

With our political theses, and the Prague Appeal, we have a clear set of priorities

- speech of new elected EL chairman Lothar Bisky, at the closing of the 2nd EL Congress

Dear Comrades,
Honoured guests,

As a rule, Europeans are proud of Aristophanes's discovery of the power of peace. After 1945 his comedy was staged worldwide, and even set to music by Leonard Bernstein. Despite all the passion for our continent's varied cultural roots, despite Europe's bitter experience in the two world wars during the last century, we face a new challenge in this new millennium:

The governments of our continent want to constitutionalise their commitment to building up armaments.

In spite of this, we on the left say: we do not want a US missile shield in the Czech Republic, or in Poland, or anywhere. The European Left will have to be Cassandra's voice; we must not let the warnings about the new Trojan Horse, the dangers of new wars, go unheeded.

Europe invokes Attic Democracy and The Enlightenment – in the knowledge that the European model of the enlightened political citizen was, historically, a privilege of the ruling classes. The recognition of miners' and women's rights required a further two millennia of bloody, underground, Pyrrhic victories, before their rights became part of the broader political debate. That does not mean however that these rights are now secure and recognised by all. They have to be promoted afresh every day.

It is still the case that immigrants are divided into people with valid passports and people without official papers. A person cannot be illegal! The political and social rights of refugees are placed at the mercy of a different figure every day. We should not forget that.

Comrades,

When the rulers of Europe convened in Lisbon a month ago, and the Executive Board of the European Left met there as well, to formulate our alternatives into the theses for Prague, one thing was clear: the Reform Treaty has not grown to become the future of our continent.

In Lisbon, we also noted that the rulers' ignorance angered the people and left everything else cold.

More than 200,000 took to the streets. They showed that they are not indifferent to Europe's future, and that they are not ready to let themselves be touted as a radical market economy and an arms manufacturer.

Many people do not want the experiences of our continent to be trodden under foot – especially by its governments.

I think that the European Left's responsibilities are clear. The campaigns in France, Spain and elsewhere demonstrate that the people want the prospect of a European social union, and are prepared to contribute to it. It can still come to pass that car makers working for the same company are paid differently in the competition to lower wages. The impression comes to the fore, that in the end this makes everybody worse off. The only winner from the struggle for lower taxes, longer working hours, shorter pension periods and the downgrading of jobs is financial capital, which makes more returns for itself by selling off the businesses it has bled dry.

This so-called interregional competition is destroying long-term research, a breadth of employment opportunities, and the social fabric. This harms politics and lowers people's capabilities to take on the problems they face in common. The damaging ideologies of neo-nazis and racists take root in this soil. We will resist them.

Comrades,

It is for these reasons that I think it is important for us to be an open, multi-party European Left, and to develop further in this way. We can only grapple with the major challenges if, for example, we combine the experiences of the trade unionists with the ideas of the free software movement, or if we defend social struggles in town and country, and free research and study at the universities, in conjunction with the peace movement and environmental projects. We need these different political experiences, in order to (as Fausto Bertinotti says, and so I'm quoting another classical author) "to contribute to building up a critical mass", which can find an audience for its political alternatives, and engage in society's debates.

I would like to thank Fausto for his commitment and for his labour, as well as for his theoretical proposals and efforts in this direction, which he has contributed as the first chairman of the EL. He has invested a lot of passion. Thank you.

From this position I would also like to assure him that we will remain an open party. I am of course familiar with the Prague of Kafka and Neruda. After this conference, I know the Prague of my comrades from two left-wing Czech parties somewhat better, our comrades-in-arms in the European Left. We have no need to fear that our left-wing alternative will lack an identity. When we are at the press festival of *l'humanité* or singing the song of the Revolt of the Carnations, when we experience the work of Mikis Theodorakis in Athens, we are taking what are regarded as a solemn occasions as the basis for the EL's work, namely our identity as open to new experiences, cultures and solutions.

We have taken the path of putting our commonalities at the centre of our political approach. With the Prague Appeal, with our concluding paper, we have taken responsibility: that goes for every one of our 400,000 members, who come from more than thirty parties in more than twenty countries.

We have also come to Prague to fulfil our own demand to bring the experiences of Eastern and Western Europe together. Similarly, we also want to learn from our members in Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, from whom we always have something new to experience, how close the European, Arabian and African worlds are to each other.

