



new LIBERTAS

New Libertas is a publication of European Liberal Youth

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Different shades of liberalism

American democrats and European liberals

Aloys Rigaut, LYMEC President

Having a good time in Strasbourg

Marie-Louise Schmidt & Michael Kruse

Liberals in power in Germany

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**The Eastern Strand - Liberalism in Central and
Eastern Europe in the 2000s**

Lavinia Teodorescu

When it's all about the moment: The Baltic Way

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The essence of liberalism

Editorial by Alexander Plahr

Dear friends,

we call ourselves the European Liberal Youth. But what exactly is liberal? What is liberalism about? In LYMEC we do have quite different member organizations from different backgrounds. All have their own political focus, resulting from their tradition as well as local political landscape. Some are social-liberal, others are more free market-liberal. Some do traditionally aim to form governments with the social democrats, others with the christian democrats or conservatives, some are open towards both options. Feel free to replace by appropriate political naming convention for any given country.

So what unites those different variants of liberalism we find in our membership? What makes them all liberal in the end? It is the idea that individual liberty is the core as well as the aim of all political action. A liberty that does not shy away from responsibility, but to the contrary is the prerequisite for the personal responsibility in the first place. That being free means to be free of human oppression. That being free is more important than being safe. And that we aim for fair chances, not equal results. Because all people are different, but of equal value and rights.

As long as one does not infringe the liberty of others, one may do whatever he or she likes. To constantly check that this is not the case is the inherent duty resulting of this idea. And only in the case that these limits in fact are touched, the state may (and indeed needs to) intervene. But apart from that, neither the government, nor society or church, public opinion or even good taste are censors of people's lives. They may do whatever they want, they are free.

That's why one cannot split liberalism into different policy areas and be "liberal" only in some of them, like for example, economic policy. Or be only "liberal" in for example, civil liberties. Because liberalism is an ideology as well as an ethic that is holistic in itself, that is what in former times would have been called atomic - meaning that it can not be separated. The essence of liberalism is the freedom of the individual - it is this essence, that unites us.

Alexander Plahr
Chief-editor of New Libertas
Vice President of LYMEC

P.S. Oh, and Europe, of course!

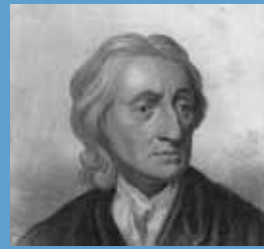
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**BECOME
INDIVIDUAL
MEMBER
OF
EUROPEAN
LIBERAL
YOUTH**

You can be an Individual LYMEC Member!

In some European countries there are no liberal youth organisations that could provide young liberally minded people the access to LYMEC. Also, some European idealists also would like to work directly on the level of European politics even if they are already members of their national liberal youth organisations. To those people the Individual Members' Section (IMS) is a great opportunity to get direct access to LYMEC and its events.

Individual members, together with the Member organizations form the backbone of liberal youth politics in Europe. They elect their delegates to the congress via an online election in advance to the congress. All individual members that have paid their membership fee can vote at this election of the IMS-delegates to the LYMEC congress. The amount of IMS-delegates depends on the membership figures of the IMS.



American democrats and European liberals: brothers or just friends?

Article by Aloys Rigaut, President of LYMEC

“There is no doubt about the fact that American democrats are the closest to European liberals as regards civil rights and society issues, especially since the 1960s and J.F. Kennedy.”

It has now become common sense in the European political landscape to believe that “liberal” has a different meaning in America than in Europe and that any comparison between American and European liberals is without hope, but is that true? Whilst putting this into question, I am aware that I will probably receive some laughter, but after attending recently the Convention of the Young Democrats of America (YDA), I just cannot refrain myself.

YDA is now a full and active member in the International federation of liberal youth (IFLRY), but even in our ranks, I continue hearing the same scepticism, melted with some admiration. Where does it come from? Most will say that European liberals are in the middle between mainstream Republicans, supposed to be economically market-oriented (*laissez-faire*) but socially conservative, and mainstream Democrats, supposed to be economically State-oriented (regulation) but socially liberal. In other words, the same old debate between social liberalism and classical liberalism, or Keynes and Hayek. Boring... No need to cross the Atlantic to see such differences, even in LYMEC you can feel them. These clashes are just part of our great family, of our identity as liberals.

There is no doubt about the fact that American democrats are the closest to European liberals as regards civil rights and society issues, especially since the 1960s and J.F. Kennedy. This could be summarised into

equal rights/opportunities for all regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, or national origin.

There is also no doubt that European liberals identify more strongly to the Democrats’ internationalism than to the Republicans’ unilateralism, with some strong resonance today as regards environmental policies to fight against climate change, an issue of so much importance for us Europeans. But it is probably less known that the Democratic Party was at its foundation a strong advocate of a weak central government: just like us today, they were critical about delegating too many powers to the federal level and promoted the principle of subsidiarity. It may not thus be surprising that the party has evolved, just like us in Europe, into the party of minorities: far from wanting to centralise and harmonise everything, it has defended the rights of being different and the importance of diversity, another fight that we certainly share.

Let’s face it; the main bone of contention between American democrats and European liberals is about the economy. One may wonder however why.... Historically, the Democratic Party has always opposed unregulated business and finance, favoured progressive income taxes and promoted welfare spending targeted at the poor. I probably don’t need to remind the virtues of unregulated finance, we are in the midst of the most important crisis since the Great

Depression because of that stupidity. No, we are not living in a pure and perfect market, we are all humans, we make errors, and therefore we need regulation, that's a fact of life. The point about resorting to taxation to reduce inequalities may certainly be more controversial from an economic liberal dogmatic point of view. I nevertheless wonder if some European liberals would go as far as some US Republicans, comparing Obama's healthcare plan to socialism... Probably not, unless they want to commit political suicide of course!

We shall not forget that social services and progressive income tax were invented by European liberals in the first half of the 20th century. William Beveridge, the inventor of the "Welfare State", and J.M. Keynes were both prominent liberal democrats, but other examples could be quoted from other national contexts than the UK. And it made perfect sense from a liberal point of view: how can someone vote in full intelligence if one is in the want? How can you be free if you are not educated? How can you be educated if you don't have the money to go to school? How can education be free and open to all if the State does not intervene to redistribute wealth through taxation? The same logic of course applies to health and other social services. This is how the latter started to appear at the end of the 19th century throughout Europe, and the same in the US. The movement then only strengthened in the 1930s, as all our societies were shaken by the Great Depression. Franklin D. Roosevelt even theorised that freedom into a "freedom from want" - the ultimate liberalism probably.

Does this make US Democrats "socialists"? Not more than we European liberals I am afraid. There are actually major distinctions between American (liberal) democrats and the European notion of social democracy. First, EU social-democrat programs are aimed at providing national welfare programs for the entire country, whilst programs designed by US democrats are designed to assist only lower-class individuals. And second, US democrats have always been reluctant to the nationalization of private sector industries as a solution to any problem, preferring instead to rely on government regulation of abuses or excesses, whilst EU social-democrats could live with a large public sector economy. In this sense, the economic programme of US democrats and EU liberals is not that distant: we both favour a free enterprise system tempered by government intervention

(mixed economy), and history has proven that this was indeed the correct way to go.

