



EUROPEAN LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Insight

27 YEARS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRAT ACHIEVEMENT NOVEMBER 2003
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Liberal Leaders meet in Brussels

On the fringe of the EU Summit 16 October 2003



On October 16th 2003, ELDR Prime Ministers and Leaders met in Brussels. The meeting was hosted by Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, at his official residence.



Present at the ELDR Leaders' meeting were: the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Anton Rop; the Prime Minister of Finland, Matti Vanhanen; the Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen; European Commission President Romano Prodi; and the President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox. Also taking part in the meeting: ELDR Party President Werner Hoyer; ELDR Group Leader, Graham Watson; European Affairs Minister of the Netherlands Atzo Nicolaï; and Belgian Foreign Minister, Louis Michel.



The meeting took place in order to prepare the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) and the European Council. The main issue of discussion was of course the IGC, but the ELDR leaders also discussed the European growth initiative and European defence. Mr Verhofstadt summed up the main conclusions of the ELDR leaders' meeting. He said that the Liberal leaders were very pleased with the outcome of the Convention. The Prime Minister added that there were some points to resolve, and the question of the composition of the Commission would be one



of the most important to address in the coming weeks and months. However, Mr Verhofstadt emphasised that the Liberal leaders consider that the proposal of the Convention is the basis on which the IGC should conduct its work.

Next ELDR Leaders' and Ministers' Meeting: 11 December 2003 in Brussels

24th Congress of ELDR Party in Amsterdam (NL) at Hotel Krasnapolsky, from 12 - 14 November 2003

The theme will be "Freeing Europe's Potential"

This year the Congress will assume a particular importance. Apart from our primary aim of bringing together key liberal decision-makers to discuss and debate the most important issues on the European agenda, a secondary aim must be to prepare ourselves for the great challenge of the June 2004 European elections.

Among the most important issues will be the debate and adoption of the ELDR Electoral Manifesto 2004 - our common political programme. This will not only be used during the electoral cam-

paign but also as our main document of reference for the 4 year Parliamentary term.

We expect a strong representation from each and every one of our 49 member parties at this landmark event (over 400 delegates expected from 35 European countries). Moments of leisure will not be missing, and among the social events we expect to hold a charity art auction. Liberals with an artistic inclination should not miss out on this chance to donate one of their works for this auction. We want to prove that Liberals can also have artistic souls!

But above all, we expect a very intellectual and political contribution from our main key-note speakers. Among these we count on the presence of the Prime minister of Belgium, Mr Guy Verhofstadt, Mr Anton Rop, Prime minister of Slovenia, Pat Cox President of the European Parliament, Werner Hoyer, President of the ELDR Party and Graham Watson, Leader of The Parliamentary Group at the EP, plus a number of Foreign ministers and State Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

The central theme of the congress will be developed

during three working sessions: "The citizens of the European Union"; "Towards a liberal Europe"; and "The European Convention and the IGC". Special working groups will be formed to discuss and amend the Theme resolution and the 5 draft resolution on the agenda, as well as eventual last-minute urgency resolutions.

Last but not least, we will transform our Congress into a real media event, where all leaders and candidates will express their ideas, and make a substantial input into the final forging of our



Electoral Manifesto. The campaign beckons: let's roll!

New Statute for the ELDR Party

On 18 September 2003 the ELDR working group on the future statutes of the ELDR Party met in London under the chairmanship of Lord Alderdice.

Until now the ELDR Party - as all other European parties - did not have a formal European legal statute. The Maastricht Treaty

mentioned European parties but did not foresee any European legal statute for them.

This has changed since the adoption by the European Council on 29 September 2003 of the Regulation establishing rules on the statute and financing of European political parties. This regulation foresees that in

order to benefit from funding by the EU, parties must register in the country of the EU where they are active, by way of a legal statute.

The ELDR Party secretariat has for two years now been preparing for this change and identified the statute the most appropriate for us, as recommended

by a Law firm, which is the incorporation as an International Non-profit Organisation (IASBL). The Law firm has drafted statutes for an IASBL that have been scanned by the Bureau and the working group set up by the Bureau.

To facilitate their adoption by member parties these draft statutes are based as far as

possible, on the former statutes of the ELDR Party.

Two steps now must be taken for these statutes to see the light: One is their adoption by ELDR Party member parties. To achieve this, the draft statutes will be submitted to the ELDR Council in Amsterdam on 11 November 2003 for examination. They will then have to be approved by an extraordinary Congress which would be organised in April 2004.

The other step is the introduction of our request for recognition at the Belgian Ministry of Justice. Once the Ministry approves our statutes and the IASBL is created we will have to ask the EU authorities for a formal recognition as European political party. This will then lead to the financing of our party by the EU.

The European regulation will enter into force as from the first plenary session after the European Parliament elections in June 2004.

It means that by then the new legal structure must be in place (IASBL recognised by the Ministry and statutes signed by its founding members) and the ELDR party installed in its new offices.

It is a new era that will start for the ELDR: it will have a full-fledged structure with its own offices but more importantly it will become at last, a recognised European political party!

**Sabine Dechamps,
Principal Administrator
ELDR Party**

Joint ELDR - Liberal International Fact-Finding Mission to Lithuania and Estonia

The ELDR Party and Liberal International have recently stepped up their level of co-operation. On 1-2 October a joint ELDR-LI delegation visited Estonia and Lithuania and met the representatives from all our member parties in the two countries: the Reform Party and the Centre Party from Estonia, and the New Union (Social Liberals) and the recently merged Liberal and Centre Union from Lithuania.

