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UNITY IN FREEDOM: THE LIBERAL CHALLENGE FOR EUROPE

(Draft electoral manifesto for the ELDR Party Congress in Berlin on 28 April 1998)

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The twentieth century has seen Europe at war with itself and Europe coming together in unity. Liberalism, at one time imperilled, survived to inspire the defeat of totalitarianism and the birth and growth of the European Union. Now is the time for the Union to join with new member states in the same spirit of unity and freedom.

ELDR, the party of European Liberal Democrats, is firmly resolved on the further development and enlargement of the European Union. We wish to strengthen Europe's economy, to modernise Europe's democracy and to invest in Europe's security. Our aim is a larger, democratic and more open European Union which is empowered to take decisions on European and international issues, but is committed to decentralisation on domestic issues.

Without enlargement the mission of the European Union will be unfulfilled and our liberal hopes frustrated. With enlargement we can look forward with determination and confidence to a wider Union that is working effectively towards a more just, prosperous and safer world community. A liberal Europe will strive for social justice and economic opportunity worldwide. A liberal Europe will work to enhance the global environment. A liberal Europe will offer peace, stability and liberty to those threatened by war or oppression.

This is the liberal challenge for Europe. Here we set out our common programme for the European Parliament to be elected in June 1999. We say what we hope to achieve and how we plan to achieve it.

The Party of European Liberal Democrats and Reformists (ELDR) commends this programme and calls on all those who fight for liberty, security and justice to support our cause.

Making the Difference in the European Parliament

ELDR Members of the European Parliament form a strong and cohesive force. They have been in the forefront of the Parliament's campaign for human and civil rights and against racism and genocide. The Liberal Group, which is the third largest in the Parliament, has taken the lead in arguing for the creation of an International Criminal Court and initiated the Sakharov Prize for human rights.

The ELDR Group has always been strongly in favour of a common foreign and security policy, and has argued in particular for a more effective role for the Union in the Balkans. Liberal Democrats have been active in encouraging the growth of pluralism in Central and Eastern Europe, and in preparing for enlargement.

At home, ELDR and its member parties have fought for the completion of the internal market, as well as for the foundation of economic and monetary union (EMU) and the reforms that are needed to sustain it. We have fought for the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, which, despite their obvious shortcomings, have gone some way in modernising the European Union. And we have campaigned successfully for stronger environmental legislation at the EU level. Our MEPs have always shown themselves to be on the side of the citizen and consumer against that of big government. They continue to battle against fraud and maladministration in the EU institutions, not least in the Parliament itself.

Building a Dynamic Economy

Only a strong economy can effectively tackle poverty and unemployment. Economic dynamism is essential for a healthy and participative society which is itself the cornerstone of a strong democracy.

At a time of global economic instability, the economy of the European Union must combine dynamism with stability. This is why ELDR has championed the single currency, the introduction of which will help to contain inflation, boost investment and reduce costs for business and the consumer. We believe that it is important to respect the independence of the European Central Bank and the role of the Stability and Growth Pact in keeping prices stable and budgets disciplined.

We look forward to the United Kingdom, Denmark, Greece and Sweden joining the euro as early as their circumstances allow.

ELDR is pledged to the values of individual freedom and responsibility, equal opportunities and sustainable development. We believe that the role of government within a market economy is as a guarantor of social justice, the liberalisation of trade and environmental protection. Government must be capable of recognising and addressing market failure.

Reinforcing the single market

The single market has already delivered for consumers an enhanced choice and a higher quality of goods and services. ELDR welcomes the introduction of a stable euro as a key element in furthering liberalisation, particularly in establishing transparency of pricing. We will work to complete and enforce the single market in such areas as financial services, post, public procurement and energy supply. We favour fair competition between the tax regimes of member states, but recognise the need for the EU to protect the tax base from erosion and to prevent harmful tax breaks that penalise other member states. By enhancing competition and choice, we are putting the citizen first.

European Liberal Democrats believe that EU funded programmes demonstrate solidarity within the single market and have direct effects which are visible to the citizen. But all EU programmes should favour local initiative, good governance and sustainable development.

