



My life as a **European**



SOCIALIST GROUP
IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



A day in the life...

Mark is 19 years old. His girlfriend Anna is from Central Europe and came here to study thanks to the Erasmus programme. Once they have their diplomas they plan to tour Europe.

The aim of this story is to tell you about their day-to-day lives and those of their friends and acquaintances, and to show you the benefits brought about by the European Union, the European Parliament and especially the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.



Cleaner water

To reduce the amount of harmful substances found in the water we use, the European Union (EU) passed a law in 1980 which first set the same water quality standards in all member states of the EU. The law is continually being strengthened to take into account new scientific developments and to improve health and water safety levels (including for bathing and river water). Good water quality has long been a goal for European Socialists. Wherever you travel in the EU, you can now be sure that the water you use is safe.



Safer cosmetics

As well as legally binding safety standards on water, the European law on cosmetics ensures that the toothpaste, shampoo and other cosmetics we use are safe, wherever we may buy them in the EU.



More varied and safer food

Much of the food we eat comes from another state of the EU. By opening up borders within the Union, the EU has allowed for quicker transportation of many fresh foods and dairy produce to different states of the Union. This gives consumers greater choice and better prices. Our supermarket shelves are now full of choice gourmet produce, without the gourmet prices. The foods we eat all reach EU safety standards and European Socialists have fought hard to enforce quality in farming and to ensure the safety of farm produce, through, for example, initiatives to reduce the amount of pesticides used by farmers. European Socialists have also worked to ensure that farming land in Europe is well regulated to safeguard the environment, and their intervention means that a new European Food Safety Authority will defend EU consumers' interests. On Genetically Modified Foods (GMOs), European Socialists want a balance between scientific innovation, the consumer's right to safe food, freedom of choice and a healthy environment.



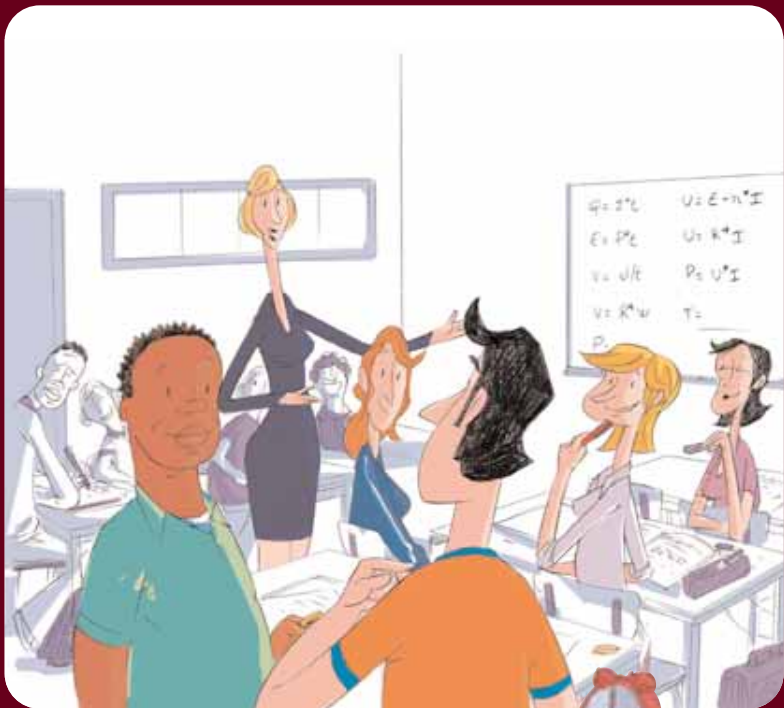
Improving public transport

Through research and structural fund support, the EU helps to improve public transport in towns, cities and local communities across Europe. The aim is to build public transport networks which are safe, efficient and affordable, meeting the needs of EU citizens. Building links between different modes of transport is a key priority and to this end European Socialists have worked very closely with passenger groups and public transport operators to bring through laws making public transport more accessible for people with disabilities, the elderly and parents with prams.



Safer roads and vehicles

European Socialist have been instrumental in pushing through common EU rules to ensure road safety throughout the continent. These include safer car design, new laws on seatbelts for school buses, clamping down on sleepy lorry and coach drivers and Europe-wide rules on drunk driving.



