



the round table

Key issues for European Socialists and Social Democrats

Issue Number 1

May 2000

Our New Europe

'Our round table debates will highlight the issues that matter to people and determine the future of our Union'

*Rudolf Scharping
PES President*

'We must turn challenges into opportunities. Without compassion and solidarity we will never make EU enlargement a success'

*Enrique Baron
EP Socialist Group Leader*

'Lessons learned by EU countries are invaluable for a country aiming to overcome 40 years of communism.'

*Milos Zeman
Czech Prime Minister*

'The Europe Debates' take EU to the People

European Socialists and Social Democrats will this month launch a programme of round table discussions across Europe on key policy issues for the 21st century.

The round tables – whose high level participants will include prime ministers, European commissioners and other senior politicians – are to tackle policy questions such as EU enlargement, mass media, the modern welfare state and the information society with



Picture a.p.

Scharping, left, and Baron give EU a lead

the aim of finding modern responses to new challenges for Europe's people.

The series of round ta-

bles – entitled 'Europe in the 21st Century: the responsibilities of European Social Democracy' – is

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Challenge or Opportunity?

The impact of EU enlargement on jobs, crime, farming and the environment will be among issues addressed at the Prague round table on 5 May.

Czech Premier Milos Zeman, Foreign Minister Jan Kavan and the new Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland will be among participants in the talks at the Social Democrat HQ, Hyberniska 7, Prague.

An e-mail link (pes@socdem.cz) will allow journalists all over Europe to take part in a press conference given by the President of the Party of European Socialists, Rudolf Scharping, the leader of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Enrique Baron and Mr Zeman at 11H00 on 5 May.

Discussion sessions will include talks with trade unionists about the social situation of employees within the enlarged Europe.

The roundtable is open to the media throughout.

The Players

The European Socialist and Social Democrat Round Table programme is organised by the Party of European Socialists with its member parties and the Parliamentary Group of the PES with its national delegations.

The Round Table Web site, which offers a comprehensive range of documentation including speeches, background papers and other materials, is at <http://www.eurosocialists.org>

Czechs Heading for EU

By Milos Zeman, Prime Minister, Leader of the Social Democrats

Throughout history, the region that is now the Czech Republic has been at the heart of Europe. One of our first ambitions immediately after the 1989 Velvet Revolution was spelt out in the slogan *Back to Europe*, although only a few people understood what it meant. The public optimistically identified with Europe as a wealthy neighbour with guaranteed social standards. The picture was accurate – but the supranational framework for such success was not familiar.

In the first half of the 90s, Czech Conservatives – the best pupils of Margaret Thatcher – portrayed the EU as merely a free trade area: only Brussels bureaucrats, with strange ideas of taming market forces, were trying to spoil the party.

We had to work hard to counter this, pointing out that only through regulation of the economy can we guarantee sustainable growth and a secure investment environment.

By the mid 90s, it was clear that the country had to pay for the political naiveté that had led to belief in a special Czech way of privatisation and integration into the world economy.

The notion of a free ride into the modern world and lofty disregard for other central European



All aboard: central and eastern Europe on track for EU

countries, showed unrealistic assessment of Czech ability to modernise the state and society single-handed. The country had to reduce its economic capacity, which in turn was a major threat to Czech ability to meet the basic Copenhagen criteria on the internal market.

In 1998, we won the election and set up a minority government. We have since been working to reverse negative economic trends and to catch the train of European integration.

We have always argued that

the only way to bring the Czech Republic into the family of developed countries is through full integration into the EU. Lessons learned by EU countries are invaluable for a country aiming to overcome 40 years of communism. The Europe Agreement has always been an important step to bringing my country and the EU closer together.

Our Conservative opponents read the agreement as a trade deal. Trade is certainly a major part of the EU agenda and playing it down can lead to misunderstandings. That said, an important motive for promoting EU integration has been to safeguard the interests of all social groups. Our policy has been to combine modernisation of the country with integration.

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Times change and people with them. Today, there is a consensus that accession is priority number one for the Czech Republic.

European integration was launched as a thorough modernisation in which an efficient, dynamic economy is supported by a sound social environment. Later, with regard to the world environment situation, sustainable growth will complete the European model.

These political constants can be sustained only if we work within a stable political framework. The variables are the ever-widening scope of policy and enlargement is one of the most topical.

The life and feelings of the citizen are the quintessence of Social Democratic politics. Given the complexity of EU enlargement, much remains to be said. In this context politicians must also prove their ability to listen to the opinions of their citizens. We European Social Democrats acknowledge that we bear this responsibility.

EU Web Links

Web links related to the round tables and their topics include the following:

Czech Social Democrats: <http://www.socdem.cz>

Swiss Social Democrats: <http://www.sp-ps-ch>

Official texts on EU enlargement: http://www.europa.eu.int/pol/enlarg/index_en.htm

European Council on Refugees and Exiles: <http://www.ecre.org>

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia: <http://www.eumc.at>

Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org>

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants: <http://www.jcwi.org.uk>

Themes For The Future

Young people and their perspectives on Europe will be to the fore on 1 July at a round table in Paris at the beginning of the French EU Presidency.

