

# STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

S&D GROUP ROUND TABLE DEBATES  
MAY & JUNE 2010



**S&D**

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

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Jan Pronk	Professor/Speaker	Netherlands
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Kathleen Van Brempt	Head of Delegation	Belgium
Kristian Vigenin	Coordinator S&D Group	Bulgaria
Janelle Ward	Academic Speaker	USA
Bernhard Weßels	Academic Speaker	Germany
Glenis Willmott	Head of Delegation	UK
Boris Zala	Head of Delegation	Slovakia

## **S&D Group round table debates first half 2010:**

- I. Youth and politics: towards a new model of citizenship? ..... 4**  
European Parliament, Brussels 12 May 2010
  
- II. European Social Democracy: perspectives and potential one year after  
the 2009 EP elections ..... 7**  
Limelette, 9 June 2010
  
- III. A progressive agenda for the foreign policy of the European Union ..... 10**  
European Parliament, Brussels 30 June 2010

## FOREWORD

In autumn 2009, in the aftermath of the June elections to the European Parliament, the Bureau of the S&D Group in the European Parliament decided to join the debate on the future of European Social Democracy by organising a number of round table debates. In this brochure, you will find short presentations on the first three of these debates, held in May and June 2010.

Recent developments show that the dwindling support for Socialists, Social Democrats and Democrats in the last few years is not an irreversible trend. The revival and strengthening of our political family requires a frank and open debate mobilising our parties, parliamentarians, foundations and party members at all levels. We welcome the activities of the PES and FEPS in this respect. The S&D Group, as a unique and permanent meeting place of European Socialists, Social Democrats and Democrats, stresses the need to engage in a truly cross-border debate.

The round tables brought together the S&D Group leadership with a limited number of speakers, leaders and representatives of PES and FEPS, as well as participants from outside our direct political family. We felt it was important to report back to those who are active and interested in these deliberations throughout our political family.

We are very pleased with the results of the first debates, and we thank moderator Jacki Davis and the secretariat team led by Ton Beumer for their contributions.

Our first round table on youth was a unique gathering of young MEPs, trainees and facebook debaters with academics and the Group leadership. Young people still tend to be more left-wing than the population as a whole and we have to take up the challenge of becoming more relevant in their eyes.

The second round table made an overall analysis of the situation one year after the European Parliament elections on the basis of contributions from Bernhard Weßels and Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. It concluded that there is no overall decline in electoral support, but rather different cyclical developments in south, west, north and eastern Europe, coupled with a general increase in the volatility of voters. In a context of globalisation and permanent change, electoral support depends on our capacity to provide security and fight fear.

A third round table with Massimo d'Alema and Jan Pronk provided a down-to-earth analysis of the importance of the EU for a progressive foreign policy and made clear how a lack of willingness to pool sovereignty amongst the member states, makes the Union irrelevant in areas where it could make a difference.

We hope you enjoy reading this brochure and we will report on the next series of round tables early next year.

**Martin SCHULZ**

President

**Maria BADIA I CUTCHET**

Vice-President responsible  
for the Round table programme



# YOUTH AND POLITICS: TOWARDS A NEW MODEL OF CITIZENSHIP?

European Parliament, Brussels 12 May 2010

## Main presentations

### Anne Muxel

*CRNS Director of Research at the Centre of Political Science Research at Science Po (CEVIPOF), Paris*

There is a common perception that falling turnout among youngsters is the result of apathy among the younger generation. But while turnout is significantly lower among young people than in the population as a whole – generally about 10% lower – this does not mean they have no interest in politics.

Over three-quarters of young people think it is important to vote and two-thirds feel it is the most effective form of political action; they are calling, however, for representative democracy to be combined with participatory democracy (for example, in the form of Internet-based discussion forums and actions, demonstrations and protests). There is a growing spectrum of means of political expression and young people are better at using all these different possibilities, particularly in defence of values such as equality, human rights, pacifism and anti-racism.

So is falling turnout a sign of a break down of civic spirit and a democratic deficit, or does it rather point to the emergence of a new model of citizenship?

There are many reasons why young people do not turn out to vote. Some of them are structural: they are at a very dynamic time in their lives when they are focused on finding jobs (especially during a period of economic crisis) and on starting their adult lives, and there may be practical reasons why they do not register to vote in countries where this is required.

But there are other reasons too: a lack of trust in politics and the weakening of political allegiances, with many young people deciding only at the last minute who to vote for (if they vote at all). This is coupled with the fact that voting habits, which are formed at an early age, are much less enshrined in today's youngsters than in older generations.



## “ Snapshots of the debate

*“In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the socialist world movement was an emotional movement which captured the hearts of young people. We stand for the same things now as we did then, so why don't young people come to us?”*

*“We have become too technocratic. Young people see us as professional politicians. We need to let our emotions come out and show more passion.”*

*“The focus should never be on what we have to do to attract people - it should be on providing answers to the problems we face. If young people think we are aiming at political survival, they will not grant us even that.”*

*“Young people are the ones who are able to go onto the streets to fight for what they believe in. At the moment, it does not seem that we have a message that will really make them get out and fight.”*

*“Young people are working in NGOs, for international organisations, volunteering, working with disabled children. This shows that they do want to get involved – they do want to make a difference.”*

*“Social media offer huge possibilities and are popular, but cannot replace build traditional social relationships between people. If we do not succeed in convincing people through face-to-face contacts, how can we expect to do it one step removed through the social media?”*

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This growing indifference and withdrawal from the political system could spark a real crisis in representative democracy and undermine the legitimacy of the system.