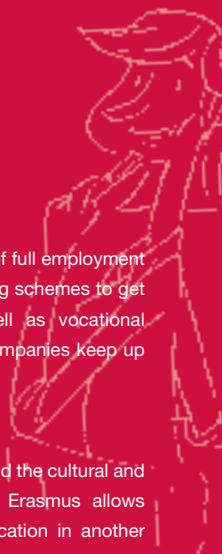
Education and Training

European Socialists believe that education is key to our goal of full employment in Europe. The EU invests in education through various training schemes to get people back to work and reduce unemployment, as well as vocational programmes to re-train workers and ensure that European companies keep up with technological advances.



Promoting student mobility

To help people understand other cultures, the EU has developed the cultural and linguistic exchange programmes, Erasmus and Comenius. Erasmus allows European university students to complete part of their education in another European country, and Comenius focuses on links and exchanges between younger school pupils from different countries.





Enlarging the European Union

The EU is constantly evolving. A community of six in the 1950s has grown to a union of 25 member states* from 2004 with 450 million citizens and 20 official languages. Enlargement anchors democracy throughout the European continent, and fosters trade and economic growth. For European Socialists, EU enlargement and the reunification of Europe are contributing to peace, stability and prosperity in what in the past has been a warring continent.

* The EU member states are now: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.



Easier and safer holiday booking online

EU investment in internet technology makes it easier for many people in Europe to take holidays abroad and to book online. EU competition rules and opening up the market have also given access to cheaper air travel. European Socialists have lobbied to ensure that while prices have come down, standards have gone up, with new EU laws guaranteeing money back deals for air passengers whose flights are cancelled or delayed and an EU crackdown on timeshare frauds with guaranteed compensation for victims.



Skilled people and a competitive economy

IT skills are vital in today's information society and the EU is committed to building a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy through training initiatives such as e-Learning and lifelong learning to transform education. This is a top priority for European Socialists, determined to give disadvantaged groups access to education, with special emphasis on IT. The EU designated 1996 the year of 'Lifelong Learning'; 2003 the year of people with disabilities; and 2004 the year of education through sport.



Regional regeneration

The EU actively helps regions faced with economic and social difficulties through a number of 'Structural Funds' to finance projects to generate long-term economic development and remedy social problems such as unemployment and to address skill shortages. Funding is available to regions in current EU member states and accession countries. European Socialists work closely with regional and local authorities to ensure the Structural Funds develop in line with current and future needs.

Safer seas

European Socialists constantly promote safety for vessels shipping goods, and ferries carrying people in EU waters. When the Prestige oil tanker sunk off the coast of Galicia, European Socialists called for a full investigation and for single hull oil tankers to be banned from EU waters, and have also been successful in improving ferry safety and the passenger records which ferry companies must keep.



Rights at work

Several European laws ensure that working people are not exploited, covering for example: equal rights for part-time workers, the maximum number of hours a person can be required to work, and entitlement to paid holidays. European Socialists have worked hard to secure these rights, which are now enjoyed by all EU citizens.



Buying over the Internet

The single EU market brings many benefits, such as lower prices through greater competition. Internet technology has brought even more benefits by allowing companies to sell their products over the internet and save on operating costs. Similarly, consumers can shop around and pay for products online, and European Socialists are working to ensure security for internet transactions, and maintain the rights of on-line consumers.



Safer workplaces

A safe working environment is vital for workers. The European Union has set strict legal limits for the exposure of workers in all industries to certain noise levels and their exposure to asbestos or excessive vibration from machinery. European Socialists have contributed significantly to securing greater protection from workplace health risks.

Worker involvement in company decisions

Common EU rules exist to ensure a level playing field for workers in the single market. These rules include the right to information and consultation about significant company decisions affecting them.

Equality between women and men

The EU has adopted measures to promote equality between women and men. EU laws guarantee equal pay for equal work, equal rights for part-time workers, no discrimination in pensions, maternity rights and paternal leave, equal access to jobs and training and promote an equal role in decision making. European Socialist believe the equal participation of women in all aspects of society is necessary for democracy and is a force for progress.