The Parties involved exchanged views on the most important issues on the European agenda, including the outcome of the referenda on accession to the EU and the state of play in the IGC talks.

One of the issues which was raised related to the possibility to hold a European Referendum on a possible new Constitution of the EU. The meetings also provided an opportunity for our delegation to get an important insight on prepara-



October 2003 - The ELDR-Liberal International joint delegation meets representatives from the Estonian Reform Party. Johannes Lebech, Vice-President of the ELDR Party, Lex Corijn, Secretary General of the ELDR Party, Federica Sabbati, Secretary General of LI, Francesco Greco Political advisor ELDR Party, Siim Kallas, Leader of the ERP, Kristen Michal, Secretary General ERP and Triinu Rajasalu, Secretary for International Affairs.

tion for the 2004 electoral campaigns, and to exchange views on the latest draft version of the ELDR electoral programme.

The ELDR-LI joint delegation was composed of Johannes Lebech, Vice-President of the ELDR Party, Lex Corijn, Secretary General of the ELDR

Party, Federica Sabbati, Secretary General of Liberal International, and Francesco Greco, Political Advisor of the ELDR Party.

Perspectives of liberal co-operation in an enlarged Europe

Only a dozen years separate us from the time of the Berlin Wall and the Communist dictatorships that governed the eastern half of Europe, including Estonia. Today, less than half a year separates us from the unique step of the unification of Europe, the accession of ten new members to the European Union. Historically this is an enormous step forward for the cause of liberty. For countries like Estonia, these past few years have been a time of great achievements, but also of great sacrifices.

We have built up successful democratic societies and functioning market economies. Our societies are still markedly poorer than those of Western Europe, but compared to our recent past, the progress has been enormous. As Dr. Otto Graf Lambsdorff said a few years ago, on the occasion of the presentation of the Liberal International's Prize for Freedom to former Estonian president, Lennart Meri, Estonia is seen in Europe as a country that has initiated a bold programme of reforms, and is seen as a model liberal government.

Estonian liberals have long believed that the purpose of integrating Europe is to guarantee security and prosperity on our continent. Our goal of joining both NATO and the EU has not been an end in itself. It has rather been part of Estonia's overall effort to create a political, economic, and institutional environment, in which our national interests can be developed. As liberals, we believe that Estonia's accession to NATO and the EU will not restrict the free space, which every nation requires for its existence, but would actually expand it, thereby increasing the

nation's opportunities and security.

We expect to become active and constructive members of both the EU and NATO. One of our contributions is certainly our firm belief in how crucial freedom of choice and freedom of enterprise are for creating a solid social foundation, which would be essential for ensuring that a unified Europe is successful on the world stage. I also believe, that Estonia's positive experience in the field of social and economic reforms could provide new ideas for liberals in so-called old and established welfare states.

It has been in Estonia's interests to join an effective Union, which assures equal opportunities for both large and small states. When planning to make institutional changes, it is very important to observe the principle, that all member states are equal.

Most current and future members of the EU believe in a workable model for a Commission of 25 or more members according to which all Commissioners would retain full voting rights, and they would be organised into groups of Commissioners. What is important here for me, is that full representation of all small and big countries around the table where new European legal acts are proposed, gives possibility to inject new ideas in to the system.

The commissioners from new member states bring with them the experiences acquired in the course of the successful economic reforms carried out in the last 15 years. The new commissioners would be orientated more towards the liberalization of markets, and to giving a role to new



solutions and technologies. At the same time, they will defend and promote traditional common European values and interests just as vigorously as their colleagues from Western Europe.

It is in the nature of the leadership of the EU, which is, after all, a community of very different nation states, to hope, that supposedly perfect institutional arrangements could be a miracle solution for problems such as a democratic deficit or lagging economic growth. Institutional structures are of course essential for organisations such as the EU. But as the great liberal philosopher Ludwig von Mises has shown, the growth of regulatory government agencies, and statism as such, do not have a positive impact on the

economic growth and welfare of societies. We believe that the right of member states to determine their own tax and social policies is a fundamental one. Thus, we insist that tax and social policy matters continue to be decided by unanimity. Tax competition is essential raising the EU's competitiveness in the global market.

As liberals, we must see the whole world as an open market place for exchange of not only goods, but also of ideas. I hope that the accession of the ten new states from Central and Southern Europe to the EU will bring many new liberal members to the European Parliament.

Kristiina Ojuland
Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs

The EU must remain competitive

I have served as Prime Minister for about a hundred days. In this short time, the everyday work of a Prime Minister has become familiar in all its dimensions. It would be an understatement to say that EU work is merely an important part of my duties. The EU has become such a central instrument in ensuring that any Government can deliver on its numerous core functions.

One of our main challenges today is to safeguard the EU's competitiveness. As a policy maker, I am well aware of the limits of public powers. Competitiveness will not be achieved by statements nor can unemployment be banned by decrees.

This is the fourth year that the EU implements its own Competitiveness Strategy. The Lisbon Strategy must gain greater influence within Union policy-making, and it must succeed.

The most important thing is to focus, both at national and EU level, on efforts to enhance the prerequisites for genuine



and lasting competitiveness. It is up to public authorities to ensure that businesses are supplied with skilled labour, that they are provided with clear rules and that they have free entry into

markets. It is also important from the businesses' point of view that the society in which they operate fares well.

