

ΕΡΩΤΗΣΕΙΣ

We either make ourselves miserable,
or we make ourselves strong.
The amount of work is the same.
Carlos Castaneda

For the record
The Policies of the Parliamentary Group of the PES
and the 2004 European elections
Contents and Substance

1. Introduction

During the coming period a number of events is taking place which are of crucial importance; not only for the development of the European Union, but also for the member states and their citizens in relation to the Union. Both the accession of ten new member states and the decision on a constitution for the Union will have a major impact on the future of Europe and its citizens. But the same is true for the active implementation of the Lisbon process, for the attempts to further liberalise basic public services, for the efforts to enhance consumer protection and other decisions that may have a major impact on the daily life of the European citizens.

The European Social Democrats can therefore not accept on forehand that during the campaign for these European elections, our activities in the European Parliament are just a side-track off the main national campaigns. Also our positive European record is at stake.

It is now the time to swim against the main current of European neo-laissez-faire. It is also time to fight against the distrust towards joint, European solutions for our joint concerns. We must ask ourselves what we can contribute in European substance to the 'national' European election campaigns? Which are the links between our national and European priorities, seen from the perspective of our work in the European Parliament? Call it the parliamentary framework of the new PES Election Manifesto.

The contents of our policies must get more attention. Because the public will ask us more and more who are those European Social Democrats and what do they stand for. It is therefore necessary to give clearer shape to what we stand for together as European Social Democrats.

2. Eurosceptis

Very few people are nowadays longing for a return to a nationalist past where you could only depend on your own country and where you had to be afraid of the neighbouring countries. All our citizens, and in particular the younger ones, are used to be part of a larger Europe.

But people are sceptic about the possible role of the European institutions and their influence on their daily lives. Right wing politicians and their media are reinforcing this scepticism and are bringing fear to the people for the so-called threats coming from the European Union. They continuously warn against the waste of money by the European institutions; they warn against the "ridiculous regulations coming from Brussels" on minimum standards for safety at the work place, on working time and on product safety; they warn against the catastrophic consequences of enlargement.

Of course our response is that we are different; that we have a positive agenda for Europe and that we are willing and capable to solve the problems which are of great concern to the people. We are

convinced that a more active, more united European approach is necessary to safeguard employment and to create more jobs, to take care of a cleaner environment, to secure stability in Europe and to present a counter balance against the unilateralist tendencies in the world. We want less Europe where appropriate and more Europe when necessary.

But at the same time we should send out a strong message that we understand and share the scepticism about a Europe which has no other ambition than creating a single, liberalised market with one currency. We must make clear that such a neo-liberal/conservative European Union, which only cares about the interests of the big companies and the profit-makers and not about the working people, is not our Europe. We must make clear that we refuse to accept the concept of Europe of Berlusconi, Bolkenstein and Poettering and that we want the Europe of Schroeder, Diamantopoulou and Baron.

3. The electoral context

Although serious attempts have been made in the past to turn the elections for the European Parliament into truly European elections, they have remained to a large extent an addition of 25 national elections with national candidates for one European institution.

The situation will not be much different in 2004. In most countries these elections will be considered as a mid-term poll on the popularity of the people and the party in power. This will certainly be the case in most of the larger EU member states, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain and - to a lesser extent - France. Specific European issues will therefore have only little chance to come to the forefront of public interest.

At the same time, it must be feared that when the media will be paying attention to European issues, they will again be more interested in the negative aspects of European integration. There is a great risk, that only the "scandals" (Eurostat, Members' salaries and allowances, the absence of a decision on a European constitution, etc) will make it to the front page of the newspapers.

Because there is no government to be won and no "real" power at stake, the political parties have great difficulty to fully concentrate on these elections. Also for them the European Parliament and the European Union's political issues are sometimes far away from their political reality. Also for them those "European issues" are sometimes difficult to explain to the people. And during the campaign for the European elections, the political life in the capitals goes on as always and continues to be in the centre of attention.

This inevitably means that the election campaigns will be dominated by national issues and sentiments. The efforts and in particular the investments in a real European election campaign will be much lower than would be the case for elections for the national parliament and even for local elections.