Helping employment

Europe's unemployment is an affront to the dignity of the individual and a costly waste of resources. ELDR welcomes the closer coordination by the EU of member states' employment policies.

Labour, product and capital markets need to be further adapted to meet the requirements of EMU and the demands of the global economy. Employability must be enhanced by a greater and more innovative investment in education, training and life-long learning. Labour mobility in Europe can be eased by developing exchanges of students and apprentices, by intensified language learning and by the full mutual recognition of qualifications, as well as by making more portable pensions, mortgages and social insurance. The social partners must be engaged in securing stability and moderation in wage settlements.

Small and medium-sized enterprises play a critical part in job creation. Their access to venture capital markets and their freedom to grow must be improved by the removal of unnecessary and burdensome regulation at all levels.

ELDR favours early agreement on the single European Company Statute that will allow enterprises to integrate their structures and adapt to transnational activities.

The dynamic effects of the introduction of the single currency must be seized to lower unemployment. Effective policy coordination at the EU level is needed to balance the use of EU structural and cohesion funds, the lending of the European Investment Bank and member state measures. We strongly support the imperative of price stability as being critical for public confidence in the euro, as well as necessary for the protection of those on fixed incomes, such as pensioners.

Social solidarity

The goal of European Liberal Democrats is for a society of active citizens with equal opportunities living in strong communities and backed by enabling government. Today, too

many people in Europe are condemned to a marginalised existence on permanent welfare dependency because of passive systems of social security and excessive tax burdens on labour. Women can be especially disadvantaged.

While we will always guarantee welfare assistance for the least-well-off, Europe's taxation and social security systems too often have perverse effects which lock people into dependency. Much can be gained from innovations in the field of social policy, such as the greater integration of tax and social security systems. Although there will not be one single European social model to suit all countries and circumstances, it would be helpful to share best practice more closely across the EU about how to balance the competing demands of liberalisation, deregulation and social cohesion.

In general, member states should reduce the overall tax burden for individuals and companies, and develop policies to shift taxation away from jobs and incomes towards consumption, pollution and resource depletion. This will help employment.

Promoting sustainable development

European Liberal Democrats are in the vanguard of the fight to protect the natural environment in the interests of future generations. We promote an integrated energy supply and environmental protection policy at the level of the European Union. Our approach to sustainable development means that we only support economic activity that enhances nature's capacity to restore itself. We insist that all technological substitutes for raw materials should be safe and clean.

ELDR favours the use of market forces to protect the environment, and supports the introduction of fiscal measures at EU level to prevent pollution and the squandering of natural resources.

The European Union should concern itself with all cross-border environmental issues, including air and water quality, greenhouse gasses, nuclear safety, and waste disposal. A particular effort should be made to improve the quality of the environment of the applicant states of Central and Eastern Europe.

Eurostat should work to create a new green GNP, incorporating environmental factors and energy consumption, to be used in conjunction with conventional GNP to measure Europe's wealth.

Penalty payments for non-compliance with EU environmental legislation should be applied, while the implementation and control capability of the European Environment Agency should be strengthened.

ELDR supports the agreements signed in Kyoto in 1997 aimed at reducing CO² emissions by 8% for the EU as a whole, and calls on member states to stick to their commitment to effect further reductions.

Farming and rural development

Liberal Democrats continue to insist on the need to reform the Common Agricultural Policy according to the threefold objectives of sustainable development (including public health and animal welfare), less public intervention and more decentralisation. We are also determined to preserve the discipline of the EU common policy in which the interests of producers and consumers, and of urban and rural life, can be balanced. The European single market for farming and fisheries must be preserved.

The reformed CAP must make food production more responsive to demand, thereby making a significant contribution to the liberalisation of world trade. At the same time, the European Union's policies should be rapidly developed to protect the rural way of life and to enhance the prudent management of the countryside.

The role of the Union

European Liberal Democrats emphasise the principle of subsidiarity, according to which decisions should be taken not only at the most effective level but also as close to the citizens as possible. In the economic field, this means that member states and their social partners have the primary role in combating unemployment and social exclusion. The European Union should focus on developing the macroeconomic conditions and the framework of the single market in which appropriate national measures can more fully realise their potential.