The dynamism of European development is brought about by our well-functioning, wide Internal Market, our inputs in education and research, and by the fact that the EU leaves room for internal competition between different national and local solutions. Different countries have different designs as regards their taxation, education and provision of services, to mention a few. The enlargement of the EU will add to this dynamism.

There must always be adequate leeway for these varying socio-economic choices so that the Union will always stand properly equipped to take on challenges posed by the rest of the world. The rise of the European telecommunications sector is an excellent example. A part of Europe's dynamism is created by this ability to adapt. The worst scenario would be that of an inflexible economic area of some 500 million inhabitants

unable to introduce and implement changes. Businesses build their success on their ability to react to changes. The same applies to societies.

I believe that today a truly liberal vision of the European Union needs to be organised along two basic principles – strong rules and dynamic competition. We need robust rules that guarantee a level playing field for all economic actors, be it companies, public authorities or consumers.

These rules must provide added value and not lead to centralisation for its own sake. We also need an adequate degree of internal competition within the EU, which guarantees our ability to adapt to new challenges. This vision is paramount for the very reason that the Union stands for – the long-term welfare of its citizens.

Matti Vanhanen
*Prime Minister and
President of the Centre Party
of Finland*

Muslims are better off in a liberal world

Liberal International 52nd Congress, Dakar, Senegal

The conclusion to an open constructive debate on the Theme resolution 'Islam and the West: a Liberal View' at the 52nd Liberal International Congress in Dakar, Senegal was "A liberal world is a threat to intolerance, religious fanaticism, dictators and undemocratic government".

The debate could not have taken in a more appropriate country than Senegal,

When talking about 'the West' we mean the intellectual and scientific tradition that is commonly described as 'Western' being a heritage with contributions from many parts of the world, including the world of Islam.

When discussing 'Islam', it is necessary to recognise that the Muslim world is diverse, as it is comprised of countries which have Muslim majorities. Some of these countries

Delay of Democratisation

The delay of democratisation in most Muslim countries is often caused by external and internal destabilising factors.

The modernisation process in most Muslim societies has often been complicated by the interference, and in most cases occupation by external powers of most of these countries. This occurred mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries, which has impacted on their economic development and impeded or distorted some internally generated progressive movements. However many Muslim countries have been independent for two generations or even more. Their poor governance, like in other countries, has in many instances contributed to the failure of closing the economic gap.

Whether Muslim countries are allies of the West or not, it is imperative that the same standards apply. The geopolitical importance of a country must not adversely affect the chances of its inhabitants enjoying individual freedom.

Crucially the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians needs to be and can only be solved peacefully. While pressing for a solution, Liberals state clearly that the responsibility for solving it rests principally with the Israelis and the Palestinians. Conflicts like these, however, may not be used as a pretext for violence against any countries, their citizens, institutions or companies.

An internal problem for progress in many Muslim countries is that consultation (despite being a requirement of Islam) does not reach wide enough to prevent, whether intentionally or otherwise, ruling elites from imposing a self-serving governance that fails to provide equitably for the wider populace.



Frank Hsieh (DPP) and Prime Minister Idrissa Seck.

While taking into account the specific political traditions in Muslim countries which condition the future path of reform in the Muslim world they should not be used as excuses to violate universal human rights and freedoms and to postpone liberal and democratic reforms.

On the other hand, it is encouraging to see that the drive for Islamic reform has intensified. This is mainly a result of the realisation by Muslim intellectuals that the ideology advocated by Muslim ruling elites has not led to meaningful political or social progress in many Muslim societies.

Separating moral beliefs from administering policies

Much of the misunderstanding between 'Islam and the West' revolves around the role religion plays in societies.

For liberals one of their great achievements is that in the West, Church and State have been separated. While advocating a secular state, liberals do not mean an anti-



Arrival of President Abdoulaye Wade.



Closing of Congress with Prime Minister Idrissa Seck, President Wade, Annemie Neyts and Minister Aminata Tall

with a liberal President and where the majority of the population is of the Muslim faith. But as President Wade pointed out: "In Senegal we do not consider ourselves Christian or Muslim, but simply Senegalese."

'Islam and the West: a Liberal View'

What do we mean by 'Islam' and 'the West'? What are the external and internal drivers that influence the relationship between the 'two' and influence governance in Muslim countries? How do liberals perceive religion and what entails 'the liberal view'?

classify themselves as Muslim states. They differ not only in the way Islam is applied socially and politically, but also in terms of political and economic organisation.

At the same time we need to underline that illiberal policies and practices on the part of governments of many Muslim countries should not automatically be seen as a representation of the true attitudes of the population. Moreover, one should be aware that in many of these countries there exist significant differences amongst Muslims themselves over the ideal political and social order.



Annemie Neyts, Abdoulaye Wade, John Alderdice, Carles Gasoliba I Böhm and Matyas Eörsi.

The liberal view



Jasper Veen

Liberals believe that the establishment of political, social, legal and economic reform is needed to build a strong institutional framework, which would allow individuals to develop their own human potential. This must not be seen as attacks on Islam as a religion but aimed at powerful prejudices and vested interests.

Freedom of conscience and religion is a basic and universal right and every human being has the right to choose the religion they prefer without being subject to any form of oppression, negative discrimination, or suppression in any part of the world.