It is vital to restore the credibility of, and confidence in, politics as a precondition for finding a solution to this problem. There is also a growing need to highlight ‘attractive issues’ which matter to young people, as they will turn out to vote if they think it will make a difference on the issues they care about. Improving democratic and political education in schools to familiarise young people with the significance of politics at an early age is also important, and consideration should be given to lowering the voting age, as has already been done in some countries.

Above all, now more than ever, there is a need to “forge a social project which young people will sign up to.” For Socialists and Social Democrats, there is every reason to invest in this. Although young people are generally less left-wing than two decades ago, they still tend to be more left-wing than the population as a whole.

## **Janelle Ward**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Media and Communications, Erasmus University Rotterdam*

The new media are important tools to promote political participation among young people and the population as a whole. However, having a presence on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter is not a guarantee of greater interaction with young people, who are often cynical about their content. Nobody believes that Facebook pages of senior politicians are actually written by the politicians themselves, prompting youngsters to ask: “Why should we engage with ghost-writers?”

There is one thing worse than being totally inactive online: establishing a presence and then letting it stagnate. Social networking sites require a committed individual or team effort to maintain an active presence.



# EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: PERSPECTIVES AND POTENTIAL ONE YEAR AFTER THE 2009 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Limelette, 9 June 2010

## Main presentations

### Bernhard Weßels

*Senior researcher at the Social Science Research Centre (WZB) and Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt University, Berlin*

Some have predicted the end of Social Democracy on the grounds that its main goals have been achieved (the welfare state, relative prosperity and reduced social inequalities) and Social Democrats find it increasingly difficult to differentiate themselves from other parties.

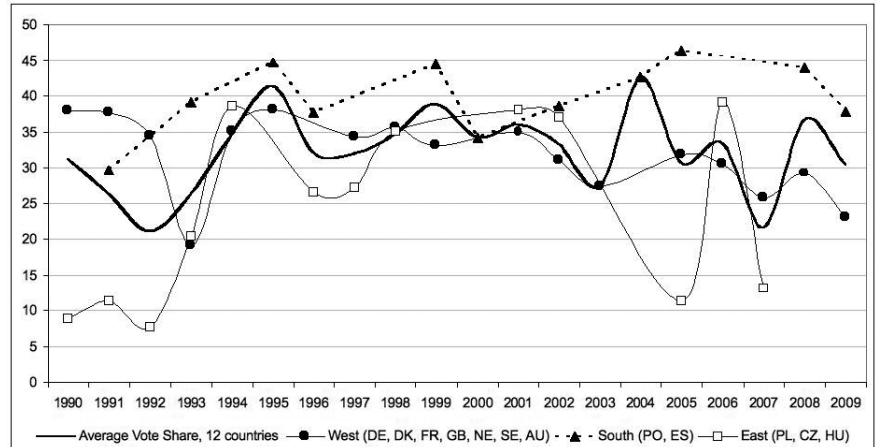
But an analysis of election results across Europe between 1990 and 2009 does not point to an overall decline in support for Social Democrat parties, either in terms of their share of the vote or involvement in government. The problem is more cyclical in nature, combined with extreme volatility in voter behaviour in some countries.



But Social Democracy does face serious challenges, most notably because there is no such thing any longer as a 'core' voter the movement can rely on. The proportion of voters with a fixed allegiance to any one party is declining and the public now judges parties on their performance and outputs.

The trade unions are disproportionately represented in the movement, but their membership is declining. Rising education standards also pose a challenge for a movement which tends to attract the less educated, and falling support among young voters is a cause for concern.

Social Democrat parties were undoubtedly the 'big loser' in the 2009 European elections, although falling turnout was partly to blame. Given that Social Democrat supporters are generally more likely to stay at home than other parties' supporters, the movement needs to make a greater effort to mobilise them.



**Average Vote Share of Social Democratic Parties Overall and Divided into Groups of Countries, 1990-2009**

Source: Bernhard Weßels, Is There Any Truth in the Thesis of the End of Social Democracy? An Empirical Analysis of the Election Results and Voter Profiles of Social Democratic Parties in Europe over the Past 20 Years, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Policy Analysis (IPA), August 2010. Author's calculations based on the database "Parties, Elections and Governments", research unit "Demokratie", WZB. Paper download: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/07414.pdf>.

## Poul Nyrup Rasmussen

*President, Party of European Socialists*

The 2009 Euro-elections were not truly pan-European elections and were rather a series of referenda on the respective national Governments. Social Democratic parties therefore generally lost in countries where they were already weak and did well in those where they were already strong. Although Social Democratic parties lost ground in the elections, no other mainstream parties made any significant gains. The turnout was the lowest ever. Reversing this trend of voter apathy is the single biggest electoral challenge for European Social Democrats.



