

# **The Liberal Party's EUROVISION!**

## **A Commonwealth of Europe: A democratic partnership**

**If elected, Liberal Party European Members of Parliament would work within the existing structure to persuade colleagues that there is no future in the European Union as currently constituted. We wish to replace what is popularly seen to be a malign and dictatorial institution with a benign, democratic body, the Commonwealth of Europe (CoE).**

Directives, secretive horse-trading between the ministers of member states and coercion based on the lowest common denominator would be replaced by openness, co-operation, free exchange of ideas and encouragement of best practice.

Like the British Commonwealth, there would be no single currency, no single army, no single tax system or single law. There would be no President or other trappings of super-nationhood, such as a national anthem.

Unlike the "British" Commonwealth - or, for that matter, the United Nations and the Council of Europe - our Commonwealth of Europe would be governed by a democratically elected European Parliament. And, unlike the current talking shop in Strasbourg, our CoE Parliament would hire and fire the European Commissioners.

Moreover, we would like the CoE Parliament to oversee its own budget, initiate legislation, and hold its civil servants to account. We envisage that CoE income would be levied according to a fixed percentage of each nation's Gross National Product.

## **A Commonwealth of Europe: Peace with justice**

In 1992, French President Mitterrand claimed that the EU would rival the greatest powers on Earth. Liberals want nothing to do with such a vision, nor do we support any notion of a single European army now being proposed for no other reason than to compete with the military might of the USA; one global giant crashing about the world stage is one too many, never mind two!

Liberals believe that the road to peace with justice is achieved by mediation, monitoring and reconciliation. Those who oppress and wage war on the innocent are more effectively isolated and brought to account through war crimes trials than by indiscriminate sanctions and the bombing of their fellow countrymen. We prefer the peace keeping methods in Bosnia to the bomb dropping methods in Iraq and Kosovo. This is why we have opposed all the military adventures in the Gulf and why we opposed the aerial bombardment of Serbia and Kosovo.

The Liberal Party opposes the arms trade and the deployment of any weapons of mass destruction, whether they belong to Iraq, Korea - or Britain! We believe the CoE can do much to lead by example. Rather than attempt the expensive and dangerous formation of one single European army as has been suggested, we believe that the CoE could co-ordinate European nations' individual armies as a force for peace.

Monies spent on expensive macro military capability should be diverted to enable European nations to resource ground-based Bosnian-type peace keeping/enhancement operations, primarily in Europe and eventually world-wide. We believe that a benign CoE would be better able - and better trusted- to oversee such exercises in Europe than the hawkish NATO.

## **A Commonwealth of Europe: Prosperity in Europe and beyond**

When Liberals talk of Europe, we mean all the nations of the Continent, not just the existing member states of the European Union. The recent and long-overdue enlargement of the EU will make a significant contribution

to the political stability and international security in Central and Eastern Europe, which is one of the benefits of the EU and one of the reasons why we believe the UK should remain a member.

One of the problems of the EU in the past had been its exclusivity which had effectively blackballed Eastern European communities for many years. It was ironic that membership of NATO seemed easier for the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe to achieve than membership of the European Union. We must not be so tardy about admitting remaining European nations or in inviting countries beyond the Continent who wish to join.

One of the prime tasks of the CoE would be a redistribution of wealth from the rich countries of Europe to the poor, channelling such monies through the regions as grants for specific projects. If properly administered, such funds can play a significant role in stimulating local economies and generating employment. Such a redistribution of wealth programme would invariably involve radical reform of the disreputable and wasteful Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies.

Of the EU members, only the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark and Sweden achieve the UN aid target by giving 0.7% of their Gross National Income in aid to poor countries. Shamefully, Britain's contribution is under 0.4%. One of the prime objectives of the CoE would be to bring all contributions up to 0.7% as a matter of urgency.

Today's Liberals champion fair, rather than free, trade. Accordingly, one of the priorities of the CoE would be a review of the existing EU customs union, hopefully as an element of an exercise to reform the existing practices of the World Trade Organisation. Additionally, we foresee a joint exercise between the CoE and the WTO in the regulation and taxation of multi-national companies.

## **A Commonwealth of Europe: An Uncontaminated Continent**

Clearly it makes sense for nations with common borders to make common cause on all environmental matters and Liberals see the CoE as a key player in co-ordinating policies against pollution. Europe's over-reliance on coal, oil and nuclear energy would be a major challenge for the CoE who would undertake extensive research into energy saving and alternative energy sources.

We believe that the CoE should set up a "Pollution Police Force" who would have powers to prosecute polluters and instigate clean-up operations. We would also establish a "green audit" of all CoE policy and practices. We would also ensure that individual nations could introduce tougher policies and more pioneering environmental projects if they so desired without running the risk of being charged with restraint of trade.

Liberals have long campaigned for reform of the common agricultural and fisheries policies and we are appalled by the plight of small farmers and of fishermen. With particular regard to the fisheries industry, we wonder if the fish stocks crisis might be addressed by a more pro-active approach to fish husbandry, following in the tradition long practised on land of giving nature a helping hand. This would be distinct from intensive farming methods which create health and welfare problems and which we oppose.

The CoE's responsibility for fishing and agriculture would include the overseeing of humane animal husbandry, fish stock conservation, the drawing up of an uncontaminated soil, sea and air plan, and production of quality food, free of pesticides and of genetically engineered products.

Improvement of transport links between European countries would be a major function of the CoE. For the UK in particular, it is vital to exploit the Channel Tunnel by developing a high speed electric - and re-nationalised- railway, both for freight and for passengers. Transport links with Europe could be further strengthened by more use of navigable rivers, inland waterways, small local ports and short sea shipping. Many journeys could be eliminated altogether by greater use of teleworking and the Internet.

## **But first, let's have some democracy here!**

There is no point in preaching the benefits of democracy to all and sundry on the Continent and elsewhere if we hardly practice it ourselves! This election is an undemocratic farce, courtesy of a host of New Labour uncoordinated and badly thought through changes to the way we vote.

To begin with, we would scrap the outrageous "closed shop" party list voting system introduced for these elections by this government with the complicity of the Liberal Democrats. Under this undemocratic system,

party hacks - rather than the electorate- decide the pecking order of candidates on their party's list. Moreover the constituencies they have introduced to make this system work are enormous; in the case of the North West, the constituency stretches from Crewe to Carlisle and makes any sort of personal relationship between MEPs and their constituents virtually impossible.

We would replace this New Labour mess with the single transferable voting system in smaller constituencies, which is already in use in Northern Ireland, and enables voters to choose between candidates, as well as parties. We would also abolish the undemocratic £5,000 Deposit which puts standing for the European Parliament beyond the means of ordinary people and we would have a mid-week polling day holiday - Democracy Day - to replace New Labour's madcap voting initiatives such as all-postal voting which is vulnerable to fraud and maladministration. We would also do away with the current freepost paper chase in which each party's election address is delivered separately by the Royal Mail. One brochure containing everybody's statements such as is published in London for the Mayoral elections would be less expensive, more efficient and less burdensome to the Royal Mail.

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