

Priorities for Europe

3 October 2002

The Party of European Socialists in the
Convention on the Future of Europe

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A third of the Convention's members are from the Party of European Socialists. They represent the EU and countries seeking EU membership. This document – published as detailed work begins on recommendations for a new EU treaty – sets out their vision of a Europe with a strong social dimension and enhanced democracy.

Further papers examining aspects of the debate on Europe's future in greater detail will be published as the work of the Convention proceeds. A final position paper will be published before the Convention concludes its work in June 2003.

Making the European Union work for everyone

We want to build a European democracy underpinned by our shared values as Europeans. These values are proclaimed in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights; they are given substance in the European model of society that balances competition and solidarity; and they are founded on the principles of equality and respect for minorities.

The creation of a more democratic, open and efficient European Union means we must reform existing EU structures. Reform must be accompanied by strenuous efforts to promote public understanding of the EU and the benefits it brings. We must encourage people to engage in politics – and we must deliver what people want.

Europe must not be an obscure project for technocrats and political élites: it should involve everyone who lives in the Union, whatever their position in life. Europe's horizons must stretch beyond purely economic issues: its policy ambitions must not be blown about by the winds of the free market.

Enhanced democracy at EU level will reinforce local, regional and national democracy.

At all levels, socialist and social democrat members of the Convention on the Future of Europe envisage communities stimulated by competition, but tressed by cooperation and united by solidarity.

Reform of the EU institutions

People are confused by the way EU affairs are organised. We have four treaties that set out more than a thousand articles as well as many protocols – and we have two legal entities, the European Community and the European Union.

To dispel confusion and the perception that Europe is not open enough, we must simplify and re-organise the treaties.

We need two texts. The first will set out the basic principles of the Union and its constitution. The second will set out policy detail.

The European Constitution will define the character of the Union including its aims and missions, its powers and institutions and the rights of its citizens. The Constitution will also determine relations between the Union and its member states as well as with neighbouring countries: it will provide for the financing of the Union and set out a procedure for constitutional amendment.

The Constitution must incorporate the Charter of Fundamental Rights. This will give the people a firm guarantee of the Union's respect for their rights at EU level. It will also sum up the social principles and values that should inspire the Union's activities. Inclusion of the Charter will give citizens extra rights without extending EU powers.

The division of policy into three so-called "pillars" is another feature of the EU that confuses people in the world at large. These "pillars" must be removed when we turn the Union into a single legal body.

We want to promote greater integration of EU countries and we seek a single institutional framework for the EU. But we will preserve Europe's unique way of exercising power – sometimes at EU level and on other occasions as the result of cooperation between governments. In such a scheme, different policy areas will require different methods of work and we will need specific arrangements for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The reformed Union should retain the main treaty clauses on its relations with member states – for instance those that allow countries to develop certain policy areas faster than the Union as a whole. This provision, known as "enhanced cooperation", could be extended to a democratically controlled Common Foreign and Security Policy. Another measure that should be retained – as set down in the Nice Treaty – is the procedure for dealing with violation of democratic principles.

The specific character of the Union's most distant regions, such as the Azores, the Canaries and the French overseas departments, must be protected in the European Constitution.

It would be wise to create a new status for countries that are neighbours of the EU but that do not seek EU membership. This would allow us to develop stronger political, economic and cultural links with them.

A number of changes must flow from this new institutional framework if it is to reflect our values and aspirations.

Updating and enriching the aims of the Union

Four broad areas summarise our ambitions to update and enrich the Union's aims:

- PROMOTION of human development;
- DEVELOPMENT of Europe's cultural wealth;
- SAFEGUARDING rights and freedoms; and
- ASSERTION of Europe's identity in the world.

The promotion of human development should be based on sustainable growth, full employment and a high level of social protection in a social market economy. This aim for the Union must stress equality between men and women: it must embrace the promotion of public services, protection of the environment and respect for the rights of future generations. The Constitution should cover youth and education policy. An important feature of the Union's promotion of human development will be solidarity between its peoples, between its member states and between its regions.

The wealth and diversity of cultures in Europe must be protected whilst we develop shared values and responsibilities. The contribution of cultural, social and religious groups will be of crucial importance in achieving this aim.