Topics provisionally scheduled for discussion later in the year, with the names of the parties involved, include:

The Mass Media and Democracy, with the Italian DS party in October;

Modern Economy, Modern Welfare State, Modern Social Democracy with the Dutch Labour Party and German SPD;

Democratic values, with the Austrian Social Democrats;

Development co-operation, with the Luxembourg Socialists;

Welfare in an age of Globalisation, with the Swedish Social Democrats;

The Information Society, Europe and Social Democracy, with the Spanish Socialists.

Round table to assess right response on the Left

A Hard Look at the Hard Right



EU fightback against populism will secure the future

The Swiss capital, Berne, is to be the venue for Europe's first major political conference on the challenge of the remodelled extreme Right since Jorg Haider's Party came to power in Austria.

The round table on 26 June will explore links between the new extreme right and Euroscepticism.

The talks are expected to take

frank account of policy-making throughout Europe including an analysis of best and worst practices in the reaction of democratic and progressive forces to xenophobia and euroscepticism in order to produce recommendations for future action.

The discussion will address:

- Populism, xenophobia and nationalism throughout Europe;
- Migration and Xenophobia – a critique of European responses; and
- The responsibility of European Social Democracy.

The round table opens at 13h30 at the 'Up Town' Cultural Centre, Gurten Park, Berne.

Participants are to include former Swiss President, now justice minister, Ruth Dreifuss.

Ms Dreifuss and Socialist Group deputy leader Hannes Swoboda of Austria will present the conclusions of the discussion at 19h30.

German Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse, Swiss Sociology Professor Andreas Gross and French publicist Claude Longchamp will be keynote speakers.

'The Europe Debates'

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organised by the Party of European Socialists and its member parties with the European Parliament Socialist Group and its national delegations. All of the discussions are open to the media throughout.

PES President Rudolf Scharping and EP Socialist leader Enrique Baron will be directly involved with host party leaders in preparing the



Haensch - strategist

discussions and in ensuring their follow-up.

An initial meeting in London on 17 March, under the aegis of the UK Labour Party was held to discuss the Socialist and Social-Democratic social and economic agenda in the week before the extraordinary summit on growth and employment in Lisbon.

From Principle To Practice

By Jan Marinus Wiersma, MEP and Vice-President of the PES

There is a deceptive calm on the EU enlargement front. Having dealt with framework issues, EU leaders are now bogged down in obscure treaty changes.

People seem unaware of what is at stake and what the overall effect of enlargement will be.

Over time, candidate country citizens must have social security, sound jobs and reasonable incomes for only with social convergence will our common labour market flourish. Without it we may need to make transitional arrangements for new members.

Crime and corruption are growing problems in the old communist bloc. There is a fear this will spread our way – and crime already is.

An enlarged EU will help crime-fighters, because all countries will share the same values. But there is an urgent need to strengthen police forces in the candidate countries and increase police co-operation.

Corruption is a cancer that spreads easily and destroys societies. A major effort is needed to improve the performance of some candidate countries. We cannot and will not accept new Members States that do not meet interna-

tional transparency standards.

These are just two issues. There are more. Migration, discrimination, nuclear safety, agriculture or financial questions – all must be debated to assess problems and work towards solutions.

Only in this way can we create more sympathy for our fellow European citizens. Without compassion and solidarity we will never make EU enlargement a success.

People in candidate countries, people suffer because EU conditions require strict budgets and economic restructuring. It takes courage, especially for our parties, to implement such policies.

Waning support from candidate country citizens for EU membership shows they believe the price is too high. By forcing countries to adapt their economies rapidly to EU rules, we suggest that the EU is no more than a competition-driven, free market. This view is reinforced by our insistence on property rights, privatisation and foreign direct investment.

We forget that the EU has a social market economy and cannot



"Candidate country police must be strengthened."

be compared with the USA. Only by stressing the social dimension, can we secure public support.

Poverty lines are drawn differently in the candidate countries. It will take time and money to alter them.

Citizens of the present EU are also beginning to hesitate. Some politicians see this as a goldmine for anti-Europeanism. We cannot let them exploit that.

What belongs together, should grow together. We prefer co-operation to confrontation. That is why we want to enlarge the EU with countries that are a part of our common history.

Way of Work

The format chosen for the round table discussions aims to ensure the fullest possible range of contributions from participants.

Long, set-piece speeches are banned. Instead, two panel members will be invited to open the discussion with an introduction of no more than 10 minutes each.

Three more panel members will be asked to give brief, unprepared reactions.

Then rapid-fire question and comment will be taken from the floor.

Reports will be compiled after every round table and published on the Internet.

How to obtain a regular copy of 'The Round Table'

'The Round Table' is a newsletter published jointly by the Party of European Socialists and the Parliamentary Group of the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament.

The newsletter will provide advance information about upcoming discussions and summarise the key points of those that have taken place.

To obtain a regular copy of 'The Round Table' please fax Brussels +322-2849026 or e-mail the editor Tony Robinson – TRobinson@europarl.eu.int