ELDR supports the role of Ecofin in developing an appropriate, balanced and coordinated economic policy. The European Central Bank, while retaining its independence of action in monetary policy, should be prepared to be much more transparent if it is to quickly establish credibility and public support. The Bank should be encouraged to enrich its dialogue with the Council, Commission and European Parliament.

The advent of the euro reinforces the position of the European Union as the strongest trading bloc in the world. The EU needs to learn how to speak with one voice on world trade issues, including financial services, intellectual property rights, and social and environment policy. The European Commission and European Central Bank must be entrusted with sufficient authority to negotiate on behalf of the Union as and when appropriate within international fora, such as G8, the WTO, IMF and World Bank.

Budgetary reform

ELDR recognises that the present system of financing the EU budget contains anomalies and inconsistencies. We are working towards a reformed budgetary system that is fair to all member states, progressive in its effects, and transparent and efficient in its implementation. European Liberal Democrats believe that all member states must accept their share of the financial cost of enlargement and of the evolution of EU common policies.

We affirm our support for the concentration of the social, regional and cohesion funds on those areas of the Union that really need them. We are in favour of the member states accepting a direct share of the costs of financing the CAP.

Modernising Democracy¹

European Liberal Democrats are firmly committed to the modernisation of democracy throughout a free and united Europe.

European citizens should participate more in their own governance. The European Liberal Democrats will work to develop the legitimacy and effectiveness of all the institutions of the European Union, but especially that of the European Parliament, which directly represents the citizen at the level of the Union, and that of the European Central Bank, which manages our common currency.

Empowering the European citizen

Liberal Democrats place a high value on the development of the concept of citizenship. A shared sense of community is the foundation for democracy. Civil liberty and a respect for civic society are at the heart of European culture. The European Union needs a political system that safeguards our liberties and defends these values.

For Liberal Democrats, the growing European affinity of the citizen is not a substitute for state or national identity but a supplement to it. European citizenship contributes to a greater awareness of living within a political community under the rule of law, and underpins the concept of freedom of movement within the Union.

We adhere strongly to the belief that government should be as decentralised as practicable. The participation of the citizen is strongest in the local community. European Liberal Democrats are committed to the revitalisation of local government and are working to galvanise the development of the regions.

Political parties are also important in encouraging citizens to take an active part in economic, political and social life. ELDR wishes to build further the role of the political parties at the European level.

A modern European society will be one in which political self-expression is enhanced, and in which men and women have true equality. Europe's system of governance must fully reflect the growing pluralism of society, the increasing autonomy of the citizen-elector and the rights of minorities to decent representation.

In Europe's information society, equality of access to high quality education and secure freedom of expression must be universal. European Liberal Democrats insist upon the full application of the principles of open government.

¹ Radikale Venstre respects the special arrangements for Denmark, signed at Edinburgh in December 1992.

ELDR would increase access of the EU citizen to the European Court of Justice, as well as reinforce the powers of the EU Ombudsman.

Civil rights and civil order

European Liberal Democrats applaud the consolidation of human rights in the Treaty of Amsterdam, and welcome the extension in principle and practice of non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. ELDR supports the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into EU law.

The European Union, its member states and citizens have a duty to respect and enhance civil rights. Special attention must be paid to the rights and opportunities of Europe's minorities. Non-EU citizens must enjoy the full protection of EU law. The future development of European citizenship must be motivated by the desire to spread the fruits of liberty and social justice worldwide.

A fair deal for immigrants

ELDR welcomes the European Union's commitment to develop a common immigration policy, without which freedom of movement of people within the Union will remain a pipe-dream.

We also insist that the treatment of refugees be improved. Member states should be obliged to share costs and responsibilities. Financial support for actions in support of refugees should take the form of an EU Refugee Fund.

EU asylum policy must not be developed to the detriment of those who are fleeing persecution. It must conform to the highest international standards.

Fighting crime

Misuse of the European Union's funds undermines its credibility. ELDR emphasises the role of the member states in spending and controlling expenditure from the EU budget. We want stronger action to prevent fraud, recover losses and punish offenders.

Organised international crime, particularly the trafficking of drugs and armaments and money laundering, poses a growing threat to the civil order of the European Union. Our democracy must be sufficiently robust to protect the citizen by tackling crime effectively through wholly legitimate means.