It is no wonder, that voter turn-out reflects in most cases the importance which is generally given to the European elections. Why bother to vote for Members of a very far away, scandal-ridden institution, when these elections are not really important anyway.

4. Limits to the European election campaign

It should be noted at the same time, that it is very difficult to conduct a real European election campaign. The European Parliament's financial rules do not allow the Group to organise or to actively take part in an election campaign - even on the European level.

It is not possible to launch a European campaign which can replace in any way the election activities on a national level. The campaign strategies, the specific national issues and the political circumstances do differ so much from country to country, that such an all-European campaign is not even wanted.

5. The PES Group's record

However, the achievements and commitments of the PES and its parliamentary Group with regard to those issues which are truly of importance to Europe's citizens, do merit to be given more specific attention. Over the past years the Group has been most successful on those issues where it was able to present a clear, united position. And only from a position of strength and unity, it was possible to convince others (other Groups, Commission, Council, etc.) and to win their support for our objectives and projects. For a future Group with representatives from 25 countries it will be even more necessary to concentrate on seeking and strengthening the unity of the Group when presenting our commitments for the future.

With a view to a presentation of the Social Democratic ideas and achievements at a joint European level, it is therefore absolutely essential all those engaged in the election campaign are aware of the strong points of the PES Group in their approach to a number of policy issues.

6. United we stand

When it is noted that unity creates strength, one of the natural weaknesses of European politics comes automatically to the surface. There are virtually no subjects on which all European socialists and social democrats between Palermo and Helsinki do fully and for 100% agree. Some differences have their origins in the history and geography of a country and its people; other differences are determined by the fact if a national or regional socialist or social democratic party is in government or not; and - on a European, like on a national level - people and socialist and social democratic politicians do from time to time simply differ about the best ways to achieve their objectives. The continuing discussion is, however, also a demonstration of strength of a pluralistic movement for which we should not be ashamed at all. Therefore this natural weakness must not only be accepted as a fact of European political life, but can also be translated as an element of strength.

More important are the many points on which we agree. We believe in a Europe of peace and stability, we want to make Europe a civic superpower. Although we defend the principle of a free market economy, we are at the same time convinced that strict rules are necessary to make that market function, to give everybody a fair place in our economic system and a fair share of the wealth generated in our economies. We know that the public authorities have a great responsibility in providing services which the market can not deliver or can deliver only in a discriminating way by not offering equal access at a reasonable price.

We aim to take the problems and concerns of our citizens seriously and to respond to the expectations of the many. We do not want to create a European Union that just creates profits for the few. Our aim is not to get a majority to be in power, but to obtain the power to benefit the majority of the people.

7. The selection

When selecting our issues, we should adopt the following criteria:

- We should concentrate on issues which belong to our core business, where our commitment is clear. These are the issues which are considered to be part of our ideological wealth and on which people are prepared to give us their confidence,
- We should concentrate on those matters where we and our political position can be clearly distinguished from our opponents; in this context it must be emphasised that our main opponents are the European conservatives which are in the European Parliament mainly represented in the EPP/ED Group,
- We should concentrate on issues where we have been more effective in bringing them to the forefront of political attention, and
- We need issues which can be translated in a clear, understandable message.

The best campaign items are of course those where all above-mentioned criteria are met. These issues give body to European Socialism and Social Democracy. With our actions in the past it is possible to substantiate our record on these issues.

8. The issues

On the basis of our record in the European Parliament, but also in view of the position of the socialist and social-democratic parties in the member states, the following points of strength can be identified, which are fulfilling those criteria:

1) European Socialists and Social Democrats fight for the maintaining and creation of jobs;

We support the Economic and Monetary Union and the one single market, but we believe that an active policy for the creation and maintaining of jobs must be an equal part of that Economic Union.

We also believe that the stability pact must be an integral part of the of the Monetary Union and insist that the rules of this agreement will be strictly maintained; at the same time we call for a certain degree of flexibility to the pact's rigid rules to permit for supplementary investment in infrastructure, education and research to create future high quality employment.

We emphasise the importance of a growth initiative for Europe based on an intelligent rethink of the Stability Pact and on investment, for example in European Transport Networks (TENs).