Some will rightfully say however that the US Democratic Party is a wide party with a lot of trends, including even a conservative base in the Southern part, and a working-class part closer to European social-democrats. True, but political studies also show that (social) "liberals", also referred to as "progressives" or "modern liberals", constitute roughly half of the Democratic voter base and thereby forming the largest united typological demographic within the Party. Furthermore, according to the 2008 exit poll results, 89% of American liberals favoured the candidate of the Democratic Party, with white collar college-educated professionals now composing one the most vital component of the Party. A large majority of them favour universal health care, diplomacy over military action, stem cell research, LGBT rights and the legalization of same-sex marriage, secular government, stricter gun control, environmental protection laws, right to privacy, and the preservation of abortion rights. They also see immigration and cultural diversity positively. Of course, there can still be some differences, like some divisions about free trade agreements (NAFTA), or their support to affirmative action (would be considered totally illiberal in Europe), but still, how much closer do you want this to be from mainstream European liberalism?

The main problem in the end relies on the fact that US politics are very much bipolar, and that therefore the US Democratic Party must gather an electorate going beyond liberals to win elections. As a matter of fact, studies show that liberals constitute only 22% of the electorate in the USA, something pretty similar to the EU situation! We can thus only be happy that they represent about half of the Democratic voter base... You just need to look at certain liberal parties in Europe that managed to become dominant in their national political landscape (e.g. Venstre in Denmark, or CiU in Catalonia): in order to reach 30-40% of the electorate, these parties had to catch votes on the right-wing or left-wing electorate. This is called political pragmatism, and again, nothing really so surprising.

Yes liberalism is in the end also about pragmatism: we want progress, more and more freedoms, but we sometimes forget the price of each freedom we have gained.

"The main problem in the end relies on the fact that US politics are very much bipolar, and that therefore the US Democratic Party must gather an electorate going beyond liberals to win elections. ."



The Eastern Strand

Liberalism in Central and Eastern Europe in the 2000s

Article by Lavinia Teodorescu

“National Liberal Party reemerged from the ashes of the inter-war party of the same name, which had been dismantled in 1946. “

Wanting to find out more about liberalism in Eastern Europe, I met Blagovesta Cholova, a Bulgarian political science PhD at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. She is studying the construction of identity of right-wing parties in Poland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic; sitting in the glass and steel tower of the ULB, she told me that the main challenge is actually identifying what may be a right-wing party in a 21st century context.

At first, it would seem that seeing which parties are liberal would be easy: if they call themselves one, and if they belong to a liberal group like ELDR or the International Liberal, then that's what they are. There is, however, a vast array of cases in which some parties either identify themselves as liberal-conservatives, or their platform is liberal enough but choose to belong with the EPP, which has swept up many of the center parties in a mass movement of sorts, or else are ethnic parties, which are, if possible, even more difficult to align ideologically.

The second step is, then, to analyze the various Central and Eastern European parties' approach on different policy subjects and then to label them accordingly. This was very easy to do from the fall of the Communist regimes to more or less 1995. The right-wing parties, and especially the liberal ones, sprung up as a reaction and an alternative to Communism in the aftermath of its collapse, and sometimes fought against the still-communist bureaucracies

that took over; for instance, in Romania, the National Liberal Party reemerged from the ashes of the inter-war party of the same name, which had been dismantled in 1946. Its members, who were very keen on the tradition of the so-called 'historic' parties, actively but pacifically demonstrated against the newly-installed neo-communist government, a protest from which the government was saved only by the arrival of miner squads in Bucharest and the subsequent street fights.

A liberal party, then, would have been in favor of Europe, reform and privatization, and proud of its anti-Communist and dissident roots, as in, for instance, Poland, with the Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD) and the Democratic Union (UD). In Slovenia, on the other hand, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia party (LDS) was formed from the former Communist Youth organization, which had been a critic of the former system.

Around 1996 came the second wave of democratic elections. In this case, shifts were made: if the first winners of the elections had been former Communists, who had by now become Social Democrats of a fashion, they were usually replaced by bickering coalitions of small right-wing parties (again, Romania). If, on the other hand, liberal parties had won the first election, as in Poland, again, the unfavorable effects of the economic reforms, even when well under way, as well as general popular disillusionment and reform fatigue made

for the return of the Social Democrats. In this period, already, it was more difficult to see who was who, because now, as the possibility to join the EU had become real and that there was a true target for all the efforts, everyone was pro-European. Besides, there were many changes with the parties themselves, such as in Hungary, where the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) went on to become, from initially liberal, a civic, popular, 'patriotic' party.

Things got rather more confusing in the early 2000s. First of all, in the candidate countries for accession to the European Union, policy choices were orientated by the negotiations with the Commission and the necessity to comply with the *acquis communautaire*. In this field, then, the traditional shift between social democracy and neo-liberalism was no longer a relevant mean of identification.

Furthermore, many parties were confronted with an identity and legitimacy crisis, its results being a shift towards populism, nationalism and savior figures. In Bulgaria, for instance, in the aftermath of the economic crisis that hit the country in 1997, the liberal party of Simeon the IInd swept the elections in 2001, on the basis largely of his popularity and appeal as a political figure who would reform the country in 800 days.

Nowadays, the fragmentation, shifts and uncertainty continue, encouraged largely by the left's own identity crisis at a European level. In the mean time, some of the liberal parties, the prime example being the Czech Republic and Poland, have switched to a sort of euro-skeptic and essentially nationalistic brand of liberalism.

According to Blagovesta, it is unclear yet what direction the liberal parties of Central and Eastern Europe will head in. If one extrapolates from what happened in the Western European democracies, populist or nationalist streaks may be anticipated until such a time as a new political identity takes shape. The electoral base of the right-wing parties is generally not getting younger; the Green movement has a lot of appeal for the young, but it is not so well-developed in the ECE area and doesn't quite function entirely like a party yet.

The future may also bring a different political and institutional landscape, with NGOs and local groups taking the front scene, which will call for a radical redefinition of the very notions of parties and political representation as they are now.

Are things similar in the perspective of an actual liberal militant? This is the question I asked Julia Leferman of the National Liberal Party in Romania and former LYMEC Bureau member. She kindly answered extensively despite being in Romania and on holiday, and according to her, the main problem is indeed communication and getting the message across to jaded and inconstant voters.

The Romanian PNL (National Liberal Party) was in a coalition government from 1996 to 2000 and again from 2004 to 2008; during the last tenure, part of it as a minority government, they managed to pass across some very liberal reforms – namely, a flat tax rate that radically simplified the tax system and encouraged private initiative, a change for which they are still widely recognized. Now, the PNL is the main opposition party (with 22%) and is keeping an eye on the presidential elections this autumn. They may be advantaged by the unsuccessful management of the latest –or indeed, ongoing– financial crisis by the incumbent coalition government.

