

The challenges from multicultural societies in a globalised world

Liberal principles valid in a changing world

'All equal all different' was the theme chosen by the Council of Europe for the European year against racism in 1999. In 2002, there are reasons for European liberal democrats to re-state their support for that theme and their profound belief in a tolerant, open, democratic and non-discriminatory society where all are treated in the same way and to re-address some of the challenges arising from increased globalisation.

The September 11 terrorist attacks, the related military interventions and the escalation of the violence in the Middle East has also affected public opinion and been exploited by certain populist, xenophobe, racist or extremist political trends.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out basic human rights and values, which should form the basis for our societies and for interaction with the rest of the world. We want a Europe, which takes a leading role in the promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and free market economy in the world, thus providing the fundament for economic prosperity, social development and ecological sustainability.

- European liberal democrats call on all European political parties to sign and respect the Charter of political parties for a non-racist society, which was adopted in February 1998 and signed by nearly 100 political parties.

Integration is based on rights and responsibilities

It is inevitable that Europe will continue to attract migrants and asylum seekers, as a result of our competitive economic strength and political stability. It is crucial that the European response to this challenge is based on respect for fundamental values - especially concerning human rights and freedoms, a willingness to integrate and the long-term needs following from an ageing population. It is important to underline that integration is a two-way street, involving rights and obligations on the part of society and individuals.

There is no final and proven method for integration within our European societies and as European liberal democrats we do not call for such a solution either. Rather the response must be tailored to the individual needs, to the needs of different countries, ethnic groups and segments of society involved. However, the ELDR Party welcomes a much greater EU commitment in this area, resulting not only in a common EU asylum policy based on strong minimum standards for a humane reception, but also in

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more co-ordination and co-operation between the member states regarding integration policies.

For us, integration is to secure the fundamental European values and human rights while respecting the individual's cultural freedom. This means that individuals have the right to a private sphere based on their own cultural identity or religion, as integration is not necessarily assimilation but rather to empower all to equal chances to participate in and contribute to society. However, respecting the sphere of cultural freedom can not be used as an excuse for accepting any violations of human rights. Especially attention should be paid on safeguarding the individual human rights of women and children. It is also of crucial importance to highlight a gender perspective in immigration and integration matters. Lack of focus on the specific gender issues arising in connection with immigration and integration can have devastating effects for the women involved as well as for society in general, especially the societies in which these women reside.

Successful integration is a responsibility for all and we therefore stress the need for social inclusion in a cross cultural dialogue in which all segments of society need to enter into the dialogue. The tools for this should be developed, especially in schools and workplaces. Non-governmental organisations and neighbourhood societies can provide useful forum for dialogue and networking among people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. NGO's should be supported and encouraged in that work.

Education is conditional to successful integration and education systems in the member States must be better geared for this task. As Europe is evolving into an information society, equality of access to high quality education and secure freedom of expression must be universal. Guarantee equality of opportunities through education is a central main line of social justice.

- A precondition for successful integration is the mastering of the language of the relevant member state, while also knowledge of the social cultural background of the member state may speed up the integration process. The ELDR Party calls upon the member states to make necessary means available to ensure that the teaching of these languages are an important and integrated part of the integration process. In order to reach a successful integration the sufficient public resources are needed for the language education of immigrants both in their mother tongue and in the language/languages of the new home country. In the language education also the needs of those adult immigrants that do not participate in the labour markets should be taken into

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attention. Often there is a risk that female immigrants are isolated in the home sphere without decent skills of the new language.

- Liberal democrats believe in a society where a plurality of ideas and cultures thrives. We welcome diversity in all its forms and wherever it is found and the strength of the European Union is precisely its unity in diversity.
- EU and Member State policies must balance rights and duties, so that immigrants understand that they can work in the host country and enjoy freedom of movement within the Union and other benefits of EU citizenship, but that they must make an effort to integrate and live by the rules of the society they join.
- Liberal democrats will continue to defend the principle that politics and religion should be kept apart, as secularism plays an important role in resolving tension between religions. However, it is necessary to deepen our knowledge on world religions and their cultural connections in order to understand our own history and identities. The dialogue between churches and world religions and encounters between people from different religious backgrounds is an important means to ease the potential tensions.
- Intercultural dialogue is best promoted through traditional means of equal opportunities, through education and employment policies and through offering space for cultural expression. The questions of intercultural dialogue are not only internal issues of European societies. It is also a foreign policy issue for the European Union.

Universal rights in a globalised world

European liberal democrats also want a Europe that is self-confident of the strength of its values, communities and cultures and that is open for dialogue and inter-action over borders and cultural frontiers. In a globalised world, the interactions between cultures, economies and people are not only necessary but also desirable.

It is important to recall that globalisation on one hand has brought wealth and knowledge to increasing numbers of people but on the other hand has highlighted and exposed the plight of those still on the margins of the global economy. Globalisation of the economy requires social, cultural and environmental lifelines that the European dimension can provide.

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