Our third aim for the Union is to make it an area of freedom and personal safety endowed with a system of justice that guarantees respect for individual rights and freedoms.

At world level, the Union must assert its identity and pursue the security of European citizens in an international order based on:

- respect for the UN Charter;
- peace and democracy;
- respect for fundamental human rights;
- protection of children's rights;
- equality between men and women;
- rights to a healthy environment;
- eradication of poverty and the exclusion of people from a normal life in society; and
- promotion of fair competition on global markets.

Promoting Basic Principles

The Union must not be a centralised bureaucracy that issues heavy-handed edicts. Decisions should instead be taken at the most appropriate level of government. Whenever possible this should give the greatest chance of engaging people in decisions that affect their lives – and European legislation, when needed, should have as light a touch as possible.

These principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are political. National parliaments need to see that they are respected before EU legislation is enacted. The parliaments should do so primarily in their role of supervising the actions of their governments in the Council.

The European Court of Justice must enforce respect for these principles.

Encouraging as many people as possible to play a part in decision-making – the principle of participatory democracy – will lead the Union to recognise the key role of European political parties in forming and representing public opinion. At the same time, citizens and organisations that represent particular interest groups should have the opportunity to contribute their ideas on every area of EU action. We need to find ways in which such views can be put forward. The role of trade unions and employer organisations should be strengthened and civil society should be granted a right to be consulted on legislation.

A Better Way to Share Power

It would be a mistake to draw up a hard and fast list of responsibilities for EU member states. What really matters is to define the scope and scale of EU authority in areas where it is needed so that member states can pursue their common aims. We want to promote and develop the Community method of decision-making in which EU institutions share responsibility.

The new text should therefore say clearly what the Union's exclusive responsibilities are – and it should spell out those areas in which the Union shares responsibility with member states. In the remaining areas, which fall under the responsibility of member states, the European Union can give support through promotion and coordination of national policies.

The Union should be able to act forcefully as a political unit when it needs to – but it should also avoid imposing needless conformity. Therefore:

- We want Europe to be a strong and active world power. It should take its responsibilities in facing the challenges of globalisation. In foreign and security policy, vetoes should be limited to the adoption of new European strategies or actions. Once agreement is reached, member states may act only under the authority and within the limits set by the European Council.

Conflict prevention needs special attention and we must develop our security and defence policy in order to carry out peacekeeping duties – the so-called "Petersberg tasks" – equipping ourselves with an operational armed force. In security and defence policy, the European Parliament and national parliaments must have greater power of scrutiny. The Union should also have a seat in any international body whose activities relate to areas in which the EU has authority. Such a provision will not impinge on the rights of member states to be

represented themselves in such international organisations where their own competencies are involved.

- The notion of the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice must be brought into line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Policy should mainly be set out in framework legislation. This will allow national and regional authorities to define the detail of legislation in a way that best responds to local needs. At the same time, the Union must remain able to adopt EU-wide legislation when it needs to apply standard rules in all member states.
- There must be a strong link between economic and social co-ordination. This will allow us to use the economic potential of the Union in order to have jobs for everyone and to ensure that people in all regions of the Union enjoy the same high quality of life. We must set economic and social priorities for the Union as a whole, with targets for economic, employment, social and environment policy that member states are committed to achieve.
- When the Union's power is limited to the production of framework legislation, the European Court of Justice should have the power to adjudicate on challenges to the Union if it has exceeded its powers.
- The Union is the world's largest geographical area for the free trade of goods and services. The smooth operation of this market is essential. If at some point safeguards were needed – but bringing national rules into line with one another would conflict with the principle of subsidiarity referred to above – provisions should be limited to measures allowed by the treaties to eliminate market distortions.

Making the Union more open

Europe must change the way in which it passes laws – and to begin with it should use the word “laws” instead of confusing jargon such as “regulations” and “directives”.

The European Commission must continue to have the sole right to propose new laws and the European Parliament must have a full say in legislation through a single, clear, legislative procedure. The EU must create a single new Council for Legislative Affairs to replace the 16 different Councils of Ministers that currently sit with representatives of the European Parliament to en-

act laws.

A streamlined Council will meet in specialist groups to coordinate policy on foreign affairs, economic issues, justice and home affairs, social and employment policy. Ministers for Europe, meeting in the General Affairs Council, will prepare EU summits.

