

# STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

S&D GROUP ROUND TABLE DEBATES  
DECEMBER 2010 – MAY 2011



**S&D**

Group of the Progressive Alliance of  
**Socialists & Democrats**  
in the European Parliament



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## FOREWORD

Welcome to this second brochure on the S&D Group Round Table programme on strengthening European Social Democracy.

In the first brochure, we reported on our debates on the political profile of young voters, the electoral support for our political family throughout Europe, and the future shape of a progressive foreign policy.

The three Round Tables presented in this brochure addressed three other themes which are highly relevant in the debate about how we can strengthen our political profile as European Socialists and Social Democrats. They dealt in particular with the Social Democratic alternative in the context of globalisation and permanent change (December 2010), the trends regarding the electoral basis of Social Democracy (January 2011), and the challenging policy areas of migration and integration (May 2011).

The six round tables debates will feed into the discussions at the S&D Group Barcelona Conference (June 20-21 2011) on “A renewed Social Democracy to face Europe’s challenges”, bringing together 30 high-level guests with around 60 S&D Group Members.

After this Conference, the S&D Group, alongside the PES, the FEPS, national parties and foundations, will continue to nurture the crucial debate on how the European family of Socialist and Social Democrats can sharpen its political profile and raise its electoral support, so that by the next European elections in June 2014, we will be the decisive political force required to face Europe's challenges.

**Martin SCHULZ**

President



**Maria BADIA I CUTCHET**

Vice-President responsible  
for the Round Table programme



# THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION AND PERMANENT CHANGE

European Parliament, Brussels 8 December 2010

## Main presentations

### Miguel Angel Moratinos MP

*Minister of Foreign Affairs, Spain, 2004-2010*

The Social Democratic movement faces a paradox: at a time when there is an urgent need for social justice in the wake of the financial and economic crisis, voters are not supporting us in the numbers they used to.

We need to develop a new kind of social movement which goes beyond traditional party structures. Above all, Social Democrats have to win elections – we cannot do much with only three or four leaders around the table in the European Council.

We *do* have answers to the challenges we face, but have tended to be on the defensive in response to neo-liberal claims that we are to blame for the crisis. We have not yet really found a convincing response to the confusion, uncertainty and loss of confidence.

We need to offer a positive vision of the future that people can believe in. We should not try to copy the neo-liberal discourse or move sharply to the left, but provide our own answers. For example, why is it that we always cut budgets in areas that please the markets but cause problems for our citizens? It is ironic that a Conservative Prime Minister in the UK has cut the defence budget, which no Social Democrat leader has ever dared do, even though reducing defence spending has always been part of our political programme.

The state does not have many instruments at its disposal to control what markets do, and we now live in a more individualistic and fragmented society, so we need a new vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a new model of citizenship.



## “ Snapshots of the debate

*“The answer lies in ‘going European’. We can cope with the crisis if we act at European level, rather than at national level. We no longer have the tools at national level to solve the problems we face.”*

*“We need an open society, we need to defend our values, we need more Europe.”*

*“We don’t particularly want leaders of hedge funds to vote for us, but we should not erect barriers between ourselves and the majority.”*

*“If we give up the fight, accept that the markets are all powerful and decide that we should not play a role in regulating the invisible hand of the market, then we might as well throw in the towel.”*

”

## Martin Schulz MEP

*President of the S&D Group*

Traditionally, Socialism was an international movement, but Social Democracy is in danger of becoming increasingly national, while the other parties are now more international.

European solutions are inevitable and absolutely necessary. We should have the courage to be the first party to say, "we cannot do this at national level, we need European and global solutions". In the mid-term, we can win elections on the basis of this approach.

For 50-60 years, Europe was not just the promise of peace but also of social justice: it brought people more jobs, money and wealth, and that is why they trusted it. We are collectively responsible for the fact that people no longer have any trust in institutions, no confidence that politicians will be able to guarantee them a future. They are right: none of us can do it alone.



We politicians say that Europe brings more growth, but people see that it brings fewer jobs; we say it brings more wealth, but they also see that in some ways, it undermines prosperity. There is a gap between our European promises and reality, and this is a consequence of our focus on the nation state.



