

A BETTER EUROPE STARTS NOW

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SP 

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The debate on Europe is on its way!

When, in the spring of 2005, the Netherlands was thrown into confusion by the referendum on the European Constitution, I was lying in bed nursing a hernia, and thoroughly fed up. The work that I would have been doing in the campaign, with the SP calling for a No-vote, was, however, taken over in fine style by my parliamentary colleague Harry van Bommel. He quickly came to be the face of the voice of the progressive resistance to a megalomaniac constitution, a proposal behind which there loomed the spectre of a European superstate.

From my bed it was both reassuring and exciting to see that a 'no' to the proposed constitution could not be put down to Dutch narrow-mindedness or simple nationalism. On the contrary, Harry van Bommel and his fellow campaigners were succeeding in bringing more and more people over to their side, despite the furious and often amusing attempts by the Labour Party, Green Left and D66* to convince their supporters to vote 'yes'.

It was entertaining, as I lay in bed at home, to see also how the government descended into total panic simply because the people were not doing what it wanted. The more various ministers called down calamity and disaster on to the heads of the population should they dare to say no, the more people were persuaded that on this occasion to say no was the most intelligent thing to do and that a yes vote would mean taking an irresponsible risk. The cri-de-coeur of Premier Jan-Peter Balkenende, that he would look a fool in front of the whole of Europe if the Dutch people did not follow his advice, was for many the last straw. This was surely about something more than the honour or good name of a man who had all too rashly, at a ceremony in Rome, added his signature to the European Constitution, without giving any thought to whether his country's people actually wanted it!

On 1st June 2005 the people won a victory over both the government and the great majority of the Dutch political class. In the first national referendum ever held in the Netherlands, almost two thirds of the voters said no to the European Constitution, and the proposal was, following the sledgehammer blow dealt to it by the French no a few days earlier, consigned to its final resting place. Shortly after the Dutch people had said no, their representatives in Parliament said yes to a proposal from Harry van Bommel that a broad social debate should be organised on the question of how European cooperation might be reconciled with the people's desire to remain in charge of their own affairs and not allow themselves to be ordered around by Brussels busy-bodies.

The speed with which the proposal for such a broad debate was approved was matched by the speed with which real support for it ebbed away, with Dutch politics returning to 'business as usual', with Europe at best in the background. In addition, most political parties, traumatised as they were by the 'no' of 2005, were anxious to keep 'Europe' off the agenda, at least during election periods. Yet the question would not go away, even

if only because at the beginning of the coming year Angela Merkel and the German government will take over the presidency of the European Union. Merkel wants to persist with the Constitution and the Netherlands will have to bend to this wish. We must for this reason remain on our guard and ensure that the no of 2005 stays a no in 2007.

European cooperation is necessary and inevitable. The Netherlands is no island. The European Union has contributed to our prosperity and can continue to do so – if we see to it that it is organised correctly. But a European Union in which the Netherlands disappears? To be swallowed up is not a form of cooperation! As long as this threat exists we must stay alert to it, and debate with anyone who is willing to do so how it could be better. This should also involve putting forward in a concrete fashion what we want and do not want in and with the European Union and Europe as a whole. I am pleased that this paper lays a strong foundation for such a debate. Because indeed – a better Europe starts now!

Jan Marijnissen
Europa- er !

*D66 is a small centrist liberal party.

Summary

Europese samenwerking heeft ons al veel goeds gebracht, bijvoorbeeld op het gebied van mensenrechten en onze welvaart. Dat betekent niet dat het altijd goed gaat en dat samenwerking op alle gebieden toegevoegde waarde heeft. De uitslag van het referendum over de Europese Grondwet toonde aan dat een duidelijke meerderheid weinig waardering kan opbrengen voor de huidige EU. Ook bleek dat er behoefte was aan een brede maatschappelijke discussie over Europa en de rol van Nederland daarin.

Proposals for a more democratic Europe:

- strengthen the role of national parliaments and governments and of the Parliament (EP)
- limit the role of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Court of Justice (ECJ)
- introduce the proposed 'yellow-card procedure', under which, where a minimum of a third of national parliaments consider that a proposed EU measure comes under national competence, the Commission must reconsider the proposal
- limit the scope of the economic market
- make the Council more transparent
- improve relations between national parliaments and the European Parliament
- increase public involvement
- changes to the Treaty should be put to referendum

Proposals for a slimmed down Europe:

- subject legislation to tests of competence, subsidiarity and proportionality
- clearly demarcate competences and return them to national institutions
- develop a Europe based on core competences
- improve and limit the scope of the internal market
- improve European environmental, asylum, energy and terrorism policies
- ensure that we have fewer but more effective rules
- work towards a 'social' Europe
- no centralised European foreign policy

Proposals for a more balanced European Union

- extend the accession criteria
- hold referenda over future enlargements
- give more financial support to poor member states
- regulate the free movement of workers
- for the time being, no enlargement in the Balkans

Proposals for an affordable EU:

- limit the EU budget
- suspend the Dutch contribution to the budget by refusing to approve the annual accounts
- apply the Stability Pact fairly
- reform the structural funds
- the EP must have a single seat in which it holds all meetings

Proposals for a fruitful agricultural policy

- shift agricultural subsidies to farmers and to environmentally beneficial services
- ensure better environmental, food safety and animal welfare legislation
- discourage overproduction
- abolish export subsidies
- give developing countries preferential market access
- extend the Anything-but-Arms rule
- remove agricultural production from the WTO
- cofinancing for agricultural policy

Chapter 1

European cooperation: a good idea

A good idea...