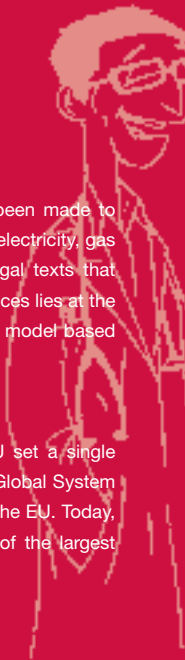
Public services for all

Thanks to pressure from European Socialists, provisions have been made to guarantee that public services of interest to all citizens – such as electricity, gas and water supply, postal services, etc. – be included in the legal texts that govern the EU and its single market. The guarantee of public services lies at the heart of European Socialists' efforts to ensure a European social model based on solidarity and social cohesion.



Mobile phones

When the mobile phone industry took off in the 1980s, the EU set a single standard for mobile phones. This standard, known as GSM (the Global System for Mobile telecommunications) is one of the great successes of the EU. Today, about 75% of all EU citizens own a mobile phone, and some of the largest producers of mobile phones are European businesses.





Access to healthcare

Wherever EU citizens might be within the Union, they are entitled to the same health services as local citizens in that area. All they need is an E111 form, which will show proof of eligibility. European Socialists have also fought hard to give EU citizens legal assistance in their own language should they have an accident while travelling in another EU country.



Giving people new skills

To help people back into the job market, the EU has set up training programmes to give unemployed people new skills. Through such schemes, the EU hopes to create some 20 million new jobs by 2010.



Improving our environment

Since the 1970s, the EU has promoted a high level of environmental protection, resulting in cleaner air, a ban on leaded petrol, cleaner beaches, safer industry and an increase in recycling, which has led to a reduction in the number of landfill sites in the Union. European Socialists believe that a healthy environment is a citizen's right and are committed to giving future generations a well-preserved environment.



The European Union in the world

In 1999, EU countries decided to establish a common foreign policy to give them a larger voice on the international stage and to tackle modern threats such as terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. European Socialists support nuclear disarmament and measures to combat sales of chemical and biological weapons as well as mines, small arms, and ballistic missiles. European Socialists also support sanctions on countries which abuse human rights and a common asylum system is being established to ensure fair treatment of people fleeing such countries. The EU has a long history of financial support for projects to tackle poverty in developing countries which respect human rights, follow democratic principles and promote the rule of law and good governance.



European football and TV

Football and other sports clubs are now free to field any number of players from other EU countries after the Court of Justice's Bosman Ruling, matching rules which allow EU citizens to work in any EU country with the same rights as local workers. Also, European law ensures that major sporting events in the EU are broadcast freely to the public.



The challenge of the millennium

The first challenge for Europe was to maintain peace and rebuild after the war. In the 1980s, it was to build the single market. In the 1990s, it was to create a single currency. Now, the challenge is to continue enlarging the EU, creating stability, peace and prosperity for all. Enlargement is a great opportunity for the EU which European Socialists have actively promoted, working closely with Socialists from accession countries to represent all their constituents.



How does the European Union affect you?

This story shows just some of the ways the European Union affects our daily lives. There is a European Parliament and Commission office in each of the EU countries which you can contact for more information, as well as the Parliament and Commission websites:

<http://europa.eu.int>



Who are we?

The European Parliament directly represents the interests of citizens in the European Union. The members of Parliament are directly elected every five years and are members of political groups, such as the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

Our priorities are to:

- include employment and social aspects in Economic Policy;
- promote a healthier and sustainable environment;
- create a European area of peace, freedom, security and justice;
- ensure that Europe has a strong voice at global level and that our policies promote development in the world's poorest countries.

We played a key role in drafting the Charter of Fundamental Rights, incorporated into the draft EU Constitution. We will play a full role in the continuing work to shape the European Union of the future, and in bringing success to the enlarged Union.



To get more information about our organisation, policies and how we represent you, visit our website:

<http://www.socialistgroup.org>



CONTACT

Socialist Group in the European Parliament

European Parliament

Rue Wiertz

B-1047 Brussels

+32 (0)2 284 14 40

pesgroup@europarl.eu.int