Twenty years on after the 1989 Revolution, it is still too early for the Romanian public to have acquired enough experience with the different colors of the political spectrum. The hope, as always, lies with the future, and even if the youth are for the most part uninvolved and declare themselves disappointed with the political system, they are, however, quite open to liberal values such as freedom of movement, of speech, initiative and justice. The medium-term strategy of the PNL is pro-European, against corruption, and promotes ambitious economic growth of a particularly alluring kind: seventh European country by size, seventh also by economic power. And if the Romanian liberals are successful in their electoral endeavor, Luxembourg for one had better watch out

“The medium-term strategy of the PNL is pro-European, against corruption, and promotes ambitious economic growth of a particularly alluring kind: seventh European country by size, seventh also by economic power..”

1) To avoid confusion, the Romanian governing coalition, at the time that I am writing this, is a broad-spectrum association of Social Democrats and Democrat-Liberals; the Democrat-Liberals are members of the EPP and broke off early on from the Social Democrats. The 'Liberal' appendage comes from a more recent merger with a wing of the National Liberal Party. Their platform may be characterized as non-specifically right-wing. They are rather a good example for what was said in §2, that there's more to a name than meets the eye.



LYMEC supports “Watson for president” – Having a good time in Strasbourg

Article by Marie-Louise Schmidt and Michael Kruse

“Just a week before we should arrive in Strasbourg, Graham Watson withdrew from the race – for uncertain reasons. “

A real highlight of campaigning for Liberal thought took place just at the constitution of the European Parliament in mid July 2009. 30 Liberals from all over Europe came together to lobby for a Liberal President of the European Parliament – his name ought to be Graham Watson. It has been the best campaign for a Liberal becoming President of the European Parliament so far. 22 country leaders were visited by Graham Watson, everybody knew about the campaign. It was time for him to become the President.

Knowing that, it was a great pleasure joining the campaign for two days in Strasbourg, which is quite a funny place to be at that time: Almost 40 percent of MPs were Freshmen, making the European Parliament a place where most people need to re-orientate themselves.

Just a week before we should arrive in Strasbourg, Graham Watson withdrew from the race – for uncertain reasons. Flights were booked, and so LYMEC decided to keep the trip and make it a discovery for young Europeans interested in international politics. It turned out to be a great trip that gave most participants a deeper understanding of the European Parliament and of politics as such.

On Monday, 13 July 2009 we met at the hostel to travel to the European Parliament to meet with Graham Watson. Meeting him was definitely one of several highlights of this trip. He explained his personal interest in the job and why he withdrew. The group got in touch with him very easily

and experienced that he would have been the right guy to represent the European Parliament. Also, the group was quite in favor of him when he ordered 50 beers for us.

Having met the man we wanted to lobby for, we went back to our hostel to discover the best food that one can have in a hostel. Afterwards we went out and enjoyed a lovely time in the centre of Strasbourg. Early Tuesday morning we went up to possibly meet with another MP. After a very brief chat with the President of the European Commission Manuel Barroso we experienced the election of Jerzy Busek, who is President of the European Parliament since then and the right man to further strengthen the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe. Good luck, Mr. Busek!

Next we had the great pleasure to meet with Guy Verhofstadt, who was the newly elected leader of the ALDE group in the European Parliament. Mr. Verhofstadt explained the Liberal claims for the Commission's politics in the following years. It was very impressive to realize why Guy Verhofstadt has been leader of a national government that considers a number of different political groups – his enormous talent to channel many different opinions will be a key essential for his way to lead ALDE in the next years.

We as participants of this trip really need to thank LYMEC for inviting us to Strasbourg. Although the journey had a different aim at the beginning – it was a good time to be in Strasbourg these days!



Liberals in power in Germany

Article by Berthold Haustein

Thought it is not yet a month ago that the general elections in Germany lead to governmental participation of the FDP (Free Democratic Party) there is already a considerable liberal impact noticeable in German politics. First results of the negotiations between the future partners of the FDP and the CDU (Christian Democratic Party) show that civil liberties will be a major issue in German politics again. Not only that the idea of blocking (and thus censoring) instead of deleting child pornography on internet pages will not be brought into power in the next years, also the cases in which data retention may be applied will be strictly limited. Moreover the ability to search private computer will be subject only to the national (instead of state or local) criminal authorities.

But the FDP has not only set cornerstones for liberal politics in the field of civil rights: If it comes to financial issues they have seen their ideas through, too. Although no official figures have left the negotiations in Berlin yet, it has already been made clear by both involved parties, that there will be tax cuts in order to support families with low or middle income.

The FDP will have their share in personal issues too. In the end 5 ministries will be held by liberal politicians in the next four years. The minister of health will be Philipp Rösler from Lower Saxony. Born in 1973 it will be his task to represent young people, their problems and perspectives!

After all not only the elections but also the following negotiations have been highly successful for liberals in Germany. After the first steps are made we now have to see that liberals ideas will be implemented throughout the whole administrative period so that Germany will be seen and named "a more liberal country" when the next elections will come!



When it's all about the moment: The Baltic Way

Article by Gouda Lomanaite

“This year the world commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Berlin Wall, when the iron curtain fell.”

We find ourselves in the year 2009. The year of European Parliament elections, the 54th edition of the Eurovision song contest, the year that a man of Hope was inaugurated as President. This year the world commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Berlin Wall, when the iron curtain fell. If we look even deeper the list of events that shaped world history will be difficult to end.

In Lithuania we find this year rather festive. It is the thousandth year that we count the existence of Lithuania as a state. One thousand years ago the pagan ancestors killed some Christian on a mission to enlighten them and this bloodshed event has been carefully written down into the Annals of Quedlinburg as all matters concerning the Holy Roman Empire. But it seems that from then on came the thousand years of war for this small piece of land near the Baltic Sea. Lithuanians (as some Latvians and Estonians) fought the Crusaders, the Swedish, the Norwegians, the Turks, the Prussians, the Germans, the Polish and several other uprising nations through the course of history. Some battles were won, some were lost. However, one battle started somewhere in a room full of conspiracy anticipation.

This brings me to another memorable date – August 23, 1939. On this day the foreign ministers of the USSR and Germany - Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, following the orders of their superiors Stalin and Hitler, signed a treaty

officially entitled „Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Third German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics“ or to keep it short The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. To say the least it ended up a rather important piece of document. Among the declaration of neutrality and promises not to join any alliances against the other party, the document included a secret protocol dividing Northern and Eastern Europe to the disposition of Germany and the Soviet Union. In the initial pact the Baltic States were divided as follows: Latvia and Estonia were assigned to the Soviet Union and Lithuania assigned to the Reich sphere of influence. However, less than two weeks after the start of war came another treaty the “German-Soviet treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation” in which the map was modified giving the German side more of Poland territory and Lithuania to the Soviet Union.