In particular liberals emphasise that the fundamental rights of the individual are applicable irrespective of gender. Religion may not be used as an instrument for the infringement of these rights. The correct reading of Islam emphasises the equality of women in every aspect of life but sadly it is not practised in many Muslim countries, nor by their leaders. Gender discrimination and abuse of human rights in the name

of religion has to end. On the other hand, it should be noted that the four largest Muslim countries -Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey- have had women heads of Government.

Liberals believe all possible support should be given to liberalisation and democratisation in Muslim countries. This support should extend beyond governments and state bureaucracies. The trend towards a civil society must be strengthened and encouraged. When one reads the 2003 UN Arab Human Development Report, which highlights the severe under-investment and the low quality of education in many Arab countries it becomes apparent that investment is much needed. For Liberals, qual-

ity education is a key tool for social mobility and inclusiveness as well as a prerequisite of progress. Education for both genders will strengthen civil society as it is an important tool for overcoming monopolies over information and interpretation of powerful governments, and religious and political groups.

A world based on liberal values such as individual human rights, democracy, and rule of law will strengthen a more plural market which is not a threat to ties of family, community, culture, religion and tradition.

Not only Muslims, but we are all better off in a liberal world.

religious government, but a neutral government; that is, a government that treats equally those of all faiths and those of no faiths who adhere to the law and does not support any of them in any manner.

As ELDR leader, Graham Watson described in his speech "the faultline that concerns us runs not between Islam and the enlightened West but down the middle of every one of the Abrahamic religions..." and "...the issue is not the divide between Islam and the West but between secular government and its enemies."

In contrast, there are continuous debates in Muslim countries over the role of reli-

gious leaders in politics. Currently there is much conceptual difficulty in separating moral beliefs from administering policies. This means religion continues to play a significant part, not always harmoniously, in the workings of politics in many Muslim countries. However, attempts to establish bigoted theocratic governments are not following the true spirit of Islam.

Jasper Veen

Political Advisor Liberal International

(the article is based on the adopted theme resolution)



Graham Watson MEP with the Angolan delegation.

Deep-rooted myths behind Swedish euro-no

A large majority of Swedes have voted to reject the euro, thus opting to keep the crown for years to come. The result of the recent referendum can be interpreted in different ways. Some say that Swedes are anti-European by nature, whereas others claim the overwhelming no was a protest against the entire political establishment and rejection of government policies. The latter theory may carry some weight, but it is not true that Swedes would be opponents to international and European co-operation in general. For a long time, Sweden has contributed actively to important international fora, such as the UN, the Council of Europe and within the Nordic sphere. This co-operation has gained wide popular support.

Commissioner Margot Wallström has explained the loss for the yes campaign with the lack of political leadership in European issues. She is right. During nine years of membership in the EU, the social democratic government has repeatedly missed the opportunity to fuel a public debate on the future of Europe and on Sweden's role in the Union. Without a discussion, the interest among the population is obviously low and public opinion will remain sceptical to changes. The lack of a Swedish

public debate was manifested in a recent survey by the Commission, showing that only one in ten Swedes knows that the Convention has been drafting a constitution, compared with an average of 32 per cent of the citizens throughout the EU and the accession states.

The lack of a debate on Europe has to do with a deep split within the social democrats on the whole issue of EU membership. Ever since the last referendum in 1994, the party has suffered from an internal split between pro- and anti-European forces that take completely different views on European integration. The struggle to keep the party together has clearly been considered more important than engaging in an open discussion on European integration. This split became particularly evident during the euro campaign, as five out of nineteen government ministers took an official stand against the single currency, which led to a serious credibility gap for the government.

I believe we need to go back about 50 years to seek the roots of the current Swedish scepticism towards deeper European integration. Since the 1950's, when the Swedish economy was booming and the welfare state was under

construction, the social democrats have added fuel to two very powerful myths. One of them is that our welfare system is unique and far better than that of other countries. The second myth says that peace and stability are guaranteed only by staying outside any political co-operation with like-minded countries. These myths have been rooted not only within the social democratic movement, but also among a majority of the population, despite the dramatic change of the economic and political situation from 1970 to date. Having been told about the superiority of the Swedish system, many citizens fear that the euro, and possible deeper economic co-operation with the rest of Europe, would have negative effects on public services and benefits. For a government that needs both political and economic arguments to win a referendum on the euro, it is obviously very difficult to suddenly change the rhetoric it has used for decades.

I voted yes to the euro because the single currency is a tool for deeper European integration and a sign of mutual dependence. I am sure that a Swedish yes to the euro would also have stimulated growth and facilitated a better economic performance. The

result of the referendum means that Sweden will not join the eurozone any time soon, and this decision must be respected. The consequence may be, however, that Sweden will find itself in a more difficult situation, both economically and politically, within the EU.

My view is that Sweden should continue playing an influential role in an enlarging European Union. The support of the citizens is a determining factor in this process, and for this we need a long-term campaign to create a more positive attitude towards Europe, which would also help Sweden get away from its "euro trauma". The social democratic myths about Sweden need to be exploded and the true story about other European countries must be told. It is also more important than ever that the government as well as liberals and other pro-European forces spend time and resources on involving citizens in a wide debate about the future of Europe and about our own role as Swedes in the process of European integration.