Europe is the part of the world where democracy, human rights and environmental protection were first conceived and where they are now most developed. It was the first part of the world to abolish the death penalty. That is something of which we can be proud.

The European Convention on Human Rights, binding on all forty-six member states of the Council of Europe, contains important provisions, creating rights which can be enforced by the recourse which citizens have to the European Court of Human Rights. Following the demise of communism in central and eastern Europe, the division of the continent came to an end and all of the former communist states acceded to the Council of Europe, signing the European Convention on Human Rights. This treaty offers visible proof of the enormous importance of European cooperation. The same goes for the European Social Charter, also instituted by the Council of Europe, in which minimum social rights are laid down. This latter treaty, however, remains to be ratified by a number of European countries, including the Netherlands.

The treaties which, from 1957 onwards, led to the creation of the European Union, have been of great importance for European cooperation, primarily in the area of economics. The original six member states have increased by stages to fifteen and now twenty-five, a figure which will grow to twenty-seven with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. Within the European Union the guiding rules establish the free movement of goods, capital, services and labour, with the frontiers between member states becoming internal borders. Economic cooperation, set in motion after the Second World War, has contributed to the prosperity of the participating countries and their citizens. In addition, these countries have been able in this way to reduce political differences to such a degree that armed conflict has not recurred.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in which the United States and Canada also participate, is now the biggest regional security organisation in the world and is primarily concerned with 'early warning', conflict prevention and crisis management.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), following the end of a Cold War which divided Europe for fifty years, has now grown into an Atlantic-European alliance in which most of the former member states of the Warsaw Pact now participate and with which Russia is linked under a 'Partnership for Peace' agreement.

These various cooperation agreements have created numerous possibilities for countries and their citizens to learn from each others' experiences, so that we are not all

obliged to keep reinventing the wheel. Through the sharing of knowledge, making use of each other's capacities and finding in each other an ongoing source of inspiration, Europe is able more rapidly and better to develop, allowing the rest of the world to benefit from this.

...but not self-evidently so

But none of this is self-evident. For cooperation to be effective it must be based on political will and the availability of necessary material resources. Despite all the guarantees of human rights, in reality many people in Europe continue to suffer discrimination. People attempting to bring a case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg discover that tens of thousands are in the queue in front of them. Many countries which have signed the European Social Charter have failed to achieve the minimum social rights which it establishes. While NATO has indeed brought former enemies in Europe together, it has now declared the whole world to be an area of possible intervention, involving itself in dubious wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And despite economic cooperation within the EU, far from every region of every country belonging to the Union has achieved prosperity, and conflicts over a number of points are becoming greater rather than smaller. People in some member states feel their interests to be played off against those of people in other member states and since the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 the European Union has gone increasingly in the direction of an inadvisable European superstate, with one flag, one anthem, one currency, one monetary policy and the ambition to have one constitution, one foreign and defence policy and a leading role in the world economy and global politics.

Persistent criticism

European cooperation may be a necessity – no country in Europe can get away from the realities of its geographic location, and each needs to have good relations with other European countries – but this does not mean that all forms of cooperation are by definition good. The goals and performances of cooperation must be subject to persistent critical analysis, in order to forestall the pursuit through cooperation of the wrong goals, or to curtail cooperation which leads to inflexible institutionalisation by which goals which may themselves be worthy are no longer effectively pursued. Such analysis must be present at all levels, from local councils to national parliaments and the European Parliament and other forms of parliamentary monitoring. Governments and the Councils of Ministers of both the European Union and the Council of Europe should in all cases be required to give an account of themselves, of their efforts and achievements in negotiations within European structures of cooperation. European cooperation must not be allowed to avoid democratic monitoring, for to do so is to place decision-making processes beyond supervision, with consequences which are often undesirable.

This paper is directed towards the most extensive form of European cooperation, the European Union. Within the EU over the years ambition and achievement have become estranged. Monetary cooperation is good, but the overhasty introduction of the euro was not. Transparent agreements as to how cooperation should proceed are urgently needed, but the European Constitution offered little to citizens. Freedom of movement within the European Union for people, capital and labour is a worthy goal, but the introduction of a Services Directive which takes its inspiration from neoliberalism, or the unregulated migration of workers from eastern to western Europe is far from such. The removal of internal borders was a step forward, but its exploitation by international organised crime and by terrorists is a step back. This goes equally for the transformation of the European Union into a Fortress Europe increasingly inaccessible to people from other parts of the world fleeing from violence, exploitation and poverty, who find themselves to an ever greater extent confronted by walls, barbed wire and armed patrols at the external frontiers of the EU.

Disappointment

An important justification for the creation of what is now the European Union was the argument that it would offer a solution to the many problems which respect no borders. Within the trade union movement, the environmentalist movement and international

solidarity organisations, the expectation has long existed that 'more Europe' would be a guarantee of progress and solidarity. European cooperation should therefore be much more than simply economic cooperation. For those who thought along these lines, the reality has become a major disappointment. The EU has not concerned itself with such problems, but instead interfered increasingly in member states' domestic political decisions. Energy providers, rail and postal services in the different EU member states are not being more effectively tuned to one another but instead played off against each other. The Services Directive, brainchild of ex-Commissioner Frits Bolkestein, even attempts to put different countries in competition with each other over such matters as social legislation and collective labour agreements.

