

Draft Declaration

on the occasion of the inauguration of the “European Conference” and the launch of the accession process leading to an enlargement of the European Union

PES Party and Government Leaders

London, 11 March 1998

On 11 March 1998, on the eve of the "European Conference", the Socialist and Social Democratic Party and Government Leaders of those European countries involved in the enlargement process of the European Union, met in London. At this moment of historical importance the representatives of Europe's biggest political family endorsed the enlargement process decided upon by the European Council in Luxembourg in November 1997.

Enlargement of the European Union is both a political necessity and a historic opportunity for Europe. The process of widening the Union is closely linked with the future of major EU policies. The PES parties and governments want more than "a European free trade zone"; a European Union is needed which is able and willing to act on behalf of its citizens. They stress their determination to link the enlargement process to the promotion of employment and growth, economic and social cohesion, environmental protection and peace and security across Europe.

Closer cooperation between the countries of Europe by definition means fighting nationalism and intolerance as well as promoting the development of democracy all over Europe. The enlargement of the European Union will strengthen the young democracies in Central and Eastern Europe in their development as open and pluralistic societies.

European Socialists and Social Democrats stress the need for an open discussion on the basis of clear information and a fair assessment of the consequences of EU Enlargement for the applicant countries as well as the existing Member States. Both political determination and public support will be needed to remove the obstacles on the way to a wider Union. A balanced enlargement process will at the end of the day bring benefits to all European citizens.

To further that objective the Party of European Socialists will undertake a series of activities. Firstly, Party Leaders from all those countries taking part in the enlargement process will meet annually to take stock of the state of progress. Secondly, the PES Working Party on Enlargement will bring together the 35 European Socialist and Social Democratic parties to discuss the practical steps needed to encourage progress towards enlargement. Thirdly, high-level PES delegations will, as from now, begin a series of study visits to those applicants states entering into the negotiation process.