The war began and in mid 1940 the Soviet Union joyfully accepted the Baltic States into the Union on the ground of their request to be admitted. Even though there were active initiatives to resist the occupation none of them led to success and most of the activist were deported, imprisoned or killed. This gave a clear understanding that it is much better not to get deported or killed and steered the public to embrace unarmed actions and underground protests all of which sought independence. 14 years earlier from now, after the period of Stalin repression, Nikita Khrushchev de-Stalinization and more liberal approach, after the

stagnation of Leonid Brezhnev, two short term rule of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, came a man with a vision of revised Soviet Union and communism. Declaring the start of mostly economic reforms Perestroika ("restructuring"), Glasnost ("openness"), Uskoreniye ("acceleration") and Demokratizatsiya ("democratization") Mikhail Gorbachev gave the states a breath of fresh air liberalizing the way people talked, bought and spent.

If you would ask me what the starting point of massive civic engagement in the late nineties was, I would answer – music. Not only because all Baltic States have a long lasting tradition of folk music gatherings and festivals starting from mid 1870 in Estonia and Latvia and reaching Lithuania in early 1920. The festivals during the inter-war period were kept alive and organized mostly by civil society actors and different nongovernmental organizations. Even in the times of occupation these festivals would draw audiences up to 100 thousand people in each country.

Folk music and dance festivals served as a good gathering tool but in the late nineties something unexpected hit the cultural scene. The option of openly giving a concert was still not easy to fulfill to musicians, but in 1987 one of the first concert tours – Rock March started. It brought together a number of well known yet young bands and held the unofficial slogan "Something happened". It had its roots in the stories about freedom, independence of speech and romantic idealism depicted in bright colors of patriotic feelings. The March itself at starting points did not seek political changes, however for the first time it pulled many young people to daylight of their choice, even if it was for type of music. The March swept across the country and pulled in crowds of people who would come to listen to the new generation of the more liberalized and free. To put it in less romantic words the music festivals gave a platform for people to make connections, recruit activists and start the action.

And people did start the action: late nineties were full of massive street actions, protests and meetings. Estonians were the first one to create a structure for coordination among initiatives. In 1988 the Popular front of Estonia Rahvarinne and Sąjūdis movement in Lithuania were established, last came in Popular front of Latvia Tautas fronts. After the start in the Baltic States a number of Popular Fronts were created almost simultaneously in many parts of the

USSR. The Baltic Popular fronts were very much separate structures having the same targets – to ensure that the three annexed countries would regain independence. The partnership among the three structures was on the political level seeking to condemn the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and its consequences; however this type of manifestation wasn't really reaching the target. It was starting to be crystal clear that a common action with the people within the countries is needed.

The upcoming year 1989 gave a substantial reason for united gathering. The National fronts in all Baltic States decided upon forming a human chain which would connect the territories of the countries. 50 years after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed, on August 23, 1989, three small nations living by the Baltic Sea surprised the world by taking hold of each other's hands demanding the re-establishment of the their brutally deprived independence.

The route of the Baltic way was to connect the three capitals; it started in Vilnius Gediminas castle and Cathedral square, crossing Ryga and Daugava river and ending in Tallinn foot of Toompea going along the Via Baltica for around 650 kilometers. The news about this action spread mostly person to person, only two official announcements were aired on the radio in Lithuania. People working at the main radio station within their programs played the anthem of the action "Bunda jau Baltija" ("The Baltic is rising") but also informed about the traffic jams, delays, situation on the borders. It was counted that for every kilometer of the road 1.5 thousand people would have to show up.

In modern day terms what happened could be called something reminding a flash mob only bigger and longer in duration. People had to gather on a set route wait until the set time and at the moment when the clock strikes 7 PM local time take each other's hands and sing together for the freedom of the countries. The enthusiasm of the people was striking: people flocked the area with their families in cars, buses and cargo trucks or anything that was capable of getting them to the set destination. Some did not make it in time, that's why the Baltic way has branches away from the official route.

When it's all about the moment: 7 PM. 3 countries. More than 2 million people. 1 goal – to change the world. It was all about peace and unity in the struggle to be free.

"In modern day terms what happened could be called something reminding a flash mob only bigger and longer in duration."



Libertarians – Locke’s dissatisfied heirs

Article by Jonathan Dannemann

“The most coherent theoretical foundation of modern libertarianism is Robert Nozick’s *Man, State and Utopia*. It was published in 1974, partly as a refutation of John Rawls. “

There is a broad consensus that John Locke is the founder of the liberal tradition that began during the Enlightenment age, certainly to a greater extent than his fellow contractualists Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, present-day reinventions of his theory, especially of his *Second Treatise of Government*, differ vastly and inevitably have begun to contradict each other. The same is true for the comparatively small branch of libertarian theories that surfaced to revive the Enlightenment spirit of Locke’s theory. As is frequently the case among siblings, libertarians argue about petty details at times, so there is no coherent libertarian theory.

The very term “libertarianism” is contested. In the 19th century, it was frequently used for classical anarchists and syndicalists in the Marxist tradition such as Proudhon. After World War II in the United States, it was, albeit reluctantly, coined and popularized by a group of concerned liberals. “Liberalism” ended up as the descriptive term for a more left-wing agenda which, at times, justifies the use of force for a change for is perceived to be a better state of affairs. In contrast, “libertarianism” opposes governmental interventions. What necessitated this semantic shift? In less than 15 years, the heartland of classical, albeit never “pure” liberalism, the United States, had, in the libertarian eye, caved in to the necessities of time. Not only had the Roosevelt government launched the “New Deal”, a massive effort of redistribution, but it had also revived interventionism by establishing worldwide involvement not only by

entering the war, but being prepared to confront the Soviet Union militarily, if necessary. As these policies were continually sustained, political consensus held that these were liberal, and intellectuals and pundits felt the urge to redefine themselves. However, “conservative” was regarded as an equally inadequate label, which is no surprise when thinking of McCarthyism and later of Gerald Ford’s “Great Society”.

This awkward story of a word already indicates the breadth and minuteness of different libertarianisms that are out there today. I will, however, try to give an overview of shared values and political preferences, alongside the example of two famous libertarians.

These shared values and political preferences are based precisely on a firm belief in the primacy of the individual before the group and John Locke’s theories. Libertarians champion Locke’s theory of self-ownership, deducing all other rights like corporal integrity from it, as opposed to the general enumeration of human rights beginning with the entitlement to life in first place. Self-ownership is the foundation the libertarian theory of property, drawing on Locke again, who asserted that mixing one’s labor with external objects constitutes ownership. Ownership, in turn, can be exchanged by contract, and as long as this does not happen at the expense of others, any exchange of legitimate ownership is justified. This is why libertarians deny Locke’s claim that there are reasonable limits as to how much property an individual

should be allowed to accumulate. They would respond that an individual owes nothing to society, except where he or she is obliged to honor a contract.

A second libertarian principle that can be inferred from self-ownership is non-aggression. Any use of force or the threat thereof is regarded by libertarians as an act of aggression and maybe therefore be repelled in a proportional manner. This principle inspired 19th-century liberals on both shores of the Atlantic to advocate free trade and the termination of slavery while rejecting imperialism and wars. Whereas Manchester liberalism is nowadays frequently identified with the excesses of the Industrial Revolution, Richard Cobden expressed an idea that was highly controversial during his lifetime: "War does not pay."