Because of the fact that in the EU all sorts of decisions are pushed through at a central level distant from the people, strikers, demonstrators and other active citizens can have much less influence than they can within their national capitals, while the lobbies of multinational corporations have all the more. These lobbies constantly bombard officials, the European Commission and the European Parliament with information from which it invariably appears that protection of workers or the environment or the international fight for human rights increase costs and put a brake on economic growth. On the basis of such arguments they demand European regulations which reduce the influence of the member states and force them into deregulation, for which read: getting rid of rules which were once introduced after careful deliberation.

It is no wonder that an ever-growing number of people, while they agree that European cooperation is necessary, find the European Union in its present form of little worth. The results of the referenda on the European Constitution, in particular, in both the Netherlands and France, demonstrated that when the political system does not take them seriously, they will react. How this can be put right forms the subject of the following chapters.

Chapter 2

A more democratic Europe

A more democratic Europe means a Europe in which citizens have more say over everything which happens. That means in turn that decisions taken in the context of European cooperation must be visible to those same citizens, understandable to them and open to being monitored by them. It means too that decisions must be taken as close as possible to the citizen. In the European Union, just the opposite of this has occurred. Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 the European Union has been developing in the wrong direction, at a high tempo and worst of all without the involvement of the citizens. Ever more competences are handed to the institutions of the Union at the expense of national governments and parliaments. European institutions under little or no control, such as the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Council take ever more decisions affecting national legislation without the slightest possibility of democratic control. The European Parliament, distant from the citizens, does not function as a true parliament, lacking the involvement of the public, the potentialities, the means – and the discretion – proper to such a body.

PROPOSALS FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC EUROPE

Strengthen the role of national parliaments

The transfer of ever more powers from the national level to the intergovernmental and supragovernmental bodies of the Union is leading to democratic erosion and decision-making under no democratic control. This process must be halted and reversed. The role of national parliaments within the European Union should therefore be enhanced. In the Danish parliament a Committee on European Affairs meets each week to discuss proposed European legislation with relevant government ministers and to decide on what should be the national response to these proposals. Ministers take their mandate from this committee, determining their position in negotiations in the European Council of Ministers. Only by agreement with the parliament may a minister deviate from this mandate. This is the direction in which the Netherlands should also go.

Introduce the ‘yellow-card procedure’

The two houses of the Dutch Parliament established in 2006 a joint committee which checks proposals from the European Commission to see whether they are in keeping with its areas of competence, as well as with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. If this is judged not to be the case, then the government is informed and requested on the basis of this information to state its position. This should lead to the introduction of a ‘yellow card procedure’ under which, if a minimum of a third of national parliaments consider that a proposed EU measure is not in keeping with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the initiative must be withdrawn.

Strengthen the role of national governments

The development which has seen ever more power handed to European Union institutions at the expense of national sovereignty has also weakened the position of national governments. This development should be reversed. The national veto right must not be subject to any further limitation through the ever-increasing practice of decision-making by qualified majority voting (QMV). Instead, it should be broadened and determination of the extent of the influence that the European Union can have on the national state and society returned to the national level.

Limit the role of the European Union

The Dutch people voted no to the so-called 'European Constitution' by a majority of almost two-thirds, and in doing so voted against the development of a European superstate. The European Union must henceforth reduce rather than increasing its interference in the life in the member states and among their citizens. Only where there is agreement that European legislation is unavoidable should power to take measures be given over to it. In this way the shaken confidence many citizens feel in European cooperation can then gradually be restored. Taking a step towards this is the first thing which needs to be done to demonstrate to the public that 'meddling Brussels' has been reined in.

Limit the extent of the economic market

Cooperation in the context of the European Union is at the present time primarily economic cooperation. The time is certainly not ripe for more far-reaching political integration, and there is no support for such among the people of the member states. Other areas of policy can therefore often be better and more speedily regulated on a national level or between a smaller number of states. Education, health care, social policy, transport and housing are best managed close to home, and as far as these matters go interference from Brussels is neither necessary nor desirable. Clear limits should be placed, moreover, on what might be considered appropriate to include within the European Union's 'internal market', not in order to decide whether something can be traded, but whether it should be traded as an economic good. The handing over of European economic cooperation primarily to big corporations, which want to put all mobile and fixed goods at the service of the pursuit of the highest possible profit, was an historic error which has seriously discredited the whole idea of European cooperation, in particular as the internal market has been managed through supranational powers at the expense of national sovereignty. The European Commission has, with the support of member state governments, given free rein within the internal market to neoliberalism, and against this much which is of social value has proved defenceless. Under pressure from neoliberalism, the member states have been forced by the European Union to plunder and demolish their public sector and social provision, opening ever more sectors to 'market-working', with all the disastrous consequences that has had for both the quality of services and for social cohesion. Economic cooperation in the European Union must be put at the service of everyone, rather than of the self-interest of major undertakings and of the rich.

Limit the role of the European Commission

The European Commission has long been the motor of EU integration. It produces a flood of rules affecting activities in numerous fields. Following approval by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers these become binding on all member states, confronting citizens with rules over which they have not been consulted and which they may not understand. As for any effective monitoring of the work of the European Commission, of this there is no possibility. It is time that the Commission's responsibilities were revised. The governments and parliaments of the member states must renew their grip on European Union policy. The role of the Commission should be limited to the carrying out of that policy. The right to initiate new EU legislation must be transferred from the Commission to the Council of Ministers. This concerns all European Regulations, measures which become effective in the member states without going through any national decision-making procedures. Only in exceptional cases – and only on the basis of unanimity – should this system continue to be used. In the case of EU Directives

(which oblige member states to incorporate EU measures into national legislation), the right of national parliaments to make policy must be increased. and they must have more space to interpret and apply such legislation.