Lars Leijonborg

**Leader, Folkpartiet Liberalerna,
Sweden**

The New Member States – preparing for the 1st May 2004

The European Union, as it has developed in the last fifty years, is soon going to enlarge substantially with the addition of another 10 countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Letonia, Malta and Cyprus.

The enlargement of Europe is of tremendous economic, social and, above all, political impor-

tance. Europe with its almost 500 million inhabitants is becoming an area of peace and stability, ready to take up its rightful role in international affairs.

In order to succeed, however, we must all work hard and especially we, the new member states.

On the one hand, we have the countries of central and eastern Europe which, for the last forty years have operated in an entirely different political and economic environment under communist regimes. In the south, Cyprus, has managed to survive and progress, despite foreign aggression and occupation but has continued to operate in an inward looking way, deeply involved and preoccupied by its political problem. So, in effect, all these countries needed an outward, broader-looking prospect and this prospect was non other than the European Union.

Since negotiations with the E. U. started, there has been feverish activity in all these countries, in an effort to adapt to new politi-

cal, legal and security systems, to new working methods for their economies and their business community and above all, to change the way the citizen sees his/her role in society as a whole. National Parliaments have never been busier, for, hundreds of harmonization laws and regulations have had to be enacted. New institutions have not only had to be created but had have to learn how to operate and play their rightful role.

The signing of the Treaty of Accession in the beautiful and historical Attalos Archade, in Athens, on April 16, was a cause for jubilation for all of us. However, after the celebrations were over, we all realized that the difficult part of the accession process was not over.

We have to ensure that the aquis communautaire is actually enforced, that all the new institutions that have been created are functioning satisfactorily and above all, to see that the citizens understand and appreciate the changes for the sake of transforming our respective economies, societies and public service into modern functioning states.



Change is difficult to understand and accept. That is why strikes and protests by angry citizens are usual occurrences. Nevertheless, we must all persevere and continue our dialogue with all different groups of citizens: farmers, businessmen, consumers, trade unions, women and young people on the co-operation and understanding of whom the success of our efforts depends.

To succeed in becoming fully-fledged European citizens

means acquiring a certain state of mind, different from the one we have been used to. In our effort we need the assistance and the support of the old boys and girls of the Union, which I am sure we shall have in order to create the European Union of the 21st century.

Androula Vassiliou,
Vice-President ELDR Party

Prize for Freedom 2004

LI Awarded its Prize for Freedom 2004 to Grigory Yavlinsky in recognition for his continued moral stance, alone among Russian party leaders regarding the assault on human rights in Chechnya. Liberal International Congress also expressed its concern with the growing influence of the Russian security services in all aspects of Russian Politics and economic life, and its efforts to muzzle media critical of the Putin Government.

ELDR-CoR group on Services of General Interest: "No new EU Competences!"

"No new competences for the EU in the area of Services of General Interest!" Harry Dijkma (NL, VVD), ELDR spokesman on economic affairs is very clear: "No new EU regulations, no

definitions, no standards at EU level". Services of General Interest which are delivered locally should be decided locally, adapted to local needs and circumstances. The concept of "Services of General Interest" is defined in different ways in different countries, and even the distinction between services of economic, or non-economic interest is made differently according to the national traditions.

It may include services such as education, public health, water, energy, waste management, public transports, post-offices, public credit institutions, and even public broadcasting companies. In principle the rules on competition and state aid apply to the provision of these services as to any other sector. However, in some cases exceptions are allowed, with a view to securing the provision of these essential services.

Dijkma recognises the need for further clarification of the application of the internal market rules in this area, but he cate-

gorically rejects proposals for Services of General Interest to be included in the EU Constitution amongst the main objectives for the European Union. "Such a reference would inevitably lead to the creation of new EU competences".

Though not excluding any suggestion at this stage, ELDR is also sceptical about the proposals for a framework Directive. Given the enormous diversity of SGI, "such a framework would almost by definition be too rigid and unduly reduce the room of manoeuvre for local and regional authorities", Dijkma points out. The ELDR could however envisage sectoral arrangements or specific adjustments to the internal market rules where appropriate.

Whatever formula is chosen, the three overriding principles set out by the Commission should be endorsed: neutrality (as to the ownership or legal status of the provider), Member States' freedom to define the mission, organisation and financing methods of the services, and

proportionality (any support measures must not go over and beyond what is required to ensure adequate service provision).

The Single Market has brought enormous benefits to Europe's citizens. However, there are certain internal market rules that have not been properly implemented, or that have had an adverse effect as they were not adapted to local circumstances. The rules must allow sufficient flexibility to address these problems. The main aim is safeguarding access to universal services, at an affordable rate, and ensuring fair competition in the interest of the citizens.

The Committee of the Regions will be discussing its draft opinion on the Green Paper on Services of General Interest at its plenary session on 19/20 November in Brussels. Rapporteur: Larsen (DK, PES)

Sophie In 't Veld, Secretary
General ELDR Group,
Committee of the Regions



Harry Dijkma, Executive Member of Flevoland Provincial Council (The Netherlands).

Singapore's fake democracy

Whilst the left still glorifies such revolutionary idols as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Marx, another Chee - a real freedom fighter - is struggling for democracy in Singapore and Asia.

This is the Chee, who should be supported by all those who claim to be democrats with a global view. In reality the situation is sadly different. This will have to change if we do not want to see the majority of Asian countries ending up as totalitarian regimes.

At the LYMEC Young Leaders Meeting in Rome in the beginning of October we had the honour to invite and welcome Dr. Chee Soon Juan as a speaker.