The non-aggression principle leads fairly straightforwardly to the conclusion that libertarians strongly lean towards the exclusive interpretation of Isaiah Berlin's definition of entitlements, commonly known as "negative rights". Berlin, although not a libertarian, opposed "having the freedom to" something. This, he thought, may open the gates to the coercion of an individual for others, allegedly for his or the common good. The nearly forgotten 19th-century French economist and contemporary of Cobden, Frédéric Bastiat, referred to this when he observed that the state is an illusion whereby everybody aims to live at everybody else's expense.

A libertarian of a certain kind has spawned attention in the light of Barack Obama's election as US president. Sales of the American classic *Atlas Shrugged*, published by Russian-born Ayn Rand in 1957, have soared to a high in the midst of the global financial crisis and the Obama administration's unprecedented bailout of the American economy, the second run on the book since its release. What makes Rand's theories so special is that she praises selfishness as a virtue rather than a vice in an intentionally provocative manner. She concludes from this that only we ourselves know what is best for us and can pursue our interests rationally. One of her characters in the novel vows to never have anybody else live at her expense, while pledging to never live at anybody else's expense herself.

The most coherent theoretical foundation of modern libertarianism is Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. It was published in 1974, partly as a refutation of John Rawls. Unlike anarcho-capitalists, libertarians consistently opposing any kind of government,

Nozick thinks that a very limited form of government is not only defensible, but would also develop automatically unintentionally among all societal participants, e.g. when issuing a currency.

Furthermore, alluding to the "tragedy of the commons", he reasons that some public goods can simply not be justly physically diversified among individuals, e.g. security and the administration of the legal system, and it is those goods that Nozick deems rightful public. Somebody who hires a certain amount of security forces will ultimately, whether intentionally or not, provide for the security of others. This is considered illegitimate because some will enjoy a free ride, although their labor has contributed nothing to the hiring of the security forces. This seems like an average case for a state, but bare in mind that Nozick disagreed with a lot of governmental activity we consider normal – regardless of whether it's the full-fledged Scandinavian welfare state or indirect involvement through federal grants in education, pensions and health care like in the United States. In return for the lack of governmental guarantees, Nozick stresses the importance of personal responsibility and obligation towards others.

Would libertarianism work in the current world? Certainly not in Europe, where it's influence is marginal. Most liberal organizations are very much in favor of social policies and positive liberty of a kind, and advocacy of the free market is dead. There rests, however, a certain charm of being at least vaguely known to most liberals while remaining with little influence. In this role, libertarianism is very much suited to serve as a reminder that power is a corrupting influence, and we should therefore never place too much confidence in it, but rather into our peers. Although a cooperative and compromising approach to politics is desirable, it can be a tough managerial business, and the ongoing promise of increasing prosperity, pleasure and personal problems management that currently prevails throughout the largest parts of world may not last forever.

By far the most important message that libertarianism has to offer is that politics cannot, and thus never should be, a substitute for personal responsibility – in the very specific sense that politics does not enable anything per se.

"By far the most important message that libertarianism has to offer is that politics cannot, and thus never should be, a substitute for personal responsibility "



MLS/LYMEC Event in Lisbon

Article by João Pedro Castro Mendes, Movimento Liberal Social

“The European Parliament must be pro-active in getting the European people directly involved. The transition from a representative to a deliberative democracy means that European institutions need to start using new tools to reach European citizens.”

I arrived early. It was the first international event I was going to take part in as a member of MLS (Movimento Liberal Social), an exciting proposition. In fact, MLS were even co-organisers, adding to the feeling of excitement. The seminar took place at a 5 star hotel in Lisbon, a recently renovated building, where our public television station used to be headquartered at. In the very spacious entrance hall, I met Maurits van der Hoofd, our International Affairs Officer, and, eventually, other MLS members, some of whom I’d not yet met in person.

Eventually, it was time for the seminar to begin. We went up a staircase and sat around to listen to Susanne Hartig, from the European Liberal Forum, who generously helped LYMEC and MLS fund this event. Ms Hartig explained what the ELF is, how it’s funded and its membership, and told us ELF had plans to expand to EU candidate countries. She also expressed the wish that we would take that opportunity to do some social networking, to meet other young liberals from across Europe.

Then, Alexander Plahr, LYMEC Vice President, briefly introduced everyone to LYMEC. This was of particular interest to me, who had glanced at the website but was eager to learn more. He too emphasised the importance of networking in these events, and then introduced us to our topic: individual participation in European politics. There isn’t any, he said, pointing to the fact that there isn’t a truly European election, and also no real European political parties;

only umbrella parties like ELDR. He reminded us that while individual membership of LYMEC exists, this in reality is not the case for ELDR. Miguel Duarte, MLS President, then told the assembled participants, some of whom were still arriving, about the importance of LYMEC for the birth of MLS. Allan Witherick, the IMS (Individual Membership Section) delegate, then gave us a short presentation on what IMS is. That concluded the first meeting, and we all had dinner at a nearby restaurant.

The afternoon session of the second day saw Igor Caldeira, an MLS member, offer us his thoughts on Café Babel (www.cafebabel.com) and “Europa Viva” (www.europaviva.eu), as examples of European political projects started by individuals. This brief presentation was followed by a discussion on what constitutes a “European identity”. We discussed the importance of individual perception of “identity”, of shared values, of common citizenship, of culture and education, and of a number of other things on what we consider to be our “identity” and, also, “European identity”. After lunch, we had the pleasure to listen to Paulo Sande, from the Office of the European Parliament in Portugal. Mr Sande’s presentation covered several topics, from a brief introduction to the institutional framework of the European Union to the European Parliament specifically. The emergence of truly European political parties, contesting truly European elections, and taking part in a truly European debate in a European public sphere would help

individual participation in European politics. At the moment, European debates are filtered by national politics, and end up relegated to a secondary position. European citizens will get involved once they feel that European debates affect them personally. The fact that the President of the Commission is Portuguese has increased interest in European affairs in Portugal. National self-esteem is in play, but it also had the effect of increasing the number of Portuguese officials in top levels of the Commission.

The European Parliament must be proactive in getting the European people directly involved. The transition from a representative to a deliberative democracy means that European institutions need to start using new tools to reach European citizens. These include social networking tools and interactive media. The urgency of achieving this goal is underlined by the fact that political integration has gathered momentum, and the EU, despite the fact it does not often speak with one voice on foreign affairs, is getting increasingly involved in matters related to Defence. Mr Sande then briefly discussed the Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty enhances opportunities for individual participation, at least slightly. The Citizens Initiative would allow proposals that gathered 1,000,000 signatures across Europe to be forwarded to the Commission for consideration, and the European Parliament will now be co-legislator in around 97% of legislative areas.