European Liberal Democrats support a methodical development of Europol, but insist that its officers adhere to the strictest codes of conduct and are subject to purposeful parliamentary scrutiny. There is a role in this for the European Parliament and member state parliaments, which must collaborate together to this end. The interface between national criminal jurisdictions should be developed so that the criminal is not advantaged by the lack of an integrated European legal order.

ELDR calls for the provisions of the Schengen Agreement to become fully integrated within the

European Union's proposed common area of freedom, security and justice. We regret that some Schengen signatories are still failing to fulfil their obligations.

Partnership for reform

The creation of Europe is essentially a political process. Many of the challenges of today cannot be met without strong and efficient institutions embodying common political will and solidarity. These are the preconditions for exercising political leadership.

The Treaty of Amsterdam develops significantly the way the European Union is governed. For the most part, ELDR welcomes the changes made, in particular the renewed emphasis on subsidiarity and openness, which should make the Union less fussy and bossy, and more attractive to the citizen.

We support a further shift away from intergovernmental ways of making decisions towards the full exploitation of the democratic and judicial procedures laid down in the Treaty. We will work at European, member state and regional level to enhance the representative capability of the Union and to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

Applying the Treaty of Amsterdam

European Liberal Democrats welcome the progress made at Amsterdam in extending the scope of qualified majority voting in the Council in single market matters. We commit ourselves to working for further progress in this direction and to other reforms of the institutions, without which enlargement may disable the Union.

ELDR believes that the Council needs stronger coordination, as well as the ability to speak with greater coherence and confidence. The Union needs stronger strategic leadership from the European Council of heads of government, as well as better day-to-day executive management by the European Commission. ELDR calls for a reduction in the number of Commissioners and enhanced powers for the president. Our MEPs will insist on gender balance within the new Commission.

The European Parliament must have full powers of co-decision whenever the Council acts by qualified majority vote. Formal unanimity in the Council should be retained for specifically enumerated constitutional issues, such as enlargement and Treaty amendment. The Parliament should have the right of assent over Treaty amendment, as it already has over enlargement.

We would widen the scope of the Parliament's budgetary control to cover all expenditure, and give it the right of assent over all legislation concerning police and judicial matters. MEPs should work in much closer partnership with member state parliaments, especially in the fields of interior policy and foreign affairs where the EU institutions and member state governments should be held jointly to account.

To assist efficiency, transparency and comprehension, we would codify EU law by type and status, and grant full legal competence to the Union. We would extend the scope of the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice to all matters directly concerning the citizen, such as Europol.

Our goal remains a constitutional settlement of the Union, including a Bill of Rights, in which powers are distributed rationally between the Union, its member states and their regions, the Council and Parliament are equal legislative partners, and citizens know how they are governed, by whom and from where.

In order to be ready for the accession of the new member states, it is essential for the Union to make progress towards these objectives now.

Preparing for enlargement

European Liberal Democrats are committed to building the security and prosperity of all Europe. Enlargement of the Union is a moral imperative, political necessity and economic opportunity.

We are convinced that EU enlargement will make a major contribution to peace and stability. All countries which are able and willing to fulfil the conditions of EU membership will be welcome to join. We applaud the advances made by most Central and East European countries in developing pluralistic democracy, functional market economies and practical social justice. We urge the Commission to do its utmost to maximise the number of countries involved in the first phase of enlargement, thus encouraging the process of structural reform within the candidate countries.

But enlargement must be well prepared by all parties. The Union must reform its institutions to be ready for new members, and the acceding states must become fully engaged in the building of a more united, liberal and democratic Europe. A new Intergovernmental Conference to revise the Treaties must soon be held. It should be informed by the twin principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, so that the Union can act more forcefully where it matters and less intrusively where appropriate.

Simultaneously with the on-going enlargement process, the Union should develop a wider, pan-European cooperation. In this respect, it is essential to take into account the important Northern dimension as well as the challenge of deepening cooperation in the Mediterranean.

We will only succeed in building Europe together if we understand the need to modernise our democracy and reinforce the popular legitimacy of the institutions of the European Union.

