

Unity in Freedom: the Liberal Challenge for Europe

Edited Manifesto of the ELDR Party for the European Elections in June 1999, approved in Berlin on 29 April 1999

The twentieth century has seen Europe at war with itself and Europe coming together in unity. Liberalism, at one time imperilled, proved defiant 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.

The barbarian behaviour of the Milosevic regime in Kosovo is a stark reminder of how liberal democracy needs to be fought for continually and how much more has to be achieved before a true European citizenship can flourish across our continent. The European liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) affirms its wholehearted support for the transatlantic partnership. We back the Nato campaign in Yugoslavia, and will support all necessary military action to defend the Kosovan Albanians from ethnic cleansing and to ensure the safe return and continued protection of the refugees.

ELDR is firmly resolved on the further deepening, reinforcement 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, accountable and more open European Union which is empowered to take decisions where only a Union-level action can lead to effective results, but is committed to decentralisation on other issues. We will insist upon a European Union that is free from waste, fraud and mismanagement, and where parliamentary accountability is enforced.

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 human rights, 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 Reform commends this programme and calls on all those who fight for liberty, security and justice to support our cause.

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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.

European Liberal Democrats have long been in the forefront of the campaign against fraud, corruption and mismanagement within the European institutions. They have played a decisive role in promoting the principle of political accountability of individual Commissioners.

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 intrusive bureaucracy. They continue to battle against fraud and maladministration in the EU institutions, not least in the Parliament itself.

Modernising Democracy

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

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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 political parties at the European level, and to introduce a system of transnational electoral lists of the European political parties. ELDR highly values electoral systems based on the principle of proportional representation and demands that a European election law is designed along this principle.

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-elect 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 European citizens must be directly informed by the European Union in the languages of the respective member state.

ELDR would increase access of the EU citizen to the European Court of Justice, as well as reinforce the powers of the 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 and the European Convention for the Protection of Minorities into EU law.

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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 across the European Union, 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. ELDR urges that EU asylum policy distinguish political refugees from economic migrants. Political refugees deserve a fair asylum procedure, based on common criteria, in all member states of the European Union. This should lead to a more balanced distribution of asylum seekers between member states, Requests for political asylum should be dealt with by the EU country the applicant enters first.

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 in people, 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.

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Coordination between ministers and judicial authorities in the different EU member states should be better developed to serve this purpose.

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. The European Union also needs a strong Commission. Every member state should have the right to nominate one Commissioner. The President of the Commission should be entitled, in consultation with the European Parliament, to define the necessary portfolios.

ELDR will continue to fight vigorously for efficient, democratic and transparent institutions at the European level. The Commission must fully cooperate with the European Parliament and independent committees in

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all allegations of fraud, corruption and mismanagement. Our MEPs will seek a better gender balance within the new Commission. ELDR will insist that Commissioners are individually and collectively accountable to the Parliament.

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 the financing system, 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 EU 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 constitution 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 this constitution the democratic legitimacy of the European Union will be guaranteed.

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

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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.

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 value 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 fair competition and social justice, the liberalisation of trade, and environmental and consumer 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

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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 and defence 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 prevent harmful tax-breaks that penalise other member states. By enhancing competition and choice, especially across national boundaries, 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.

Investments in an adequate technological infrastructure, the use of information technology in education and high-quality research into information and communication technology are essential to build up Europe's competitive position in the knowledge-intensive world market. Electronic commerce is an important means of promoting new jobs.

The development of the information society lies at the heart of the economic dynamism we strive for. European regulation should provide a level playing field with as little government intervention as possible, but enough to guarantee universal access, freedom of information and protection of privacy.

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.

However, national responsibility of governments and social partners for employment must not be shifted to the European Union. Rigid labour markets, excessive taxation and social charges will undermine market forces, lead to less efficient production, harm investment and create even more unemployment. The prime responsibility of the EU to create new jobs lies in the improvement of European macroeconomic conditions: completion of the single market, reduction of trade barriers, encouragement of a new culture of entrepreneurship in Europe and the intensifying of the exchange of best practice for employment strategies between member states.

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

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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. Special attention should be given to the employability of women. 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 would allow enterprises to integrate their structures and adapt to transnational activities.

The dynamic effects of the introduction of the single currency must be used to lower unemployment. Effective policy coordination at the EU level is needed to balance the use of 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 innovation in the field of social policy, such as the greater integration of the tax and social security systems. Although there will not be one single European social model, or one way to finance social welfare to suit all countries and circumstances, it would be helpful to share best practice more closely across the EU about balancing 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

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from jobs and incomes towards, for example, consumption, pollution and resource depletion. This will help employment.

ELDR believes that the member states and the European Union should cooperate to ensure a high level of health protection. Health considerations should be taken into account in all EU policy areas.

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 oppose economic activity that damages 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.

Common environmental policy is therefore essential to integrate and effectively tackle the crucial environmental issues that cross national boundaries, such as air and water quality, greenhouse gases, nuclear safety, and waste disposal. The ecological state of our European seas, especially the Mediterranean and the Baltic, gives rise to special concern. 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 honour their commitment to effect further reductions.

Farming and rural development

Liberal Democrats continue to insist on the need to reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 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

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the interests of producers and consumers, and of urban and rural life, can be balanced.

Liberal Democrats are disappointed by the outcome of the recent Agenda 2000 negotiations in respect of the CAP. We deplore in particular that the reduction in cereal prices will still not make EU wheat competitive on world markets and that reform of the dairy sector has once again been put off. We fear that the conclusions of Agenda 2000 have neither enhanced the prospects of EU enlargement nor strengthened the Union's negotiating position in the Millennium Round of the World Trade Organisation.

CAP reform must lead to market-oriented, competitive and sustainable farming within the EU. Agricultural expenditure and excessive bureaucracy and regulation must be reduced. A liberal approach to agricultural policy is aimed at reducing intervention in the market and creating alternative employment opportunities in rural areas, for example in tourism and services.

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 enhance the rural way of life, including family farms, and the prudent management of the countryside. The demand for clean and high quality food should lead the development of agricultural policy in the EU. The CAP should emphasize the necessity for stricter ecological conditions for rural and agricultural subsidies. ELDR will ensure that animal welfare considerations are taken into account in all appropriate policy areas.

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.

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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. ELDR will press for a thorough reform of the EU's own resources system for 2006 in which the principles of fairness, transparency and progressivity are given clear expression. 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. Programmes should favour local initiatives and good governance, strengthen institutions and stimulate sustainable development. We are in favour of the member states accepting a direct share of the costs of financing the CAP.

Security through Participation

European Liberal Democrats believe that the European Union has a duty to project worldwide the principles of freedom, democracy, 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. The Union should above all direct its defence policy into strengthening its capacity in crisis management and peace-keeping.

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

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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 members of the Union are right to back their 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 in partnership with Nato should develop a special form of long-term security association with Albania and Macedonia.

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, 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

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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 land mine 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. Environmental and social concerns should be taken more into account in revisions of WTO and TRIPS agreements; this should not be an excuse for protectionism. 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

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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.

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.

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