Decisions on the EU's budget should be taken in the same way as decisions on legislation with finance ministers making proposals to the Council for Legislative Affairs. We need to get rid of the confusing distinction between “compulsory” and “non-compulsory” spending – the first essentially being EU farm policy funding, in which the European Parliament has limited authority, and the second covering everything else for which taxpayers' money is used.

Agreements between institutions on budget matters should be retained, as should the framework to keep spending under control – the so-called “financial perspective”.

The European Commission should be in charge of any follow-up legislation that is needed as well as enforcement and co-ordination.

The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers should have the right to overturn Commission measures to implement decisions. Specifically, they should have the right to call back any measures that they oppose by a special majority.

When other non-legislative acts are involved, the European Parliament would have political authority over Commission actions – and in specified cases it would have the right to call back and, if necessary, over-rule the Commission.

Under this simpler structure for EU institutions, summits of the Heads of State or Government – the European Council – would define the Union's strategic priorities and would take a specific, wider role in foreign, security and defence policies.

The European judiciary will guarantee full respect for European law by the member states and the European institutions. It will also guarantee that all European citizens enjoy the respect, defence and development of their rights provided for by the treaties.

Openness and public access to documents will ensure accountability and effective decision-making.

Making the institutions more effective

The roundabout that sees EU countries hand over the Presidency of the Council from one to another every six months must stop. It obstructs policy continuity in the Council. Equality between member states

and a balance between institutions must accompany measures to safeguard the Council Presidency's policy continuity.

Vetoes should apply only to legislation that has a constitutional impact. All other legislation should be decided on by qualified majority voting, with a double majority, first of member states and second of the population across the EU as a whole. This is both the fairest and the most easily understood way of reaching decisions at EU level.

Europeans need to speak with one voice on the international stage. So we should put an end to the confusing duplication of tasks between the Council's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Commission's designation of a member in charge of foreign policy. A new European spokesperson on foreign policy would ultimately answer to the European Council.

The democratic legitimacy of the European Commission should be strengthened by having its President elected by a defined majority of members of the European Parliament.

The Commission President should have the right both to allocate and re-allocate policy responsibilities for Commissioners, so that they are as competent and representative a group as possible.

Making the institutions more democratic

The European Parliament's advice and, whenever appropriate, approval, must be given for all appointments of constitutional importance including nomination of judges at the Court of Justice, the EU Spokesperson on Foreign Policy and board members of the Central Bank. These provisions should also apply to international agreements.

The European Parliament must exercise control over new European activities concerning justice and home affairs policy.

EU institutions as a whole must apply the principle of gender balance when they make appointments.

National parliaments must have a stronger role, especially in checking on compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, without creating new institutions. Closer cooperation with the European Parliament is needed in various aspects of Union policy. In this way, we will improve democratic control mechanisms.

The important role of the regions and local governments must be supported. Their authority should

be better safeguarded and the Union should be open to proposals that involve them more closely in drawing up EU rules and putting them into effect on the ground.

Finally, a more democratic Europe requires the European Parliament, national parliaments and Europe's citizens to have a role in future amendments of the new Constitutional Treaty.

The PES Members of the Convention

With 34 full Members, 20 substitutes and three observers the socialists and social democrats make up one third of the European Convention's membership. They therefore have a special responsibility for ensuring that the European Convention is a success.

A coordination team led by PES Vice President and Vice Chairman of the Convention Giuliano Amato was set up to facilitate cooperation.

The PES caucus is made up of:
the national parliaments of the EU (20)
the European Parliament (10)
the national parliaments of the candidate countries (10)
EU governments (seven)
governments of the candidate countries (four)
the Committee of the Regions (two)
the Economic and Social Committee (one)
the European social partners (two) and
the European Commission (one)

Apart from their monthly meetings, PES Convention members held a seminar in Birmingham on 30 and 31 August 2002 to discuss the outline of their first policy paper. The presentation of the paper on 3 October is a first step in a process of defining a social democratic approach to the Future of Europe debate, which will come to a conclusion towards the end of the Convention in 2003.

Afterwards, the Party of European Socialists will continue to coordinate PES governments, members of parliament and party spokespersons in the run-up to and during the 2003-2004 intergovernmental conference that is intended to produce a new European Treaty.