We keep insisting on a full implementation of a European policy to achieve the so-called Lisbon objectives.

We insist on the creation of quality jobs for both men and women as part of a European strategy for economic growth, where the right mainly wants to discuss about ways to reduce the cost of labour to make Europe more competitive.

We believe that the European Union should not only take care of the interests of the big companies, but also and in particular of the people working in these companies; we therefore want that, in the case of mergers between such companies, a thorough analysis of the possible social and employment repercussions; we also want to ensure with regard to the proposed directive on take-overs, that before any proposed merger or take-over goes ahead, workers are provided with sufficient information and consultation opportunities; our proposals were defeated by a conservative majority;

On many occasions we asked for European measures to stop the closure of important industries and the relocation of companies to cheap labour countries; in most cases the right even refused to discuss these issues in the European Parliament.

We have been fighting to include the Social Policy as a basic element of the proposed European Constitution.

2) European Socialists and Social Democrats are proud of the European social model;

We do care about the maintenance of our social security systems and have the courage to reform these systems according to today's needs.

We fight for the limitation of working time as one of the key factors in improving working conditions for all ordinary Europeans - we refuse to accept any national exceptions ("opt outs") to allow people to work more than 48 hours on a regular basis in order to create more "flexibility on the labour market" as the conservatives want it.

We also keep emphasising that jobs for all must be a priority but that these jobs should be quality jobs – based on the best possible terms and conditions - is equally important; and of course equality between women and men in the workplace is for us self-evident - we do not believe, like the right wing in the Parliament that the market will take care of that.

We have called for an end to the unjustifiable discrimination of temporary workers with regard to working conditions and pay in order to create a positive balance between flexibility and security - the European Parliament supported us, although the conservatives voted against.

3) European Socialists and Social Democrats give priority to the education of young people and are prepared to invest in the future;

Our proposals on the need for a more flexible interpretation of the Stability and Growth pact and for new growth indicators, taking account for increased investment in life-long learning were defeated by a conservative alliance in the European Parliament.

4) European Socialists and Social Democrats have the courage to modernise our economies but are at the same time aware that the quality of some basic services must be maintained;

We have been successfully fighting against the proposals of Commissioner Bolkenstein, supported by the conservatives in the European Parliament, which would have made it impossible for local and regional authorities to keep the organisation of essential public services, such as the distribution of water and electricity and the organisation of public transport in their own hand; we believe that access to good quality services of general interest for all must be guaranteed.

In the same spirit we supported proposals to open the gas and electricity markets to greater competition, but under the conditions of strengthening the public service and the environmental obligations in this field, of a clear role for national regulatory bodies and of more information for consumers.

We also successfully fought Conservative backed proposals for the liberalisation of port services which would have led - when accepted - to an effective privatisation of the pilots service and would have given ship owners the opportunity to use their own unskilled labour to load and unload ships rather than use qualified dockers.

5) European Socialists and Social Democrats are conscious of the risks of unlimited and unregulated immigration, but are at the same time aware that some basic civil rights must be preserved;

We are in favour of a joint European policy on asylum and immigration which assures the same rights, obligations and limitations in all EU countries; the right rejects these proposals and wants to maintain only a minimum of European co-ordination with differing national practices; only in some cases it wants the European Union to be more active like insisting on an Italian proposal to make the EU organise and pay for air-planes to return illegal immigrants to their home country; we want a strict distinction to be made between those who are seeking asylum from persecution and illegal immigrants and we are prepared to give better legal protection to those who have already suffered so much in their country of origin.

We call on the Member States to co-operate among themselves and with the countries of origin to devise systems for better regulating legal immigration into the European Union; but at the same time we want an active policy to integrate legal immigrants in our societies, insist on integrating them as soon as possible in the labour process, and even offer some minimum service to illegal immigrants (health care and education); the right is not of the opinion that this should be part of European Union policy.

We defeated conservative attempts to refuse third country nationals the right to vote in local and European elections.

We also strongly defend, against the right wing in the Parliament, the possibility for victims of trafficking in human beings, in particular women who have no chance to return to their country of origin, to receive authorisation to reside in the EU, on humanitarian grounds.