Limit the role of the European Court of Justice

The European Court of Justice (ECJ), designed to ensure the uniform application of the European Union's laws in all member states, is sometimes to an even greater extent than is true of the European Commission, the motor of far-reaching integration. The ECJ's declarations often place limits on the competences of national legislators, in favour of the institutions of the European Union. The Court ruled in September 2005, for example, that the European Commission, though 'in principle' having no say in member states' criminal law, could nevertheless in the future make demands regarding criminal penalties for certain offences in the member states. Criminal law must remain a national responsibility. The Dutch government should block any further developments on this point.

Improve relations between national parliaments and the European Parliament

It is not the task of Euro-MPs to represent 'Brussels' in the Netherlands. Instead they should be presenting and promoting the interests of the citizens of the Netherlands within this sphere of European cooperation. This is why relations between the national and European Parliament must be strengthened. This could be achieved by the introduction of the so-called 'double mandate', allowing members of the national parliament at the same time to sit in the European Parliament, as is currently the case for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). This possibility is, following the adoption of a parliamentary motion presented by the SP, currently under study. In addition, administrative pressure within the European Parliament should be limited, for example through a reduction in EU legislation and the elimination of unnecessary sources of such pressure such as the constant to and fro between different meeting places in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Make the Council more transparent

In order to guarantee that national parliaments are able to exercise effective control over the Council of Ministers, greater transparency of decision-making in the Council is of prime importance. All meetings of the Council, whether legislative or not, should in the future be open to the public and broadcast via television and/or the Internet. The press could then also better report European decision-making, contributing to a narrowing of the gap between the political process and the public.

Strengthen the role of the European Parliament

The European Parliament must play a more active role in the monitoring of EU policies. This could be achieved, for example, by giving it responsibility for existing European monitoring organisations, such as the European Court of Auditors, the anti-fraud bureau OLAF and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Increase public involvement

One possible way of making the European Union more attractive to the public would be to introduce the right of "citizen's initiative", a right mentioned in the proposed European Constitution. The idea of giving citizens the right, by means of the collection of a million signatures, to have an issue added to the EU's agenda, deserves more detailed elaboration.

Treaty reform through referendum

The vote against the proposed European Constitution represented not an approval but a rejection of the existing treaties and the practices based on them. The voters' conclusion was, "cooperation, certainly, but not in this form." For this reason alone, future changes to the treaties are unavoidable. To date, the procedure has been that proposals for such changes are negotiated between governments and given force by consent of national parliaments. Because amendments to the EU treaties can have drastic consequences, it

would be better if henceforth any such radical changes were preceded by public discussion over the proposals and any possible alternatives to them, after which the debate would conclude in a referendum.

Chapter 3

A slimmed-down Europe

The last twenty years have been characterised by an ever more rapid transfer of powers from national authorities to Europe. Already, the majority of Dutch laws are based on European Directives. Sometimes these measures are sound, but in many other cases they are far from being so. European cooperation is totally necessary, but that is something completely different from a European Union which prescribes laws for the member states and lays down rules which go against the wishes of the majority of their citizens. The present process of 'broadening and deepening' of European cooperation is much too inclusive and should be reversed in order to avoid unfortunate consequences.

PROPOSALS FOR A SLIMMED DOWN EUROPE

Demarcate competences and return them to national institutions

Matters such as education, health care, social policy, public transport and social housing are primarily national affairs. Existing EU competences relating to these areas should be returned to the member states. To prevent these powers going back into Brussels' hands by the back door, which often occurs by dint of the internal market, member states should be able to set internal market rules aside.

Competence test

Proposals for EU legislation should be subjected to a more thorough examination than has been the case to date to see whether they come under the competences bestowed on the Union. Only if they pass such a test should the EU be allowed to take initiatives. In other cases national sovereignty must be respected.

Subsidiarity test

The guiding rule should be that matters which can be regulated at national level should be organised by the member states themselves. National decision-making can in most cases be carried out more quickly and in a way better adapted to the individual member state's needs and circumstances.

Proportionality test

For every problem a solution must be sought which is proportionate: you do not use a sledge-hammer to crack a nut. As soon as it is determined that the EU does have competence in a particular policy area and that it is desirable for the Union to have a voice in addressing a problem in that area, it must also be determined whether the measures taken are indeed in proportion to this problem. If not, then the matter must be left to the member states. Framework directives should be preferred to detailed regulation. Fine tuning can always take place at member state level.

Develop a Europe based on core competences

European cooperation in the context of the EU should limit itself in future years to the improvement of the internal market, with protection of democratic and social rights as the precondition of any such improvement. In addition it should address the need for better regulation of cross-border issues such as the fight against terrorism, environmental and energy policies, and asylum policy. In these areas the European Union must be able to act decisively.

Improve and limit the scope of the internal market

The internal market for goods is a fact. This sometimes brings benefits, not only to corporations but to the consumer. The downside is that the increase in scale involved leads to much greater use of environmentally damaging transport and that the 'market' is used continually as an argument for interference in national political considerations in the policy areas of, for example, social housing, public health and public transport. This market necessitates coming to clear agreements regarding the safety and quality of products and the protection of consumers. As far as services are concerned, in the SP's opinion public services should be excluded from all European rules governing competition and freedom of access. Exactly which services are public, each member state must have the right to decide. For other services, in each case and at all times the 'host country principle' must operate. In other words, foreign service providers must in all circumstances abide by the rules and social norms prevailing in the country in which they are offering a service. In the event that there is any question of unjust discrimination against service providers from outside the country, the member states concerned should address the matter, negotiating sound agreements between themselves. In such matters harmonisation imposed from on high is neither necessary nor desirable.

