
2nd MEETING OF EUROPEAN LIBERAL MINISTERS IN GOVERNMENT AND COMMISSIONERS JOINT STATEMENT



On 25 February 2013, at the invitation of the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, leading Government Ministers and European Commissioners from European Liberal Democratic parties met in Amsterdam under the aegis of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party and made the following statement:

Since our London meeting in January 2012, we have seen a renewed capacity and willingness, at the EU and national levels, to address the challenges that we face and make reforms. For now, the very worst of the Eurozone crisis seems to have passed due to: decisive action by the ECB, passage of the new Economic Governance package, agreement on the first stage of a Banking Union, and on-going structural reform across the Eurozone to cut debt and deficits and boost competitiveness. We have also seen major EU-wide reforms that will have a lasting beneficial effect on our Union: moves by the Commission to lift burdens on small businesses from existing and new regulations and agreement in the European Council to an EU budget, now awaiting the consent of the Parliament.

However, there is no room for complacency. The twin crises of sovereign debt and bank capitalisation remain a challenge to the economy and to the stability and unity of the EU. Building growth, lowering unemployment and raising competitiveness remain urgent priorities, as does rebalancing and refocusing our Union on the key strategic priorities facing us all. Therefore, we call on all European leaders in all institutions to use the period before the European Parliament elections and the formation of the next College of Commissioners to expand and accelerate the EU-wide reform agenda underway, and to lay out a clear and compelling statement of EU-wide reform priorities for the new Parliament and Commission in 2014 and for the European Council that will deliver a better, stronger and more prosperous EU. In particular:

A Liberal European Reform Agenda

European Reform to Resolve the Eurozone Crisis. To avoid any backsliding, and to restore the EU member state economies to long-term stability and health, the following priority actions are needed:

- Economic Governance: The Commission and member states must ensure full implementation of new Economic Governance rules.
- Banking Union: The Commission should move swiftly to bring forward further proposals for the Banking Union, and these dossiers should be prioritised through the legislative process by Council and Parliament.
- Unity & Integrity: Throughout, leaders and institutions must avoid erecting rigid EU divides, keeping doors open to non-Eurozone members and preserving single market and EU decision-making integrity.

European Reform to Boost Jobs, Growth & Competitiveness. To deliver a boost to jobs, growth and Europe's global competitiveness, the following actions are needed:

- Structural Reforms: EU member states must redouble their efforts to implement the long overdue structural reforms, i.e. making labour market more flexible, reforming pension systems, opening up regulated sectors for competition and providing for more women in the workforce through tax incentives and childcare services.
- Single Market: Accelerate recent progress in deepening and widening the single market, especially in the services, energy and digital sectors, through the Single Market Acts and by strengthening Single Market governance. Particular attention has to be paid to unlocking the potential of the digital single market and fostering start-ups in Europe. European leaders must also lay out a clear action plan before the European Elections that can underpin an ambitious 2nd Single Market Programme under the next Commission, with the overall goal of fully completing the EU single market by 2020.

- **Trade:** Build on recent progress by giving the Commission an ambitious mandate to negotiate a far-reaching EU-US Trade deal with the goal of securing a transatlantic single market to the maximum extent possible, and for all actors to help deliver an agreement under this Commission. In addition, all relevant parties should redouble their efforts to complete EU-Canada, EU-India and EU-Japan negotiations under this Commission.
- **Smarter Regulation:** Full and swift implementation of the new Smarter Regulation Strategy, lifting regulatory burdens on small businesses and enacting the Regulatory Fitness Communication. EU leaders and institutions should also set out clear priorities to further this smarter regulation agenda under the next Commission.