6) European Socialists and Social Democrats demand a balance between economy and ecology; sustainable development and growth are our priority;

We won the fight for a far-reaching European 'Environmental liability Directive' which obliges operators to sign up to adequate insurance cover in order to cover their liabilities in case of environmental damage., including also nuclear and sea pollution- of course the conservatives voted against.

We succeeded in making the European Parliament agree to set up a special Temporary Committee on 'Improving Safety at Sea' with the main task to examine in detail maritime accidents, including in particular the Prestige disaster, analyse their social and economic consequences and to assess and propose all measures needed to ensure implementation of maritime safety standards needed to counter the serious dangers caused by the transport of oil products; the conservatives blocked this initiative for a long time with the sole aim of trying to avoid to expose the completely inadequate handling of the Prestige disaster by the conservative Spanish government.

We lost the fight on a more ambitious European strategy for cutting pesticide use and damage, for instance by including a target of a 50% cut in pesticide use, taxes and levies on pesticides and an end to VAT reductions, because the right voted against.

7) European Socialists and Social Democrats want to increase the protection of consumers;

We believe that the Single European Market can only function well, when at the same time consumers are protected against misleading and deceptive commercial practices, not only in their own country, but all over the EU; the right generally puts the interests of industry to the front, fearing that 'excessive' consumer protection rules will impose an unreasonable administrative or legal burden on businesses.

We want the European Union to impose strict rules concerning producer liability for the products they sell; the right believes that "there is such a thing as the individual's own responsibility" on the part of the consumer.

We want the EU to ensure that EU citizens will have full and rapid access to cheaper generic medicines, which will guarantee low costs for the consumer, contribute to the safeguard of social security schemes and fair access to therapies for everybody - this is also of particular importance for the people in the developing countries to tackle the dramatic epidemic diseases in these countries.

8) European Socialists and Social Democrats want to promote peace - in Europe and in the world;

We have a long history in promoting peace and supporting multilateral responsibility.

We do agree on a policy for the prevention of conflicts, to which we attach far greater importance than to a build-up of armed force and the capacity and willingness to intervene in countries where security is threatened.

We do fundamentally believe in the peaceful solution of conflicts, but are at the same time prepared to take our responsibility in times of humanitarian catastrophe or in the keeping of peace; and we are even prepared to undertake extra-ordinary actions, step beyond our shadows, take personal risks to achieve peace when this becomes necessary.

The European Socialists and Social Democrats had and still have the people to do it:

Willy Brandt and John Hume (both having been or still being Members of the EP) are amongst the few Europeans to have won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Of course, the decision of some social-democratic led European governments (Great Britain, Poland and others) to participate in or actively support the US attack against Iraq caused an apparent split in this "commitment to peace". But together, and on the initiative of the PES and

the parliamentary Group, all European social democratic leaders agreed that the reconstruction of Iraq were only possible within a multilateral framework in the framework of the United Nations. We fully support the Solana Strategy of preventive engagement with all the means at the EU's disposal and with the military option as a means of last resort. We give our full support to the United Nations but have also proposed to make it 'tougher'.

9) European Socialists and Social Democrats do truly care about fundamental human and citizen's rights, both inside and outside the European Union;

We took the initiative for strong European actions against undemocratic and dictatorial regimes in Belarus, Zimbabwe and Myanmar (Birma), followed by strong European sanctions against the political leadership of these countries.

We denounced the unequal and unfair treatment of homosexuals, minority groups such as the Roma, prisoners, objectors of conscience inside some EU countries, where the right in the European Parliament defended the idea that the European Union should not interfere with the internal affairs of EU member states.

We emphasised that freedom from poverty and other social rights are an integral part of the fundamental rights of the European citizens, where the right stated that this was beside the subject.

We defended the protection of personal data to a high standard, where the right only agreed with this principle as far as it would not touch the interests of big companies and the private sector; in the discussion on the Telecommunications Directive we defended the citizens' right to be free from unwanted publicity, whereas the right maintained its position that advertisers could send unsolicited mails, faxes, unless the citizen's addressees were included on a "red" list; and for the publication of personal data in directories every subscriber would be included in the directory, unless the person expressed the wish not to be listed.