## Joaquín Almunia

*Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for competition policy*

Social Democrats can and must put forward an alternative to the prevailing idea that the markets run the society. Economic growth has delivered greater quality of life, in particular through the welfare state. It has broken down barriers, given citizens more opportunities and made them more autonomous. As a result, they are more individualistic and want more opportunities. Meanwhile, ageing societies are increasing the demand for labour from the rest of the world, but increased immigration is leading to social tensions and some populist voices. New forms of communications are emerging. All of this will strike at the heart of our political model.

Social Democrats need to come up with a vision of the future which can attract broad support again – while we have traditionally focused on the weakest in society, we must also focus on all those who depend on their own efforts to live decently.

If we want to become the representatives of the majority of our society again, we need to target the concerns and aspirations of the whole population. We are the only party that can reach out to the poor, but we must also reach out to everyone else.

Social Democrats must also make it clear that without Europe, Member States will not be able to succeed when facing the challenges of the future. Without Europe, we will not achieve our goals.



# SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

European Parliament, Brussels 12 January 2011

## Main presentations

### Maria João Rodrigues

*Special Advisor to the EU institutions and Party of European Socialists*

Progressives are increasing their influence across the world, in Latin America, the United States and in Asia, but the tide has turned the other way in Europe. In a sense, Social Democrats are victims of their own success – today's European societies are clearly the outcome of the work of Socialists and Social Democratic movements, and we need to remind people of our major achievements – but that on its own is no longer enough.



Our political identity is defined, most of all, by our values, rather than by the groups who support us. Social Democracy should not be defined mainly as a party of the working class. Our starting point should be our values – freedom, equality, social justice and the concept of sustainable development – and we need to mobilise around them.

As progressives, we should be in favour of concepts of progress. For the working class, this means higher wages; for others, it means better quality of life. We should base it on quality of life and well-being: we need a new concept of success, excellence, responsibilities and duties. We need a new concept of freedom which is about empowering people and to create a sense of belonging.

The European model faces significant challenges, but it is still the best in the world. We should be proud of that. We need a convincing message that we can sustain this model, but to do so, we will need to reform it.

In the current historical conditions, Social Democracy needs stronger action at European level in order to implement its new agenda. That is why we need to build a stronger European political party.

### Catherine de Vries

*Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Amsterdam*

Social Democrats face three main challenges: the end of cleavage-based voting and the rise of 'political switching'; ideological splits among potential supporters; and an increase in anti-elite, anti-state rhetoric.

The days of core electorates are over: voters now consider many different options and make up their minds who to support at a much later stage. Most do see Social Democrat parties as a viable option – i.e. one of the parties they would consider voting for – and then look for the information they need to decide which way to vote. This makes election campaigns and short-term factors much more important than in the past.

The 'ideological split' among potential supporters also poses a significant dilemma for Social Democrats: at heart, much of the electorate is on the left economically but on the right culturally (i.e. on issues such as immigration and globalisation). This does not fit well with Social Democracy's traditional, international approach and also highlights the need to launch a real debate on sensitive issues such as immigration and culture.





## “ Snapshots of the debate

*“We should rally people’s hearts, not just their minds; we should fight for them with an optimistic mindset.”*

*“Our values are still appealing. These are basic values which have been proven throughout the history of the last 130 years, but we do not articulate them enough.”*

*“For Conservatives, the solution to uncontrolled speculation is more fiscal discipline, full stop. For us, it is fiscal discipline, yes, but also cooperation for growth and European solidarity.”*

*“New forms of democratic debate are emerging. This is an opportunity for a new way to do politics. Political parties should find new ways of participating in the debates in these virtual communities. It is a new frontier for political action.”*

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The third challenge – the rise of anti-elitism and an anti-state discourse, fuelled by populist parties – is of most concern. Voters increasingly doubt whether politicians act in the general public’s interest and this mistrust of authorities helps explain why Social Democracy has not been able to capitalise on the financial and economic crisis.