European environmental protection

Environmental questions such as climate change, air pollution and biodiversity are cross-border issues in relation to which a European approach can bear fruit. Emission standards for road transport and European cooperation in the air transport sector can contribute to the achievement of the Kyoto Protocol commitments by the European Union as a whole. In addition, it is sensible to make agreements at the European level governing the processing and export of waste. It is nevertheless the case even in the environmental field that certain matters should be left in the hands of the member states. The decision not to move to rush forward with a revival of nuclear power is one example of this. Member states should not be prevented, moreover, from imposing more stringent environmental requirements than those emanating from the EU.

A better asylum policy

Border controls between member states have to a large extent disappeared. In removing them, the European Union has created a common external frontier. The member states increasingly work together in the area of security and other cross-border problems such as terrorism, criminality, asylum and migration. Minimum conditions for asylum procedures and the relief of asylum seekers have now been agreed at EU level. There remain major differences in asylum policy between member states, which encourages 'asylum hopping' and other abuses. This leads, moreover, to a race to the bottom, in which member states attempt to be less attractive to asylum seekers than are their neighbours, putting the rights of refugees in danger. Within the European Union it has been proposed that a single European asylum policy should be arrived at, under which each member state would follow the same procedure for the admission of asylum seekers. This initiative is worth pursuing, but the results to date have been far from satisfactory. It is of the utmost importance that these asylum procedures are completely in keeping with the treaties concluded in relation to such matters. For political refugees who have reasonable grounds to fear persecution in their own countries there must always be a place in Europe. In order to maintain public support for the granting of asylum it is a good idea to agree on a division between the member states of people seeking such refuge, so that every country makes a proportional contribution.

European energy policy

Since the creation, during the 1970s - earlier than in other countries - of a strong environmentalist movement in the Netherlands, a great deal of attention has been given in our country to clean methods of generating electricity. The influence of the EU has now put an end to this. Electricity generation has found its way into the hands of multinationals. Cross-border electricity grids, once intended to make available a source of electricity from neighbouring countries, are now fully involved in international trade in electricity supply. Because of this, environmentally-friendly electricity generation is no longer favoured, but rather that which we can import as cheaply as possible. We are using electricity from brown coal and nuclear power, which we prefer not to produce on our own soil, while clean power stations stand idle. This renders the country's energy supply unnecessarily dependent on the European mania for regulation. This interference works to the advantage of nuclear energy, which, though it produces fewer greenhouse gases, instead creates a waste disposal problem with no solution. The European policy also opens the door to bio-fuels which we to a very great extent must import and whose production will be at the expense of tropical rain forests and of food production in the Third World. In order to continue the positive policies of the eighties and nineties the Netherlands should take back control of its own energy supply.

Combatting international terrorism

Cooperation between the police, legal systems and intelligence services of different countries should be facilitated to enable them to work together and exchange data and conduct more effectively the fight against international criminality and terrorism. In addition, far more attention should be paid to the seedbeds of terrorism: poverty, exclusion, oppression.

Towards a more 'social' Europe

The member states retain responsibility for social policy. The European Union's responsibility is to refrain from making the realisation of social policy impossible. The SP would define a 'social Europe' as, in the first place, a Europe in which member states do not compete with each other on the level of working conditions or public and social provision, and in the second place a Europe devoted to the maintenance and extension of social achievements instead of to undermining them. Large-scale harmonisation of social legislation is not desirable, if only because of the enormous differences in living standards among the member states. Poorer member states should, however, be actively helped to raise their social standards

Fewer, more effective rules

European laws and regulations, which currently run to some 97,000 pages, must be simplified and reduced. Measures taken at European level should preferably be provided with a statement specifying their scope and a date on which their effects will be evaluated, so that after a certain number of years the question can be looked into as to whether the measure concerned has had the desired results or if it would be better if it were allowed to lapse.

No centralised European foreign policy

The most positive input into foreign policy has not generally come from the EU, but from the separate member states. Some European countries lead the way in development aid, peace mediation, and support for subordinated and oppressed groups. The EU is, in contrast, cumbersome, slow and concerned above all with obtaining advantages for important European corporations and the widening of its own influence as a world power. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003 it has become evident that a number of EU member states invariably and more-or-less automatically follow America's lead. This means that in all probability the only common foreign policy which Europe is likely to agree on would be one which was virtually identical to that of the US. The obligation to institute a common foreign policy, as provided for in the European Constitution, could only have delivered a transatlantic foreign policy. The right of EU member states to conduct a better foreign policy than would be possible in such a framework can best be ensured by preserving and strengthening freedom of choice for the Euro-

pean states. The absence of a constitutional obligation to act in unity does not in any sense stand in the way of coordination of humanitarian aid or other useful initiatives.

A European Minister of Foreign Affairs is accordingly not advisable; nor is the formation of an EU army. In addition, the existing intervention force should have no power to act outside of our continent or to take 'preventive' action. Under the pretext of Europe's security huge quantities of taxpayers' money are being invested in the modernisation and enlargement of the European arms industry, which has, because of this, been able through amongst other things the export of weapons, to strengthen its position internationally. The European Defence Agency should therefore be closed and European regulations governing the arms trade made more exacting. Not market regulations but human rights should be the major consideration when it comes to developing criteria for trade in weaponry.