10) European Socialists and Social Democrats give the highest priority to stability in Europe;

We have therefore taken responsibility for a balanced process of enlargement of the European Union and make a great effort for it to become a success and a real guarantee for stability in Europe.

We put democracy, respect for the rule of law and the rights of minorities as a first condition for EU entry and were therefore critical about the developments in Slovakia under the authoritarian rule of Prime-Minister Meciar and in Latvia when the Russian-speaking citizens were lacking basic civil rights.

We supported the new member states in their difficult reform process and in fulfilling the conditions for entry, whilst we did not try to put up hidden barriers by asking the Czech Republic compensation for the "Benes-decrees".

We are prepared to start negotiations with Turkey about membership of the European Union, once this country has completely fulfilled the conditions on democracy and respect for the rule of law; we do not from a start exclude this country because it is not part of the European Christian tradition.

We do not believe that the European Union is now completed and thus create a new dividing line in Europe between those who are in and those who are out, and therefore we want to offer our new neighbours (such as the Ukraine) a long term European perspective for the future.

We created the "Willy Brandt programme for a successful enlargement" to work together with our sister parties in the new member states to make their integration in the European Union and its institutions a success.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The conditions for a truly European campaign for the 2004 elections for the European Parliament are difficult:
 - European elections are not decisive for government building
 - public and political (and media) interest is more directed towards national issues and national events
 - media are more interested in "scandals" (members' salaries, travel allowances, etc.) which damage the public image of the EP and its Members
2. The right wing parties reinforce public scepticism about the role of the European institutions and encourage a negative attitude and even fear towards Europe.
3. Our response is that we are willing and capable to solve the problems which are of great concern to the people. We are convinced that a more active, more united European approach is necessary to safeguard employment and to create more jobs, to take care of a cleaner environment, to secure stability in Europe and to present a counter balance against the unilateralists in this world.
4. It is now the time to swim against the main current of European neo-laissez-faire. The contents of our policies must get more attention. because the public will ask us more and more who are those European Social Democrats and what do they stand for. It is therefore necessary to give clearer shape to what is our record.
5. With a view to a presentation of the Social Democratic ideas and achievements at a joint European level, it is essential that all those engaged in the election campaign are aware of where the PES Group makes the difference.
6. Of prime importance are the many points on which we agree. We believe in a Europe of peace and stability, we want to make Europe a civic superpower. Although we defend the principle of a free market economy, we are at the same time convinced that strict rules are necessary to make that market function, to give a everybody a fair place in our economic system and a fair share of the wealth generated in our economies. And we know that the public authorities have a great responsibility in providing services which the market can not deliver or can deliver only in a discriminating way.
7. We must also make clear that on the European level our real opponent is the conservative right, as organised in the EPP/ED Group and in the right wing of the Liberals. In the European Parliament we have been able to co-operate well with the European Greens and the United Left. They were our allies on many important issues.
8. On the basis of our experience in the European Parliament, but also in the member states, the following points of strength of the European Socialists and Social Democrats can be identified:
 - 1) European Socialists and Social Democrats fight for the maintaining and the creation of jobs;
 - 2) European Socialists and Social Democrats are proud of the European social model; they do care about the maintenance of our social security systems and have the courage to reform these systems according to today's needs;
 - 3) European Socialists and Social Democrats give priority to the education of young people and are prepared to invest in the future;

- 4) European Socialists and Social Democrats have the courage to modernise our economies but are at the same time aware that the quality of some basic services must be maintained;
- 5) European Socialists and Social Democrats are conscious of the risks of unlimited and unregulated immigration, but are at the same time aware that some basic civil rights must be preserved;
- 6) European Socialists and Social Democrats demand a balance between economy and ecology; sustainable development and growth are their priority;
- 7) European Socialists and Social Democrats want to increase the protection of consumers;
- 8) European Socialists and Social Democrats want to promote peace - in Europe and in the world;
- 9) European Socialists and Social Democrats do truly care about fundamental human and citizen's rights, both inside and outside the European Union;
- 10) European Socialists and Social Democrats give the highest priority to stability in Europe;