The so-called “early warning system”, where national Parliaments will get involved in the European legislative process by controlling whether the subsidiarity principle is being upheld in Commission proposals. While acknowledging that this could slow down an already morose legislative process, Mr Sande argued that this measure will mean more networking between national Parliaments, and will also mean that legislative proposals will be brought much closer to European citizens, blurring the line between national and European politics, while also setting up the opportunity for European matters to be discussed across Europe at the same time. After a brief discussion between participants and Mr Sande, the various groups represented at the event were invited to give a brief presentation about themselves and the political situation in their country. We had interventions from Moldova, Cyprus, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Romania, Italy, Croatia, Finland, Portugal and Poland. After a break, we departed to have dinner in Parque das Nações, the area where Expo

’98 took place. The morning of the third day began with a discussion between Pedro Corpeni, of Amnesty International, and Rui Seabra, President of the National Association for Free Software (ANSOL, Associação Nacional de Software Livre). The event focused, I learned, on the different experiences each of them had, coming from very different movements, in shaping European politics. The presentation and discussion were followed by Aloys Rigaut, President of LYMEC, who briefly talked about the Individual Membership Section.

António Serzedelo (founder of Opus Gay, <http://www.opusgay.org/>) and Gabriel Goucha (former President of JEF Portugal) then followed, giving presentations on their own experiences as individuals trying to shape the political sphere. Mr Serzedelo focused on the LGBT cause in Portugal, as well at European level. Social inclusion is an objective of the Lisbon strategy, as is combating exclusion at Member State level. A European directive on employment equality, as well as Art 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty, have given the LGBT communities protection at European level. Trade unions in Europe have themselves tried to combat prejudice within the trade union movement, and businesses have started the International Business Equality Survey Index for these purposes. Poverty and exclusion, as well as discrimination against the LGBT communities in relation to education, healthcare, training and housing remains a concern. Citizenship education focusing on LGBT issues could help to undermine ongoing prejudices, but there are still tensions within the LGBT communities themselves.

Mr Goucha focused on the issue of individual membership of a political organisation. He stated that individual members should have equal rights to Member Organisations. Limits to the benefits of being an individual member would be detrimental to attracting individual members, who could well provide added value at federal level. Both presentations were followed by discussions, which were themselves followed by lunch. In the afternoon, three working groups discussed the issue of individual membership of LYMEC and, on Sunday, members of MLS, including myself, gave interested participants a guided tour of Lisbon. All in all, I believe this event was a success, and I know for a fact that I enjoyed it immensely. I plan on becoming an individual member of LYMEC in due course, and look forward to getting involved in future events, as time permits.

“The fact that the President of the Commission is Portuguese has increased interest in European affairs in Portugal. ”



Nanny state? No, thanks!

Consumer protection between information and paternalism

Article by David Issmer

“In the last years, it seems, the state however has more and more assumed that the public are clueless consumers. From a paternalistic position, the state has transformed into an educator that tries through orders and indoctrination to create certain behaviours among consumers.”

“Today, one is allowed again to eat a breakfast egg, and indeed should do so”, “nuts are valuable because of their healthy fatty acids” – what sounds like an excerpt from a nutrition guidebook is in fact from a government declaration from the former German minister of agriculture and consumer protection, Horst Seehofer.

He was presenting a “national action plan for a healthy diet and exercise” which is to help combat an overweight population. Now the campaign to reduce smoking is in full swing, the focus is now shifting to the over-weight.

From fighting obesity to introducing bans on advertising, forbidding flat rate party promotions to outlawing patio heaters – in many areas of life the state is interfering and wants to influence our behaviour.

The reason stated most of the time is that consumers need to be protected. But protected from what? Protected from producers, from dangers, or from themselves?

The task of the state in the area of consumer protection can be defined easily: The state has to protect citizens in their role as consumers of goods and services from dangers. This can for example be achieved by constraining laws, security advices or public warnings. That way the government can assure the safety of products.

The need for protection of the citizen furthermore results from the fact that individuals mostly have less knowledge and

experience than the producer and only have a limited ability to recognize dangers. That’s the only way that state interference in the work of the producers –and thus the free market- can be justified.

Informing consumers in order to protect against health hazards is therefore right as well as necessary in many cases. In the case of rotten meat, dioxins inside mozzarella or toxic toys for example the state needs to not only warn, but instead needs to act immediately.

Because it has better knowledge of the dangers and the instruments to intervene, only the state can take measures that have an impact in a timely manner. For less acute dangers it is sometimes sufficient to inform and enlighten people.

Regarding the legitimation as well as the scope of state activity, the views one holds on people and consumers are decisive: A responsible, rational citizen is much less in need of protection than a badly informed, clueless and emotionally acting citizen.

In the last years, it seems, the state however has more and more assumed that the public are clueless consumers. From a paternalistic position, the state has transformed into an educator that tries through orders and indoctrination to create certain behaviours among consumers.

In the fight against smoking the interests of others play a role. However that is not the case with obesity, since it only has a negative

effect on the health of the person themselves. Marking foods with a traffic light, thus dividing into “good” and “bad” food is just another example of the state moralizing with a wagging finger. This is not protecting consumers from dangers but instead trying to protect them from themselves. However, a new danger is created that way: Consumers become accustomed to using their own minds less and less and instead put blind trust into public defaults. Common sense and life experience quickly give way to state instructions. The failure of such an approach can be seen in the United States of America: Even though the security

advice on products there are legion, their citizens are among the worst informed consumers of the Western world. So what is the solution? Instead of moralizing and gesture politics, education is needed. In that regard, parents play a decisive role. But of course schools are important, too. They can for example inform pupils about a healthy diet, the dangers of tobacco and the responsible use of alcohol. Consumers that are educated in such a way later on can make rational choices on their own and use their common sense instead of being reliant on public campaigns.

“Consumers become accustomed to using their own minds less and less and instead put blind trust into public defaults.”



The Ideas Factory

Lynneth Mollis, member of JOVD, Netherlands.

Between April and July of this year the European Policy Centre held several meetings with bright young minds from different backgrounds called The Ideas Factory. During these meetings we discussed the impact of the economic crisis on young people in Europe, climate change and Europe’s role in the world. The participants were asked to come up with new ideas and – after a brainstorm session – to write an article on the topic explaining the idea in detail.

The European Policy Centre is a research centre and think tank for the European Union. It has prominent members from national governments, companies, business federations, trade unions, diplomatic missions, NGOs, foundations and international and religious organizations. They come together with experts and officials from the EU institutions to debate the key issues dominating the EU agenda. The European Policy Centre – and her staff of policy analysts – is consulted by the European Union to research and advise on these key issues.

From our brainstorming sessions and the articles sent in a few were selected and served to compose a policy advice for the EU – in particular the newly elected European Parliament. Amongst these articles is an article written by yours truly, suggesting a humanitarian guard to protect NGOs in conflict areas. Through participating in initiatives like this LYMEC can be successful in having a voice in the European Union through various channels and shall hopefully continue to do so.