We, the members of the parties of the European Left, must learn to bring our alternatives from Porto to Prague to the debating table. We have an opportunity to do this very soon – the European elections in 2009. So, it is not too early if we begin now. We will concentrate on

fewer political issues, in order to build a common, spirited election campaign, to build up a critical mass in common and in alliances, to move the area of debate back to the left, instead of allowing it to fragment to the point of meaninglessness.

Allow me to thank those who have made our work easier, even in part made it possible. Europe is, and remains, the continent of translation. Many thanks to our linguistic geniuses in the interpreting booths.

I would also like to thank our brave comrades in the editorial groups, in the proposal commissions, the statute commissions, our treasurers and our amazing organisers from the Czech Republic.

I thank also all the members of the executive board, those involved in the networks, the organisers of the 2007 summer academy and those who are already preparing for the meeting in 2008, and those who are coordinating our contribution for the ESF (European Social Fund) in Malmö.

I ask all members today to keep the European election campaign in view, and to begin our signature campaign for a referendum on the EU constitution. Once again: we are the European Left. We have 400,000 members, and very committed individual members. If every member collected one or two signatures on behalf of the party of the European Left, we would already have reached a great number. We would already have got much nearer to a European debate on our common future.

These observations lead me on to where we have to make progress in our content, where all the energy of our common policies belongs.

1. The basis of a European social state is the historical potential of the continent, a proposition to develop the ability to cooperate by solving complex problems. One must be proud to defend social rights.

The demand for a European social state includes business policy, structural change and environmental issues. Let me give a concrete example. As the European Left, we must plough the furrow of agricultural politics more deeply. Traditionally, this is a domain for the more conservative parties. However, securing the population's nutrition through renewable foodstuffs, together with the conservation of health, nature, the reproduction of its resources and the design of the cultivated landscape are crucial issues.

The addressees of left-wing agricultural policy would number 11 million, farmers with extremely varying levels of economic power, all people who live in the countryside - and on top of them 445 million consumers. The agricultural economy has been in the sights of the capital strategists for a long time, sucked into the maelstrom of globalisation and liberalisation. The Left will also have to develop and suggest alternatives in this area.

2. An all-embracing history of democracy, the Enlightenment, and the open debate on the nature of government in Europe belongs to European culture. Without referenda

on the Reform Treaty, the Europe which belongs to its citizens will be gambled away day by day.

I would like to consolidate this point with reference to a particular area of politics, to media politics. I am permitted to do this, because it concerns the profession I once practised. There is a fundamental lack of democracy in European media policy. This has not been effected through the European Parliament, but through non-parliamentary negotiations and neo-corporate talks. It is not quite what we on the left normally understand as non-parliamentary. These are non-transparent, informal committees around the office of the Commissioner for information and the media, who make decisions on key questions concerning information and communication. But these issues are important for the whole of society. I do not want to leave Prague without making the following observation: in the digital age of capitalism, the sources of economic productivity, cultural hegemony and political and military power are increasingly dependent on the acquisition, conservation and processing of information and knowledge. In digital capitalism, information and knowledge production are becoming powers for productivity through new technological, social and cultural parameters.

Information has become a decisive resource. Many new professions are involved in this area. This affects many people. The information proletariat has joined the industrial proletariat. IT specialists, game designers, cameramen, light- and sound specialists: many are working in precarious conditions, in terms of time as well as with bad contracts and low pay. The left has a new political arena here.

It is a social task of the European Left to counter the demands of digital capitalism with our own media competency, to secure access to information, technology and reliable business. I'm not going to talk about actors, a neighbouring branch, not unsimilar to politics – but there would be a lot to say there as well...

3. I would like to repeat my conviction once more: the devastating consequences of economic liberalism and armament do not belong in the European treaty, but in open discussion, where they can finally be overcome. The Left stands against the sanctification of the Market, the sanctification of War.

The realisation of a social, democratic and peaceful Europe – that is the lynchpin upon which we are developing concrete alternatives. With these theses, and with the Prague Appeal, we have set the course clearly.

Comrades,

One thing remains for me to say. I would like to remind you that in the short time since the party of the European Left was founded, we have begun to develop and take seriously our traditions. The executive board has been invited to Berlin again in January. In 2008 we will also pay our respects to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg at the memorial to the socialists. I would also like to remind you that we have a tradition of anti-fascism that we must conserve.

So, I would like to warmly invite you to Berlin, to continue our work.

Thank you.