Chapter 4

The size of the European Union

Since the fall of Communist-led governments in the east of Europe enlargement of the EU in an easterly direction has been seen primarily all as the last act of the Cold War. The desire in the west of Europe for a quick celebration of the victory over the east took precedence over all sorts of practical obstacles, such as the consequences of differences in economic and governmental traditions. The EU's increasing meddlesomeness, an approach which might function within the smaller context of a few neighbouring states, but which was much more difficult when it came to a broad cooperation involving almost the whole of Europe, also went unmentioned. In the eastern countries EU membership was seen as the miracle cure for economic backwardness, disputes between neighbours, ethnic conflict, environmental degradation and the lack of democracy. This combination of circumstances led in 2004 to the biggest ever enlargement of the EU, taking its membership in a single step from fifteen to twenty-five states.

Even after enlargement and the impending accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU embraces just half of Europe's states. Further enlargement figures in the past and recent expectations of the governments and peoples of the western Balkans, in Turkey and in the countries which belonged to the Soviet Union but which are now separated from Russia, such as Moldavia and the Ukraine.

The 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 created enormous problems for the Union both in terms of policy and of internal organisation which when Romania and Bulgaria join on 1st January 2007 can only become greater. It's a matter, amongst other things, of how the relatively weak economies of the ten new member states should be integrated into the world's biggest internal free market. In this context, the free movement of workers presents one of the biggest challenges. Despite restrictive measures, around 100,000 workers from central and eastern Europe are working, legally or illegally, in the Netherlands, most of them from Poland. In the near future a new wave of cheap labour could overwhelm our labour market. Workers from the new EU member states are welcome, but we must protect both them and ourselves from exploitation and ensure that the labour market in the Netherlands and the climate for small businesses are not subject to disruption. In addition, account must be taken of the fact that large groups of people migrating as a result of economic need can have adverse consequences for, amongst other things, social stability. At the same time, the EU has a responsibility towards the new member states. The prospect of membership was for many countries a stimulant towards democratic and economic reforms, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Now that these countries are EU members, this responsibility has not gone away. These member states must continue to receive help in reaching the democratic, social and economic levels of the old member states. Cherry-picking of the eastern European newcomers by the western European member states, by, for example, the large-scale import of highly educated or skilled workers, must be prevented.

As a result of the problems occasioned by the enlargement of 2004, public support for further enlargement has fallen strongly. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Union has taken place against public opposition. The situation in the candidate member states as well as the consequences of enlargement for the old member states is strengthening the need to take a more critical view of enlargement of the Union. The combination of 'deepening' (whereby the EU is acquiring ever more power and competences) and 'widening' (whereby ever more countries become members) can no longer be maintained.

In the short term, further enlargement of the Union would be inadvisable. The Union must first be slimmed down and reformed. Enlargement through accession of the three remaining candidates – Croatia, Turkey and Macedonia – need not be rushed. The problems relating to these countries must first of all be resolved. Other European countries should not in the short term be granted candidate member status. Countries bordering the EU can have a relationship with the Union via the European Neighbourhood Policy. This 'neighbourhood policy' should not be aimed at subordinating these countries to the EU's interests or those of corporations from EU countries, but must instead contribute to facilitating and speeding up their development to a comparable level. We reject the idea of a 'b-membership' of second class states, in favour of better cooperation with non-member states, which we applaud.

PROPOSALS FOR A MORE BALANCED EUROPEAN UNION

Enlargement of the criteria for accession

Countries wishing to join the European Union should be required to adhere strictly to the Copenhagen Criteria. According to these criteria a future member state must be a stable democracy which guarantees the rule of law, the honouring of human rights and the protection of minorities. In addition, the candidate must embrace the common rules and legislation of the EU and have a functioning market economy. This is important because a new member state must be able to cope with free competition within the European market. Absorption capacity was also included in the Copenhagen Criteria, but in the past this has been neglected. In the future this criterion must be given much more weight. In our opinion this would include judging whether the institutions of the EU, the member states and the people of the member states are ready for further enlargement. Only after the Council has determined that it appears in practical terms that all criteria have been perfectly fulfilled, should an accession date be named and the ratification process in the different member states begin.

Referenda on future enlargements

Research occasioned by the referendum on the European Constitution demonstrated that enlargement by ten new member states was for many people too rapid and too great a step. In order to involve the public more in Europe and prevent the further erosion of support for the EU, it is necessary that citizens be given a voice in such far-reaching decisions. The people of the Netherlands must be able to participate via a binding referendum in decisions over proposed enlargements. Such a referendum should take place only if and when the candidate member state fulfils the Copenhagen Criteria.

More financial support for poorer member states

Many member states have profited from their accession to the European Union. The poorer EU member states, however, continue to lag behind and should therefore be given more support in order to bring their economies and social conditions up to a desirable level. The EU structural funds should be available exclusively to these countries. At the same time these member states must be given the possibility to prevent a brain-drain.