DENMARK

RU Congress: Elections & resolutions



Radikal Ungdom (RU) at the end of October held its yearly Congress in Høje Taastrup near Copenhagen. The three day gathering saw the election of a new board for Denmark's social-liberal youth organisation. Simon Dyhr managed to win a competitive election and from now on will lead the organisation as President. Interesting from a European perspective are of course the results for the positions of European Officer and International Officer. While the

first one now is filled by the newly elected Sissel Kvist, the later one continues to be handled by Christina Bach Harboe, who was broadly confirmed by the around 110 young liberals present. LYMEC Vice President Alexander Plahr, who was visiting the Congress and together with RU's own Mette Lykke Nielsen represented the European Liberal Youth, expressed huge satisfaction about the great debating culture of RU that showed during the whole

programmatic discussions. A special focus of the Congress of course where the upcoming local elections in Denmark. On Tuesday, November 17th, RU hopes to place many young candidates in city councils across Denmark. Additionally, many of the keynote speakers including Magrethe Vestager, Leader of Radikale Venstre, addressed the importance of the UN Conference on Climate Change (COP15), hosted by Copenhagen in December this year. In connection with the COP15, RU will host various events in cooperation with IFLRY.

Being part of a strongly pro-European organization, the RU members assembled Høje Taastrup of course also debated various resolutions in regard to the European Union. Notably, Radikal Ungdom called for the liberalization of postal services and train operating companies in the European Union, as well as replacing the current price-cap system for roaming calls by requiring operators to charge the same price in the whole Union, in order to complete the internal market.

On the picture from left to right: Alexander Plahr, Sissel Kvist, Simon Dyhr, Christina Bach Harboe, Mette Lykke Nielsen

THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY

Visiting Neighbours: JuLis North Rhine-Westphalia attending JD's Congress in Tilburg



After having hosted their LYMEC neighbours from JD and JOVD at their Landeskongress in Lünen early 2009, JuLis NRW now visited the Jonge Democraten in Tilburg during their electoral congress on October 24th/25th 2009. In addition to an exchange of views on their „cultures of congress“, JuLis NRW and JD also discussed further cooperation for „crossborder campaigning“ for upcoming municipal elections in the Netherlands in May 2010 and state elections in Germany in May 2010. JOVD members, who were also present, joined these talks, which was gladly accepted by both JD and JuLis NRW.

NEWS FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

GOT NEWS?

Something happening in your organization that the rest of Europe should know about?

Write to newlibertas@lymec.org

UNITED KINGDOM

Freshers Season Ends With Record Breaking York

York University rounded off a stunning Freshers season for Liberal Youth, signing up a record 115 members to the Liberal Democrat party in just 6 hours. This is the largest Freshers recruitment in the York Liberal Democrat Society's history, and is a reflection of how students are flocking to the Liberal Democrats, up and down the country.

Craig Martin, President of the society said: "I am absolutely delighted with the Freshers Fayre success, we were hoping to sign up 30, and we surpassed all expectations with 115. We signed up more members than the Tories and Labour combined and



now cannot wait for our first event with Phil Willis MP". York's success comes on the back of similar stories up and down the country. In cities ranging from Glasgow to Reading and Aberystwyth to London, it has been

the Liberal Democrats who have truly engaged students and found them eager to sign up. In just one day in September, Liberal youth signed up over 300 people to the party, breaking all previous records.

Elaine Bagshaw, Chair of Liberal Youth added: "Our success at Freshers shows how young people are turning to the Liberal Democrats as the real force in British politics. With the Conservatives and Labour letting young people down on issues like the environment and civil liberties, it is the Liberal Democrats who are the only party who are willing to stand up for young people."



1.

Don't get scared by tractors and angry dairy producers

LYMEC President Aloys Rigaut: „We are not scared by dairy farmers coming to Brussels to protest and creating havoc. We believe that the current attempt from the liberal Commissioner Marian Fischer Boel to liberalize the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the path that we should continue to follow.“

LYMEC bureau member, Mette Lykke Nielsen: „The French and German proposal to favour additional export subsidies would not be the answer to this crisis. We believe that in the long run, it will lead to unfair competition if some countries allow additional export subsidies. We need an equal playing field, in which supply and demand determine the prices, not government intervention or quotas“.

2.

Germany turns more liberal: historical victory for FDP

LYMEC President Aloys Rigaut: “This is a good day for liberals not only in Germany, but across Europe. A coalition between the conservative CDU and the liberal FDP will replace the last four years’ conservative-socialist coalition, which was ‘grand’ in name only. One of the European Union’s biggest economies will now be governed by economic reason instead of being plagued by standstill.”

Johannes Vogel, President of Junge Liberale (JuLis), youth organisation of the FDP, and now himself elected into Parliament: “I want to thank all the active young liberals who contributed to this great result! With such a strong FDP in the next government, we can and will make sure that civil liberties are protected and that intergenerational fairness will prevail.”

LYMEC Vice President Alexander Plahr: “Germany will now get a liberal Foreign Minister (who traditionally also is made Vice-Chancellor) by the name of Guido Westerwelle. That way, Germany returns to the pro-European, pro-integration policies that once was a trademark of its foreign policy.”

LYMEC

STATEMENTS

3.

Barroso uses EU money to promote his candidacy

LYMEC President Aloys Rigaut: "This is the first time something that comes close to an EU government programme has been drafted, and we can only welcome such a symbol. Let me however immediately say that I am disappointed that this programme uses the same EU jargon and remains so general, setting a vision for 2020 instead of listing concrete proposals to be undertaken in the next 5 years. It seems to have been drafted by Commission bureaucrats, not by EU politicians."

LYMEC Vice President Alexander Plahr: "This document is a step in the right direction. However, it remains to be seen if the parliament coalition (PES, EPP, ALDE) that Mr Barroso counts on really works out in the end. We as LYMEC are rather sceptical if such a broad coalition which is bound together by nothing than pure technical arrangements is the right way to govern Europe."

Furthermore, we are very much irritated by the fact that this election programme of candidate Barroso is hosted on official Commission web space. Not only that, it also is translated in all of the Union's languages, leading to the question of who paid for this translation. If Mr Barroso used official Commission resources to advocate his own campaign for another term as Commission President, that would be utterly unacceptable."

4.

No sellout of personal bank data!

LYMEC President Aloys Rigaut: "It is utterly unacceptable to negotiate a deal, that basically is about giving away the financial privacy of all Europeans, during the summer recess and without even involving the parliament. If the US gets automatic access to our financial data, there will be no legal protection against this for the individual citizen. We move more and more into the direction of a big brother state – and now this big brother is sharing his knowledge with his pals who are even more reckless when it comes to ignoring data protection."

LYMEC Vice President Alexander Plahr: "This data sharing agreement must be stopped. The number of European transactions handled by SWIFT will become a lot higher in the

coming years, as the Single Euro Payment Area (SEPA) replaces traditional national clearing infrastructures. Doing your wire transfers by IBAN and BIC number will then be the standard even within member states.

