



Europe's Contribution to Progress in the New Century

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The agenda for this week's meeting of the UN Millennium Summit is daunting. Development, conflict, drugs, AIDS all require sustained policy innovation. But we believe there is an emerging consensus on the right framework to build a global order based on equal worth and social fairness. Our challenge is to implement what we already know to be right, as well as to develop new solutions.

Last June in Berlin, 14 Heads of Government from Europe, the Americas, South Africa and New Zealand signed a unique political document. The Berlin Communiqué brought together politicians of the centre-left to forge a new progressive agenda. Although our four countries are part of many historic networks, we are today also part of a bigger political family of renewed and modernised progressive politics. Our values endure, but our approach is radically reformed. We all embrace the potential of globalisation. In fact our shared political conversation symbolised political globalisation. But we are also committed to tackle the clear problems that come in its wake. For us, there are three foundations for global progress.

First, we need to widen the winners circle in the new economy. This is socially right but also economically important. Sound macroeconomic policy is necessary but not sufficient. We need active government, not doing the job of business but instead empowering our citizens to enter the labour market, develop their skills, and set up businesses of their own. Education and human capital is the key: in all our countries it is the top priority for investment. And for those of us brought up under the influence of successful post-war welfare policy, it must be supported by continued modernisation of welfare states. Welfare policy must be more than a safety net. It should be dedicated as well to active help that promotes work and independence, and prevents problems, rather than simply providing a palliative to them.

Second, we need to strengthen civil society. Civil society is a check both against overweening government, and untrammelled market power. The underlying values should be clear a society open and inclusive, but based on responsibilities as well as rights. There are those who will seek to exploit the population movements that are part of globalisation to stir up fear and hatred. We are determined to stand against racism and xenophobia. We also recognise that one of the most corrosive influences on the health of a community is crime. That is why we are determined to use all the tools at our disposal, from effective community policing to the latest DNA technology, to tackle crime and its causes.

Third, we are committed to a new international social compact. We recognise that in an increasingly interdependent world the aims of wider prosperity and a strengthening of civil society cannot be pursued within the nation state alone. It is not only that problems cross national borders; it is that the pursuit of self-interest in one part of the world may be disastrous for another. The key for development is to establish a virtuous circle between laudable aims that too often are pursued in

isolation debt relief, conflict prevention, trade promotion, educational and health investment, environmental enhancement. In relation to debt relief rich countries have promises to fulfil, while developing countries must show that the poor will benefit. Similarly, we need to find a way through the legitimate debate about how to ensure that free trade supports development and employee rights; and in fields like the environment we should be seeking to bind together the interests of developed and developing countries, and using innovative new mechanisms like emissions trading schemes to curb pollution.

This is an ambitious agenda and rightly so. It is based on clear values, and judging by the meeting in Berlin, it has increasing support. This is significant. Ten years ago, at the end of the Cold War, people talked about the end of the left, or even the end of politics. Ten years on, progressive politics has been liberated from old attitudes, and from contamination with Soviet style failure. In our four countries, it is left of centre parties which have brought stability to public finances, tackled social exclusion, pioneered reform as well as investment in public services, and are now engaging with the construction of a reformed European social model. The results speak for themselves: falling unemployment, rising investment, improving standards in health and education services.

We are proud of these achievements, but not satisfied. There are big challenges ahead. The protection of our environment, incorporating all that scientific advance has to offer, looms as a massive responsibility for our generation. And as leaders of four member states of the EU, we recognise the need for the EU itself to reform and move forward. We are committed to help Europe become the most dynamic knowledge based economy in the world by 2010, through reforms in capital, product and labour markets. European countries are collaborating more closely in new fields like crime, asylum and defence. And a huge challenge for the EU is to embrace new members in central and Eastern Europe. This requires institutional change to ensure that the EU lives up to its potential.

In this we are greatly strengthened by the new progressive network that has come into being. Within Europe and beyond we can and must learn from our diverse experience. Nevertheless, we find remarkable similarity in our political debates. And as we meet tonight in New York at the invitation of President Clinton to develop our ideas further, it is important to acknowledge the role he has played in fostering the new progressive dialogue. Few Presidents have so effortlessly bridged the Atlantic.

We learn from each other's ideas, and we explain to our voters that they are part of a larger project to ensure that in a changing world, government promotes opportunity and security for all. Some people and countries will always be able to take care of themselves. But we have a wider responsibility. We cannot stop change, but we can shape it for the benefit of the many, not the few.

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