This apathy is born of a feeling that voting for European representatives will not make a difference. The fall in support for Social Democracy also reflects the conservative success in exploiting the 'fear factor', particularly about immigration and job insecurity.

The Social Democratic family also suffered from the failure to nominate a single candidate for the European Commission. Happily this has been addressed by the PES and we now have a firm commitment to fight the 2014 election with a clear candidate at the head of the campaign.

Social Democrats must counter the conservatives' retreat towards 'the politics of disengagement'. The right-wing parties' focus on individualism and market forces is an attempt to shrink the public sphere.

The fight back must be waged at both the national and European level. The Social Democratic family must promote the value of the public sphere, the benefits of equality and the strength of community. By adapting our programmes to the world today, modernising our politics and making a progressive connection with voters, we can reinvigorate the Social Democratic way and prepare for 2014. The PES initiative 'Our Vision for Progressive Societies in the 21st Century' aims to do just that, by involving all actors of our family, from activists through to party leaders, in an open debate on the renewal of Social Democracy.

## “ Snapshots of the debate

*“Voters are becoming very volatile. They are trying to catch the rainbow and when they don't find it, they go to other parties.”*

*“We cannot just keep things as they were. As society changes, our message cannot be the same as it was 20 years ago.”*

*“Social Democracy is a child of the industrial society and the industrial society was in a permanent state of flux and change. We are used to change and we can innovate in the face of globalisation.”*

*“People see us as very technocratic parties: we need strong leaders and a very clear set of values.”*

*“You have got to give people a message of hope, the promise of a good future.”*

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# A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA FOR THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 30 June 2010

## Main presentations

### Massimo d'Alema

*Former Italian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, President of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)*



The EU has long campaigned strongly for multilateral world governance and yet, paradoxically, we now have a US administration that is asking for multilateralism and Europe seems unable to “get ready for this appointment” and present feasible solutions to global problems.

EU foreign policy is a projection of its capacity to play a leading role in elaborating a strategy to get out of the current economic crisis. The crisis has highlighted: 1) a deficit of democracy (we lack governance and control); 2) a deficit of equality (globalisation has produced huge global economic inequalities); 3) a deficit of innovation (with low wages in developing countries sustaining high profits without any kind of innovation policy). Europe has been unable to propose any real alternatives and project a clear profile, with implications for the relevance of its foreign policy.

The projection of the EU's image abroad also depends on displaying unity in international institutions, but it is seen by the international community as a “Europe of nations, in conflict with each other for the sake of their prestige”.

The two priorities for a progressive EU foreign policy agenda must be to improve its performance in its ‘macro-region’ (the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Turkey) and develop a strong position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, a vital issue but one where the Union’s position is both weak and uncertain. It must also continue to work on its relationships with the East, especially Russia and has a moral duty to build a constructive presence in Africa. Above all, we need a clear vision of the identity we want for Europe.

## Jan Pronk

*Former Dutch Minister for Development and Cooperation, former UN Special Representative for Sudan, Professor at the International Institute for Social Studies, The Hague*

The world order has changed completely over the last decade. Globalisation means there is no longer any distinction between traditional foreign policy and international economic, trade and climate policies, and no distinction between EU foreign policy and the international policies of individual Member States. However, the EU is not seen by the outside world as relevant any more, because it is perceived as internally divided and very slow to act.

The future will be conflict-ridden because of increased poverty, rising unemployment and the climate challenge. The most important objective for EU foreign policy should therefore be conflict management, based on protecting human rights, enhancing security and pursuing policies to reduce inequalities, eradicate poverty and promote environmental sustainability. The protection of human rights, in particular, requires us to begin negotiating solutions to conflicts from the start, as violations generally get worse the longer a conflict goes on.



EU foreign policy should have four main objectives: meeting the targets we have agreed in the past (including the Millennium Development Goals and the Kyoto targets); finding a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict; participating in international peace operations within the United Nations, based on a DDD approach – Diplomacy, Development and Defence; and resolving internal disputes and strengthening the EU's common position in a range of areas.

The inequality and poverty in the world is partly a result of our policies. Equality is an unattainable goal, but we can push for less inequality – that has to be the objective of our foreign policy.



## “ Snapshots of the debate

*Europe's decreasing role throughout the world is the responsibility of the conservatives, but where are the progressive forces to be found? We have not managed to come forward with a strong and clear alternative policy.”*

*“Europe should be leading on the recovery, on climate change, on trade, on better standards and on reform of the financial system, and that is not the case at the moment. Our family should push for Europe to take its responsibilities.”*

*“Before we start telling the rest of the world what to do, we have to find support within the EU for going beyond national interests.”*

*“It is a mistake to think you can get round the Israel-Palestine conflict. In fact, it is the central nexus, but Europe's position lacks clarity and determination.”*

*“Reducing inequality is a very important element of foreign policy because it could help to reduce the potential for conflict and that it is a key objective of foreign policy.”*

*“It is important to identify the common interests of the EU as a political entity, not just as a free market.”*

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