently and that the auditors are selected according to high standards and in a transparent manner.'



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The former advisory board of the Green Button

AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Current developments in the textile industry demonstrate the ongoing relevance of the Green Button. The endeavour to improve working and production conditions in the textile industry has also long been recognised at a legal level.

This is demonstrated, among other things, by the presentation of the EU Textile Strategy in 2022, which also includes the recently adopted Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). Christine Moser-Priewich is therefore optimistic about the future: 'The Green Button will continue to develop in the future. The many legislative innovations at EU level provide us with important impetus for this,' she says as she opens the office door to the new Green Button Secretariat with the moving box in one hand and the key in the other. 'But one thing is very clear: the Green Button will remain relevant despite legal regulations.

As a voluntary label, the Green Button promotes the due diligence approach on a broad scale and is open to companies of all sizes.'

Rabea Schafrick, Sustainability Manager at **Brands Fashion**, can also confirm this: 'It is a great advantage that the requirements between the Green Button and the legal regulations overlap in many respects. Since we have successfully completed the Green Button testing process, neither we nor our customers have to worry about sleepless nights,' reveals Schafrick, who is responsible for the sustainable certification of textile products. 'Thanks to the Green Button certification, we feel that we are now ideally prepared to implement the requirements of the Act on Corporate Due Diligence in Supply Chains.' Once in the new office, Christine Moser-Priewich looks around with satisfaction. The work can now continue. 'Our aim in the future will not

just be to provide assistance in preparing for the legislative changes. We want to continue to go beyond the legal requirements and pave the way for further improvements - just as the Green Button has already done over the past five years.'

» We now feel that we are well prepared thanks to the Green Button certification. «

„The motto for the Green Button is to keep on pushing instead of packing up,” says Moser-Priewich from the new place of work.



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