Regulate free movement of workers

The unrestricted movement of labour from new EU member states will be disruptive. Employees from these countries will be exploited, while Dutch employees will be

displaced and small businesses forced from the market. We should therefore not open our borders further until we have laid down some limits, putting matters in order in the Netherlands by clamping down on illegal work, guaranteeing equal pay and ensuring that people currently jobless, including those with disabilities, are found work. Anyone who wants to work in the Netherlands must be willing to do so according to Dutch law and Dutch regulations. An authority must be created to ensure that foreign workers are extended all the rights and granted all the conditions specified in the legally-binding collective labour agreements (CAOs) which are the norm in most sectors of the Dutch economy. Heavy fines must be used to counteract the advantages to employers of exploitation. Language requirements should also be imposed on anyone seeking a work permit, especially in sectors such as building and production work where it is necessary from a safety point of view for workers to be able to communicate. And now that the difference between an employee and a self-employed person has become ever more vague, it would be fair if any self-employed person who has no employees were required to fulfil every aspect of labour law. Employment agencies must also be better regulated, beginning with the reintroduction of a system of licensing.

For the moment, no enlargement in the Balkans

Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro have set their sights on EU accession, but have as yet not gained the status of candidate member states. The prospect of membership often acts as a stimulus for democratic and economic reform, respect for human rights and the rule of law. In this way the EU is exporting stability, which can only be a good thing. Promises once made should be followed up, if doubt is not to be cast on the credibility of the Union and of the Netherlands. But the pressure to become a candidate for membership in the shortest possible time is also leading to overhasty economic reforms and social deterioration. It must, moreover, be ensured that the Union does not import instability. The lack of support for enlargement among the people in the existing member states could lead to just that. Therefore, while it is important to allow these countries to maintain the prospect of membership, further steps in the direction of full membership are for the time being out of the question. The EU must use its funds to support development in these aspirant member states, while keeping them at a distance. In this way these countries can undergo development to the point at which they really are ready for the EU, and the EU ready for them. Experience shows that countries carry out reforms more quickly and easily in the runup to accession than they do after they become members.

Chapter 5

A fruitful agricultural policy

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) demonstrates that European cooperation can bear fruit. Installed in 1957, the CAP led to an explosive growth in production and acts as one of the cornerstones of the present European Union. Almost half of the EU budget is spent on agriculture while Brussels played host to a large proportion of the debates on food safety which followed the tragedies of BSE, swine fever and bird flu. But this policy is, in the year 2006, hopelessly outdated and inefficient. It has led to obstacles to trade, as well as the mistreatment of animals, and is now a major drain on the European budget. Agricultural reforms on the European level are therefore increasingly necessary. In carrying out such reforms attention must be paid to the importance agriculture has for people. In order that food security can be guaranteed, Europe must to a great extent provide for its own needs. Discussion of this has gone on for some years, but actual reforms have up to now largely failed to materialise.

The only effective way out of the current crisis is through a radical reform of the CAP. Starting points for a new European agricultural policy must be:

- a. a shift from overproduction to the adequate provision of food
- b. guarantee of food safety and the wellbeing of animals, of humanity and of the environment
- c. the maintenance of a farming community at national as well as European level

Every region in the world should in principle be able to ensure its own food supply. We are also therefore opposed to the idea that the world food market must be thrown open. This would not be beneficial for farmers in the Netherlands or for developing countries which would through such a shift become more dependent. Sustainable development will come about instead when these countries produce sufficient food for their own populations and not, as is now the case, for western markets, forgetting the needs of their own people.

PROPOSALS FOR A FRUITFUL AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Farm subsidies to the farmer

According to the Netherlands' national Agronomics Institute (LEI) an average of seven Dutch farmers leaves the land each day. Of those who continue, many live below the poverty line. At the same major multinationals such as Heineken, Nestlé and DSM receive millions of euros in agricultural subsidies every year. In the period 1999-2003 Nestlé Netherlands was in receipt of around 400 million euros. Even Schiphol – not a farm but the country's biggest airport – received agricultural subsidies for the construction of a new runway!

From now on, farm subsidies should be distributed exclusively to the farmers themselves and not to multinationals or landowners. The support payable to a single farmer should never exceed the average income, making large-scale and industrial farming less attractive. Subsidies must be divorced from production, acreage and historical reference, and be used to encourage sustainable and humane farming methods.

Subsidies for environmental services

Farmers indirectly provide a thoroughly public service. Consider, for example, the management of the landscape, of nature and of water courses (known in the Netherlands as 'green' and 'blue' services) of the implementation of environmental policy and the protection of the cultural heritage. The disappearance of this professional group, which manages 70 percent of our national territory, must be prevented. The services its members provide are of benefit to the community but go, as things stand, wholly or largely unrewarded. The SP proposes that farmers receive compensation for the provision of these 'green' and 'blue' services.

Better regulation of the environment, food safety and animal welfare

Stricter regulation must be developed in relation to the environment, food safety and animal welfare. The transport of animals must be discouraged, to as great an extent as is possible, through the implementation of shorter maximum travel times, and the slaughter of animals must in principle wherever possible be carried out in the region where they have been raised.

Discourage overproduction

Overproduction, for example of cereals and dairy products, continues. This is undesirable, leading as it does to unintended side-effects. In order to discourage overproduction of agricultural goods the quote system which sets limits to production should be extended.

Abolish export subsidies

An end must be put to the subsidised dumping abroad of agricultural surpluses by getting rid of export subsidies. At the same time developing countries must be given greater opportunities to protect their own markets.

Preferential market access for developing countries

In order to discourage the orientation of the European farm sector towards the world market, tariffs on external trade must be preserved. Preferential access for developing countries should at the same time be extended and the escalation of tariffs for these countries reversed. Currently, tariffs on raw materials are lower than those for worked end products. To encourage the development of the economies of developing countries, imports of finished products should be promoted.