Security through Participation

European Liberal Democrats believe that the European Union has a duty to project worldwide the principles of freedom, security and justice. We want the Union to invest in Europe's own security by developing a common foreign and security policy based on these values, including eventually common defence.

Europe must be determined to act wherever the rule of law is ignored, human rights are violated and peace is endangered.

European Liberal Democrats welcome the inclusion of peace-keeping and peace-making missions in the Treaty of Amsterdam. We wish to see the new joint planning and diplomatic machinery in Brussels become capable of proposing policy initiatives to the member states.

These reforms should encourage all member states to actively participate in the development of a common foreign and security policy for Europe according to their individual capacities. But an enhanced level of solidarity is necessary. Individual countries should not veto joint activities of the Union; but they should not be obliged to participate when clearly identified, vital national interests would be compromised.

Improved political conditions and neighbourly relations in Central Europe have not been extended southwards or eastwards. Nor have ethnic and religious conflicts been expelled from our continent. ELDR believes that in the last resort the Union must back its many declarations about Kosovo with the use of force, and in any event must build a special partnership with that troubled region.

The European Union still has to learn to speak with one voice and to act swiftly and effectively when its shared foreign and security interests are at stake. ELDR deplores the delay in establishing clear lines of responsibility at the EU level for foreign and security policy.

Europe's future defence

For collective defence, Nato remains the indispensable bond that links the USA to European security interests. European Liberal Democrats continue to attach great importance to the maintenance of good transatlantic relations.

European Liberal Democrats are working to assert a stronger European security and defence identity, possibly involving the incorporation of WEU within the European Union.

We wish to give more substance to the notion of security through participation. Already, both Nato and WEU are deepening their collaboration with the prospective new member states of the European Union. We welcome the fact that WEU now has the capability to carry out peace support operations with the help of Nato resources. European Liberal Democrats remain committed to enlarging Nato as long as enlargement serves the building of peace and stability. We would welcome the reintegration of French military forces within Nato.

We call on member states to continue to promote disarmament in Europe and support the new code of conduct in arms procurement. They should cooperate within Nato to prevent the further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The European Union should give more prominence to its relations with Russia and the Ukraine by encouraging those countries to make full use of the opportunities that exist for a more wide-ranging dialogue, while, at the same time, denying them a veto on the development of a European security and defence identity.

The OSCE is performing an important function in setting norms for the conduct of relations

between states and in crisis prevention. The European Union should nurture the capabilities of OSCE for preventive diplomacy, the protection of human rights and the strengthening of European civil society.

Global security

While stability within Europe must have priority, the European Liberal Democrats will support the assumption by the European Union of security responsibilities elsewhere in the world under the auspices of the UN.

We urge France and the United Kingdom, as Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, to coordinate their positions with their EU partners. The EU should make the reform of the UN a major objective of its developing common foreign and security policy. The UN Security Council should be transformed into an effective instrument for promoting international peace and security.

We call on all member states to ratify the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel mines and to increase their contribution to landmine clearance worldwide.

ELDR welcomes the decision to establish an International Criminal Court and urges all EU member states and applicant countries to give effect to the decision.

Worldwide responsibilities

Europe has a key role to play in conserving the environment of our planet for future generations, in relieving world poverty, and in advancing human rights. The Union should take the lead in developing a global community for sustainable development by deepening its engagement with pluralist democracies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The International Court in The Hague should become responsible for international disputes on environmental problems.

The EU must maintain a leading position in all international fora with respect to women's rights and equal opportunities.

The Union's humanitarian and commercial contribution towards the least developed countries must continually be enhanced. ELDR urges member states to better coordinate their overseas development policies, to increase their development aid to at least 0.7% of GNP, and to encourage good governance and private investment in developing countries.

The single currency brings the European Union increased responsibilities and opportunities. The Union must therefore take the lead in developing a more balanced international monetary system, with stable exchange rates and an open capital market.

The Party of European Liberal Democrats and Reformists will strive to implement and develop this programme. The elections of 10-13 June 1999 are an important turning point for European liberal democracy. With strong representation in the European Parliament we will be able to make the difference in building a Europe united in freedom.