Dr. Chee is the leader of the Singapore Democratic Party and the author of the book "Be free: stories from Asia's struggle against oppression"

He is, alongside Aung San Suu Kyi, Shih Ming-teh and others, one of the key freedom fighters in Asia. He has given his all in the fight for human rights and in criticising oppressive Asia regimes. But he continues his fight for personal and political freedom next to the economic free-

dom that Singapore enjoys.

In Singapore the right to assemble does not exist. More than a handful of people, who gather with intent, will be imprisoned. Public speaking is not legal either. Political opposition not tolerated and people involved with democratic movements are sacked from their jobs. This is the sad state of personal and political freedom in one of Asia's well developed economic countries.

In the minds of most people Singapore is a booming economic success. And it is. Thirty years ago the country was dependent on aid, today the country is an economic power centre.

According to the latest issues of "The economic freedom in the world" (2003) Singapore comes a powerful second. This naturally leads to Singapore being one of the targets for massive economic investments and the place for global companies to build up their headquarters for ventures in Asia.

Money is power in Singapore. And those with the money can generate pressure on

Lee Kuan Yew's authoritarian government.

Until recently in Singapore, the penalty for chewing gum was 10 wip, Table dancing was illegal and bungee jumping and certain other leisure activities were prohibited. When the big companies started to complain about this - as their employees were getting bored!, Lee Kuan Yew changed the rules...

But why do I say this? Because the pressure that the EU, our governments and our companies can generate is enormous. The democratic changes we push for are sorely needed. So why do we keep closing our eyes to the fake democracy in Singapore?

Why do we accept that political and personal freedoms do not exist? I wonder because we as Liberals tend to talk a lot about democracy, but isn't it time to respond?

I also wonder how young people can walk around in their "Che" t-shirts, with their red flags and still be able to look at themselves in the mirror and claim to be



democrats, when history has proved their idols guilty of violations of democracy and human rights.

I just hope that I do not have to wonder 20 years from now why we as Liberals did not support the real "Chee" in his fight AGAINST fake democracy for real democracy.

*Ellen Trane Nørby,
President of LYMEC*

European Defence - Time to Close the Credibility Gap



US President Theodore Roosevelt used to say that the best foreign policy was to speak softly but carry a big stick. Roosevelt, who oversaw America's transformation into a global power, knew a thing or two about getting his way in international affairs.

The European Union has always been rightly sceptical of the value of big stick diplomacy. It has long preferred to speak softly: to pre-empt conflict through dialogue and engagement and to act through multilateral institutions like the UN wherever possible. Yet in the Balkans and now in Iraq we have seen this policy fail when Europe fails to speak with a single voice, or fails to act when its voice is ignored.

Dependent for half a century on NATO and American power, Europe suffers from a dramatic military credibility gap. When dialogue fails, Europe has no other

card to play. When it cannot find the political will to act in concert, it cannot act at all. In the Balkans, Europe's collective weakness left it helpless as Yugoslavia fell apart and shamed it forever at Srebrenica.

It is time to close the credibility gap. Although the Union agreed at Helsinki in 1999 to establish a Rapid Reaction Force, progress has been too slow. The deployment of a European force in Macedonia this year is a welcome development, but there is still a long way to go. Two weeks ago, the ELDR convened a seminar here in Brussels on the future of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the European Rapid Reaction Force. Among our guests were senior NATO officials and the Turkish Foreign Minister Mr Vecdi Gönül. There was strong agreement among them all that Europe needed a military dimension to its security policy and that it needed it without delay.

It's not a question of creating a European Army. Nor is it about displacing NATO as the continent's chief mechanism of collective defence and our pre-eminent military alliance. The EU force would not be a standing body, but would be drawn from the militaries of the member states. NATO and the EU force would work in concert, sharing resources and some mandates. Although some - including many in the current US administration - are desperate to present ESDP as an attempt to diminish the importance of NATO or erode the transatlantic alliance, NATO's own officials are clear they do not see it this way. Nor did the Clinton administration, which welcomed the idea of a European military force.

Closing the credibility gap is about ensuring that Europe can take responsibility for

itself and for its own backyard. It is about making sure that it can respond quickly in crisis situations where it has responded too slowly in the past. It is about making sure that faced with another Bosnia or Kosovo, Europeans do not have to go half way around the world to Washington for the means to save European lives. It will also ensure that Europe has a tool to lend to the vital work of UN peacekeeping and crisis management.

The next step is for Europe's member states to spend more and spend better on defence. The umbrella of five decades of American protection has allowed most European states to forget the real cost of credible military capabilities. Politicians and voters alike have to swallow the pill of some increased expenditure. However, the economies of scale that potentially exist among European militaries mean that spending a little extra more co-operatively could deliver disproportionate benefits. By sharing some of the costs of research, procurement, training and deployment and directing new spending towards modernisation, Europe's militaries could take a huge step forward.

There must also be political will of an entirely new order. Europe's member

states must break bad old diplomatic habits and commit to speaking with a single voice. Europe's security problems are common problems and we must find common solutions. The new European Constitution proposes the creation of a European Foreign Minister, who will speak for all of Europe abroad. If such an office is to be credible, it must come with the political backing of every member state.

With Tony Blair's belated decision to bring Britain into structured military cooperation with France and Germany, a credible European Security and Defence policy is now a real possibility. Europe's leaders must build on the momentum that has already been achieved.