European Reform to Rebalance & Refocus EU Action. With a view to improving, modernising and strengthening our Union as well as to increase democratic legitimacy of the EU governance level, the following actions should be taken:

- **Institutional Reform & Coordination:** EU leaders and institutions should explore and set out priorities for EU-wide institutional reforms, including reviewing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of existing agencies and institutions, options to move to a single seat for the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in Brussels, preserving and strengthening the role of national parliaments in EU affairs and reforms to restructure the Commission around clusters.
- **Better Budgeting:** EU leaders and institutions should explore avenues for reinforcing EU budgetary control and cost-effective spending, such as establishing an independent European Office for Budget Responsibility, and providing for budgetary flexibility and considering the issue of own resources.
- **Smart Investment:** EU leaders and institutions should explore avenues for unlocking EU-level infrastructure investment and private sector and IFI leveraging, in particular through the EIB.
- **Modernise Europe:** EU leaders and institutions should set out proposals ahead of the next Commission to aid domestic structural reforms, boost competitiveness and tackle youth joblessness. This should include greater flexibility for member states over detailed rules, and targeted EU action to boost skills, apprenticeships, training and higher education opportunities.
- **Modernise EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy:** In line with December 2012 European Council conclusions, the High Representative should bring forward proposals to boost Europe's international voice, and enhance value-for-money, capabilities and deployability of CSDP at the very latest by September 2013, and member states should be ready to take swift, ambitious and practical action in put them into effect in pursuit of these objectives.
- **Subsidiarity:** EU leaders and institutions should explore plans where reforms to devolve powers across the EU would be beneficial for all. EU leaders should set out clear priorities for a targeted EU-wide devolution agenda under the next Commission, to be accompanied by mutual oversight and common monitoring by Council and Parliament on the basis of regular reports by the Commission.
- **Defending European values:** EU leaders and institutions should set out an ambitious agenda to safeguard the respect for human rights and the rule of law in the Union, including the establishment of a mechanism in the Commission to monitor member states' compliance with the values set out in the Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Looking towards the European Elections in 2014

European Liberal Leaders recognise that the economic crisis has increased political disaffection and disillusion in Europe. However, the reforms needed to tackle our collective challenges will require bold collective EU action and a strong reformist European Liberal family. Today, Liberal parties are in Government in 11 EU member states, 8 European Commissioners are from liberal parties, and the European Liberal Democrats win the vast majority of the votes in the European Parliament, more than any other Group. We are collectively determined to pull together to ensure that liberalism remains a strong, influential and reforming force across Europe both now and well into the future.

With a view to stimulating debate and to influencing the next European Commission's programme, European Liberal Parties in Government commit to bringing forward proposals for an EU-wide reform agenda setting out the priorities that must be pursued from 2014 onwards, ahead of the appointment of the new Commission.

European Liberal Leaders will next meet at the ALDE Party Congress in London on 29-30 November, hosted by the Liberal Democrats of the United Kingdom.

The following took part in the meeting: **Mark Rutte**, Dutch Prime Minister, **Sir Graham Watson**, UK, ALDE Party President, **Nick Clegg**, UK Deputy Prime Minister, **Dr. Philipp Rösler**, German Vice Chancellor and Minister of Economy, **Dr. Vesna Pusić**, Croatian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Alexander De Croo**, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Pensions, **Guy Verhofstadt**, Belgium, Leader of the ALDE Group, **Dr. Werner Hoyer**, Germany, President of the European Investment Bank, **Neelie Kroes**, The Netherlands, Vice President and European Commissioner for Digital Agenda, **Olli Rehn**, Finland, Vice President and European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, **Karel De Gucht**, Belgium, European Commissioner for Trade, **Martin Lidegaard**, Danish Minister for Climate and Energy, **Lena Ek**, Swedish Minister for the Environment, **Taavi Rõivas**, Estonian Minister of Social Affairs, **Birgitta Ohlsson**, Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, **Crin Antonescu**, Romanian President of the Senate, **Artur Mas i Gavarró**, President of the Government of Catalonia, **Ivan Jakovčić**, Croatia, IDS Party Leader, **Tamara Venrooy**, Deputy VVD Group Leader in the Dutch Parliament, **Frans Weekers**, Dutch Deputy Minister for Finance, **Hans van Baalen**, The Netherlands, VVD Group Leader in the European Parliament.