Extend 'Anything-but-Arms' Regulation

The so-called Anything-but-Arms Regulation, which gives the forty-eight poorest countries free access to European markets, should be extended, bringing, for example, all of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) within its scope.

Agricultural products out of the WTO

Agricultural products should be excluded from the WTO negotiations on trade liberalisation, thus doing away with the stimulus for developing countries to produce for the world market. At the same time the EU can, by means of such an exclusion, preserve its right to keep genetically modified agricultural products out and to maintain stipulations on products in relation to humane treatment of animals and to conditions of labour.

Co-financing

Agricultural policy must in the future be gradually returned to national financing. All farm subsidies currently emanate from Brussels, but by so-called co-financing the Netherlands gains more of a say over the implementation of agricultural policy. It has been calculated that 25% co-financing improves the net position of the Netherlands by approximately 170 million euros per year.

Chapter 6

An affordable European Union

Total EU spending in recent years has reached almost 100 billion euros. The Dutch share of receipts over the period to 2006 will remain largely unchanged, while contributions will grow as a result of the costs of enlargement and an increase in payments from the structural funds. This means that the net position for 2004-2006 deteriorated further when compared to the 2003 level. The Netherlands is invariably one of the biggest net payers into the EU. The contribution expressed in euros per head of the population grew from 180 in 2003 to 194 in 2004 to an expected 250 or even 300 in 2006. It is an urgent necessity to limit EU spending and rein in the Dutch net contribution. In regard to the latter the Dutch government has stipulated that there will be a billion euro reduction in payments from Netherlands to the EU from 2007, though it is as yet unclear just what effect this will have on the net contribution.

As well as being excessive, European spending lacks transparency. For the eleventh time in succession, in 2006 the European Court of Auditors came to the conclusion that just where the EU had spent its money was completely unclear. At the request of the SP, Dutch finance minister Geert Zalm promised to put pressure on his colleagues over this matter. But the fault does not lie exclusively with Brussels. The Netherlands' own equivalent of the EU's Court of Auditors, the Algemene Rekenkamer, stated in 2006 in a devastating report that expenditure of the sum of around 2 billion euros received by the Netherlands from Brussels in 2004 was also insufficiently transparent.

PROPOSALS FOR AN AFFORDABLE EU

Limit the EU budget

A Europe with fewer ambitions means a Europe which spends less. The European budget must shrink rather than grow during the next few years. In any case, under current conditions the budget may not exceed 1% of the EU's total Gross National Income (GNI), which in 2006 was about 860 billion euros.

Reduce the Dutch contribution if annual accounts are rejected by Auditors

If the EU's annual accounts are in the future once again rejected by the Court of Auditors, the Netherlands must reduce its contribution to the Union. In the most extreme case the contribution should even be suspended. If the European Parliament rejects the annual accounts, the European Commission must accept its responsibility and resign. In order to improve the transparency of spending of EU moneys in the member states, member states should be obliged to account for all expenditure.

Stability Pact

The 'Stability Pact', which applies to all countries belonging to the European Union's 'eurozone', obliges participating states to limit inflation, state deficits and debts, and long-term interest rates. By these means ever more far-reaching convergence of the economies of the participating countries

is to be achieved, along with the monitoring of the stability of their common currency, the euro. A stable euro is in the interest of all participants in this European Monetary Union (EMU). However, these criteria restrict the choices available to member state governments, who are forced to conduct their political affairs within the limits imposed by an extremely liberalised market economy.

EMU has done away with, or reined in, the traditional competences of a national government. National monetary competences, exercised under national democratic supervision, have been handed over to the politically independent European Central Bank (ECB). Countries within the eurozone can no longer take any national monetary measures – such as devaluation or fixing of interest rates – and their possibilities of taking socio-economic measures at national level are severely limited. The criteria for government deficit and debt can force member states into rapid and extensive spending cuts, against the wishes of their own populations. Yet it turns out that not all member states are held to equal account by the European Commission and the ECB when it comes to the Stability Pact criteria. Big countries such as France and Germany have been allowed substantially more room for manoeuvre when it comes, for instance, to government deficits and debts, than is the case for smaller

countries such as the Netherlands, Greece or Portugal, each of which has been threatened with sky-high fines should they fail to meet these criteria. This is unacceptable. All member states should be treated in the same fashion. If there are reasons to adapt the criteria for big countries, smaller countries should also be allowed this space. And if small countries are refused such room for manoeuvre, then so should the bigger member states be.

Reforming the structural funds

The subsidies which the Netherlands receives from Brussels are often intended for the support of projects where the need for any European initiative is lacking. What, for example, is the European interest served by providing more than 4 million euros for cycle paths in Drenthe? Where is the cross-border interest in financing a competition for the best garden in the Amsterdam district of Oud-West? If these things are felt to be needed, then it's logical for the Dutch authorities to provide the money. Instead of the pointless circulation of structural funds money amongst rich member states, the money would be better spent on supporting the development of pre-accession countries and new member states in eastern Europe.

A single meeting place for the EP

Before the enlargement of the EU in 2004 by a total of ten new member states, the maintenance of two meeting places for the European Parliament entailed an additional cost of 200 million euros. Since the enlargement, this figure has grown even higher. This is money simply wasted. An end must be put to this monthly removal circus between Brussels and Strasbourg and one location definitively chosen. As long as this does not happen, not only money but the public's confidence in the institution will be thrown away: a million signatures were recently collected in favour of scrapping the double-seat system. And confidence in the European Union is already in short supply!