The world already has enough big stick diplomats. Europe will continue to speak softly in international politics. It's limited military capability will be designed to add credibility to this approach; to keep people at the negotiating table, not replace it. When Europe has exhausted every one of the tools of peace, it must never again be helpless to prevent the terrible costs of war.

*Graham Watson MEP
ELDR Group Leader*

LATEST NEWS

"The European Parliament voted in first reading on 23 October on the budget for 2004. Due to a lack of co-ordination between the two biggest political groups EPP and PES before the vote, no amendment to the budget, allocating money for the European political parties, was adopted. This may cause serious problems for political party funding next year, now that the financial Regulation for political parties was adopted last September. A solution could be found in the second reading of the budget 2004. If there will be a political "package" deal, this could also encompass the political party funding."

Bridging the gap between citizens and Europe



Lex Corijn, Secretary-general of the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR Party)

Human life without water is impossible to imagine. We have only to follow a river from its source to its mouth to realise how dependent our lives and also our modern societies are on water. Men have always settled in organised communities often next to rivers, lakes and seas. Rivers are sources of life, channels of communication, but also boundaries dividing people. Therefore man built bridges to cross the rivers. Bridges give humans the chance to interact, exchange ideas, trade and prosper.

The ELDR Party has now been in existence for over 27 years. During these years it has enabled liberals from around Europe, irrespective of country and origin, to meet, discuss, write ambitious political manifestos for the European elections and establish a European liberal political family. At the end of September the Regulation for the financing of European political parties was adopted, being the first genuine step towards true European political parties, as democratic actors in the European sphere, bringing like-minded people and parties together. The regulation will enable the ELDR Party to become a bridge, connecting citizens, member parties, European think tanks and policy makers, our ELDR groups in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions.

Bridges come in many varieties. The ELDR Party is currently in the process at forming our tailor-made bridge. A solid one made of bricks from Belgium and the European Union. The Bureau, a special task force, and the secretariat, have worked more intensely than ever in the last two months on the issue to establish a legal statute under Belgian law, as required in the new financial Regulation. To obtain a legal statute we need a solid package of statutes that cater to European and Belgian legal requirements, but not to forget most importantly, also to the needs of the ELDR Party. After adoption of the new statutes the ELDR Party can become the solid bridge, legally connecting liberal democrats from around Europe.

The first main opportunity for the bridge to be functional, is the Amsterdam Congress. There we will meet, discuss, and adopt the electoral Manifesto for the European elections 2004. The manifesto is ambitious, serving the ELDR and its member parties to fight and win these important elections, the first ones in an enlarged EU. The manifesto aims at reform, more freedom, a modern and open economy, cutting red tape, promoting innovation, freedom of choice for the consumer, the end of the Common Agricultural Policy by replacing it with a Food and Rural policy, equal opportunities for women and men, defence of human rights, favouring globalisation and free trade, protection of the environment and sustainable development, empowering tax payers, and last but not least reforming the EU institutions.

As I wrote last time, 10% of the votes and the EP seats (74) is the minimum what we need to achieve in the next European elections. Our own bridge is almost set to be up and legally running, the manifesto is about to be adopted, the campaign can soon start. Now, it is up to our members to implement! I wish you a successful, positive and dynamic Congress 2003.

Lex Corijn

Member Parties and Affiliate Parties

Member Parties	
Albania Partia Aleanca Demokratike http://www.aleanca.org	Kosova Partia Liberale e Kosoves (PLK) http://www.plk-kosova.org
Andorra Partit Liberal d'Andorra http://www.partitliberal.ad	Latvia Latvia's Way (LC) http://www.lc.lv
Austria Liberales Forum http://www.liberale.at	Lithuania Lithuanian Liberal and Centre Union New Union http://www.nsajunga.lt
Belgium Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) http://www.vld.be Parti Réformateur Libéral (PRL) http://www.mr.be	Luxembourg Demokratesch Partei (DP) http://www.dp.lu
Bosnia-Herzegovina Liberalno demokratska stranka (LDS) http://www.liberali.ba	The Netherlands Democraten 66 http://www.d66.nl Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en democratie (VVD) http://www.vvd.nl
Bulgaria Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) http://www.dps.bg National Movement Simeon II http://www.ndsv.bg	Poland Unia Wolnosci http://www.uw.org.pl
Croatia People's Party (HNS) http://www.hns.hr	Romania Partidul National Liberal (PNL) http://www.pnl.ro
Cyprus United Democrats (UDP) http://www.edi.org.cy	Serbia and Montenegro Liberals of Serbia http://www.liberali-srbije.org.yu
Denmark det radikale venstre http://www.drk.dk venstre http://www.venstre.dk	Slovenia Liberalna demokracija Slovenije (LDS) http://www.lds.si
Estonia Estonian Reform Party http://www.reform.ee Estonian Centre Party http://www.keskerakond.ee	Sweden Folkpartiet Liberalerna (FP) http://www.folkpartiet.se Centerpartiet (C) http://www.centerpartiet.se
Finland Suomen Keskusta http://www.keskusta.fi Svenska Folkpartiet (SFP) http://www.sfp.fi	Switzerland Parti Radical Démocratique (FDP-PRD) http://www.fdp.ch
Germany Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) http://www.fdp-bundesverband.de	United Kingdom Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) http://www.libdems.org.uk The Alliance of Northern Ireland http://www.allianceparty.org
Gibraltar Liberal Party http://www.gibraltar.gi/liberalparty	Affiliate Parties
Hungary Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SzDSz) http://www.szdsz.hu	Croatia Hrvatska socijalno liberalna stranka (HLSL) http://www.hsls.hr Liberalna stranka (LS) http://www.liberali.hr
Ireland Progressive Democrats (PD) www.progressivedemocrats.ie	Czech Republic Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) http://www.oda.cz
Italy Italia dei valori - Lista Di Pietro http://www.antoniodipietro.it Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI) http://www.pri.it I Democratici http://www.democraticiperlulivo.it Rinnovamento Italiano http://www.rinnovamento.it	Macedonia Liberal Party of Macedonia (LPM) http://www.liberalna.org.mk Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) http://www.ldp.org.mk
	Norway Venstre (V) http://www.venstre.no
	Slovakia Aliancia Nového Občana (ANO) http://www.ano-aliancia.sk