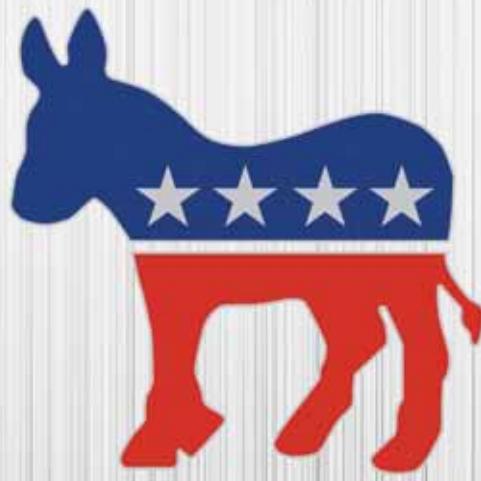
SWIFT moves its servers to Europe with the very purpose to protect their customers – basically everyone's – privacy from unlimited access which is not allowed by a judge in a rule-of-law way. Now member states foil that intention by making the European database just as un-private as the current one in the US. This is a sellout of our bank data which can not be tolerated! Us liberals believe that especially in the fight against terrorism we as a free society must stick to our ideals and moral high ground. We do not protect our liberty by abolishing it!"

5.

European voters strengthen liberals

Aloys Rigaut, President of LYMEC: "Centre-left parties in power in Britain, Spain and Portugal were sanctioned by their electorates while their allies in opposition such as in France suffered brutal losses. The vote marks a painful defeat for Socialists across Europe. In contrast, we liberals are set to strengthen our influence in the next European Parliament as our share of MEPs compared to 2004 is increasing: we keep about 75 ELDR MEPs whilst the total number of MEPs is decreasing."

Alexander Plahr, Vice President of the European Liberal Youth (LYMEC): "This is an excellent day for liberalism and an excellent day for Europe! I am especially pleased that many young candidates got elected and will be able to influence EU politics in the years to come. However, besides the many gains we liberals have made in many member states, there is still room for improvement. Voters have been choosing representatives mainly based on national issues. This has to change in the future – we want to see a truly European election, not 27 national ones! For this, it is necessary to do more Europe-wide and personalized campaigns in the future – for example about who should become President of the Commission!"



The US Democrats and liberalism: no clear cut case

Article by Nicolas Bas

‘American politics is much more complicated than it might seem at first sight and thus one must be always careful before making bold statements.’

One of the biggest misconceptions is that American liberalism stands for the same ideals as European liberalism. This is not true. American liberalism is what we would call in Europe “social democracy”. A little bit free market, but not too much, just enough to make sure that people earn money so the government can tax them.

A little bit of room for entrepreneurship and creativity, but not too much because otherwise all these greedy capitalists will take over world dominance. Some civil rights but not too much, we must make sure that no one gets offended. The most famous American liberal is probably Michael Moore, who blames capitalism and the moral values it entails for everything that goes wrong in society.

European liberalism however, is the opposite. It stands for personal freedom, i.e. the right of a person to design his or her own life, economic freedom and a very strong protection of civil rights.

The discrepancy between the two conceptions is quite clear once explained. However, there are quite some Europeans that think that they both mean the same thing and therefore believe for instance that The Democratic Party in the United States is a liberal (in the European meaning of the word) party. This is not so.

The fact is that Democrats as well as Republicans cannot be seen as one ideological monolithic bloc. There are socialists, social democrats and liberals in the Democratic

Party whereas you can find socialists, conservatives, libertarians (classical liberals) and even people that we would call in Europe far right in the Republican Part.

Within The Democratic Party there is for instance the Blue Dog Coalition (BDC). This is a group of 52 Congressmen that are fiscally conservative. They are a main opposition group to Obama’s healthcare plan. Some of the members of the Coalition are also in favor of gun ownership.

Although the Blue Dog Coalition only takes official stands on fiscal policy, it is believed that some members are socially conservative as well. This groups advocates bipartisanship and wants to transcend the constraints of ideology as they call it. The BDC holds a lot of swing votes at crucial moments and therefore is a powerful group in the House of Representatives.

This example merely illustrates that comparing The Democratic Party with European liberalism or European party systems with the American system is rather useless since the diversity within the Party.

American politics is much more complicated than it might seem at first sight and thus one must be always careful before making bold statements.



Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
Alliance des Démocrates et des Libéraux pour l'Europe

New European financial supervisory structures should provide for a single authority

Commenting on proposals presented by the European Commission for revising the structures for macro and micro financial supervision, Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE group leader called for a bolder approach in presenting plans for a single financial supervisory authority that would mirror the European Central Bank, merge the overlapping industries of banking, insurance and securities and build on a network of national supervisory authorities.

“The proposed structure currently lacks coherence, as not only the operational, but also the geographical fragmentation between Paris, London and Frankfurt will endanger an efficient coordination and flow of information between the different entities. Equally, effective supervision of cross-border financial institutions cannot separate macro-prudential from micro-prudential supervision. They are two sides of the same coin. A single European Financial Services Authority would be more effective in the co-ordination of market oversight and crisis prevention than three separate bodies in three different countries and a fourth body dealing with wider systemic risks.”

Schengen and Olympic security at risk over delayed database

The European Parliament has pressed the Commission over the lack of progress in implementing the upgraded Schengen Information System II (SIS II) and the new Visa Information System (VIS) which have been delayed by more than a year and a half due to difficulties setting up the operational database. The smooth functioning of Schengen border controls and visa issuing is essential to guarantee security and free circulation within the Schengen area, and also to security for the 2012 London Olympics since the UK is set to join SIS II for access to Europ-wide police data

Sarah Ludford, ALDE spokesperson on EU visa policy and author of Parliament’s report on the VIS system, commented: “The delays in two such high profile databases vital to secure EU border management and internal security are very regrettable, especially since the European Parliament adopted all the legislation in good time to avoid such delays in operation. The European Commission owes us detailed explanations.

The UK could have joined the present Schengen Information System years ago to access data on wanted and suspected terrorists and criminals but chose to wait for the new version. That decision now threatens to prejudice security for the 2012 London Olympics since the new system may not be up and running in time. There has to a contingency plan such that Londoners and the games are not put at risk.”

European External Action Service will bring added value

Annemie Neyts MEP (Open-VLD, Belgium) ALDE spokesperson on foreign affairs and Andrew Duff MEP (LibDems, UK), ALDE spokesman on constitutional affairs and foreign affairs committee member, have used the European Parliament plenary debate on the Brok report to urge progress towards a fully functioning European External Action Service (EAS). The EAS and the High Representative on Foreign Affairs will be appointed after such a time as the Lisbon Treaty comes into effect.

Ms Neyts commented: “The EAS presents the EU with a golden opportunity to play its part on the stage of global diplomacy. EU member states agree on many aspects of foreign policy, but we need an institution like the EAS to fully marshal our foreign affairs politics, and to coordinate our external action.”

Speaking in the debate, Mr Duff added: “I welcome the genesis of the EAS, but we mustn’t put the cart before the horse. We should pause now in the further establishment of this office until we know who will occupy it. Real progress will come when we know who the High Representative will be. Now is the time for Member States to put their candidates forward, and let the real debate begin.”



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