A three-pronged strategy is needed to meet these challenges. Social Democrats should:

- Present a new vision of the future;
- Consider how to challenge the populists’ current monopoly on defining “fairness” in the political debate, and promote a more inclusive society;
- The politics of emotion are very important – it is not about facts, it is about the image you portray and the vision you set out.

# MIGRATION, INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY

European Parliament, Brussels 4 May 2011

## Main presentations

### Anna Terrón I Cusí

*Secretary of State for Immigration and Emigration, Spain*

Social Democrats need to ensure the debate about immigration is based on facts, the reality of the situation rather than myths. Public perception tends to identify migrants as poor and 'different', although this is not accurate. The right-wing claims that we are not as good at managing migration as them, another inaccuracy.

We should talk about "integrated societies", instead of "integrating people"; about how to create one integrated society made up of people of different origins who share a minimum set of shared values. We need to focus on individual rights and to base our approach on equal treatment.

The basic idea underpinning Social Democracy is social cohesion. We need to look at the reality for each individual in terms of their rights, ensure respect for those rights and treat everyone as the same under the law. Without that, there can be no social cohesion.

Like all human phenomena, migration is a complex phenomenon that implies positive and negative aspects. We have to recognize the positive contribution migration makes to our societies, but also the problems. And we have to solve them, managing migration policies in an effective way. The only way to counter nationalists and populists, who champion exclusion and blaming others, is to focus on the real situation and 'keep it cool'. We must not echo the slogans of the right.

Today, more than ever, we must address this issue within a European framework. We cannot manage the movement of people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century unless we develop an international governance model for migration.



## António Vitorino

*Former European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs*

The public's perception of immigration is an important element of a broader problem: people have serious doubts about the sustainability of the European social model and tend to perceive migration as a burden on our welfare state rather than an asset.

Socialist governments have failed to highlight the positive contribution migrants make to the economy, fearing this would undermine their credibility on security issues. Some felt the need to prove they were as tough as the right on security issues by copying them. This was a mistake. We do not have to choose between the two: we can be very tough in insisting on the need to fight illegal migration to protect legal migration.

Populism is not new, but some mainstream centre-right parties are now abandoning their values, fearing that they can only maintain their support by copying the populists. This poses a serious threat to the sustainability of our entire political model.

Integration is a trade-off between tolerance and intolerance. We cannot tolerate migrants calling into question our key values. We cannot, for example, accept any exception to equality between men and women in the name of “cultural specificities”.

Europe's skills and manpower shortages mean that in future, it will be competing to attract skills, not rejecting people. Are we brave enough to make this argument? I think we should be – very important values are at stake. We sometimes appear convinced that we are destined to lose on this issue and cannot take the risks which would give us a chance to win. It is time to show our determination to stand firm in championing our position on immigration.



## Emir Kir

*Minister of the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for Mobility, the Civil Service, Equal Opportunities & Administrative Simplification*

We should avoid linking the words “migration, integration and identity” together in the public discourse. This is the right-wing approach; a way of stigmatizing foreigners on their soil. It is very dangerous to base identity on culture of origin, philosophy, creed or place of birth.



We also need to be very careful when talking about integration: should we say that people who are working and paying taxes and living in our neighbourhoods need integrating simply because their skin colour is different or they have a different religion?

What we should really be focusing on is social integration: access to education, childcare, skills and jobs. We must promote equality of opportunity. Many people still face discrimination because of their skin colour. The fight against discrimination and promoting diversity must be a priority.

Let's get back to fundamentals. The big fight for the Socialist movement has to be equality. Our priority must be to ensure equality between all workers. This should not be a debate between nationals and foreigners. Instead of seeing foreigners as a problem, we should play up the positive aspects of having them on our soil: they enrich us and are vital to our economic success.

## “ Snapshots of the debate

*“Instead of seeing immigration as a threat to security, as many on the right do, we need to underline the fact that it is essential to sustain our European model.”*

*“There is no way we can handle this issue at national level. We need to make it European. We now have the tools with the Lisbon Treaty. We need to start using them.”*

*“The way people integrate is to become enabled, empowered, more prosperous, able to live in a decent place. These are the issues we need to focus on.”*

*“The fight against all forms of discrimination is our fight: this should be the dividing line between us and the right on this issue.”*

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