ELDR CALENDAR FOR UPCOMING EVENTS 2003

November 2003	
3-4	ELDR Group Bureau Meeting, Luxembourg
5	ELDR Group Meeting, Brussels
6-9	Congress Folkpartiet Liberalerna, Sweden
8-9	Congress Venstre, Herning (DK)
12	ELDR Party Bureau meeting, Amsterdam
12	Electoral Programme Committee, Amsterdam
12	ELDR Council meeting, Amsterdam
12-14	ELDR Party Congress, Amsterdam
22	D66 Congress, Maastricht (NL)
December 2003	
3	ELDR Group Meeting, Brussels
10-11	ELDR Group Meeting, Brussels
11	ELDR Leaders and Ministers Meeting, Brussels

ELDR CALENDAR FOR UPCOMING EVENTS 2004

January 2004	
	Extraordinary Congress Estonian Reform Party, Estonia (tbc)
	Congress HSLs, Croatia (tbc)
March 2004	
13	Congress D66, The Netherlands
13	Alliance Party Congress, Northern Ireland
19-21	Liberal Democrats Congress, Southport (UK)
26-27	Congress Progressive Democrats, Killarney (Ireland)
April 2004	
	Congress HNS, Croatia
May 2004	
	Congress Estonian Reform Party, Estonia (tbc)
June 2004	
5-6	Congress, Svenska Folkpartiet, Finland
18-20	Congress Keskusta, Finland
September 2004	
11-12	Congress Radikale Venstre, Denmark
19-23	Congress Liberal Democrats, Bournemouth (UK)
November 2004	
20	Congress Liberal Centre Union, Lithuania (tbc)
	Congress D66, The Netherlands

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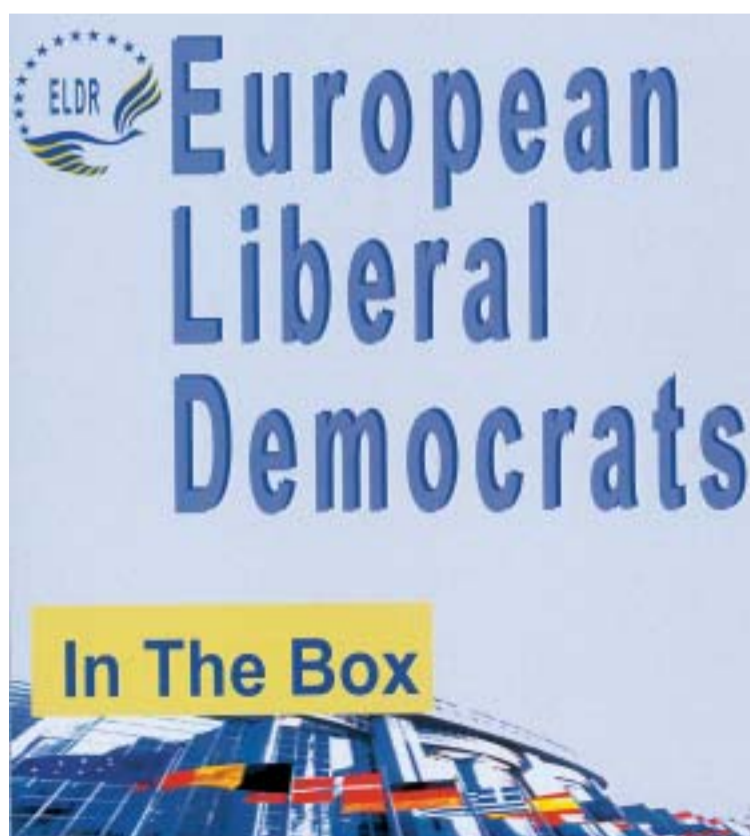
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ELDR in Reykjavik



Johannes Lebech, Vice-President of the ELDR Party

An ELDR delegation composed by Johannes Lebech, Vice-President of the ELDR Party and Francesco Greco, Political Advisor visited Iceland on 17 October 2003, and met Mr. Hjalmar Arnason MP, Parliamentary leader of the Progressive Party and Sigurdur Eythorsson, Secretary General.



"ELDR In The Box" is a presentation of the ELDR Party and ELDR Group. It contains information on activities, partners and events as well as details of size and expertise. This box with 13 hardboard explanatory cards is available on request.
Contact: efelgueroso@europarl.eu.int.

The ELDR Party Secretariat will be closed between 19th December 2003 and 5th January 2004