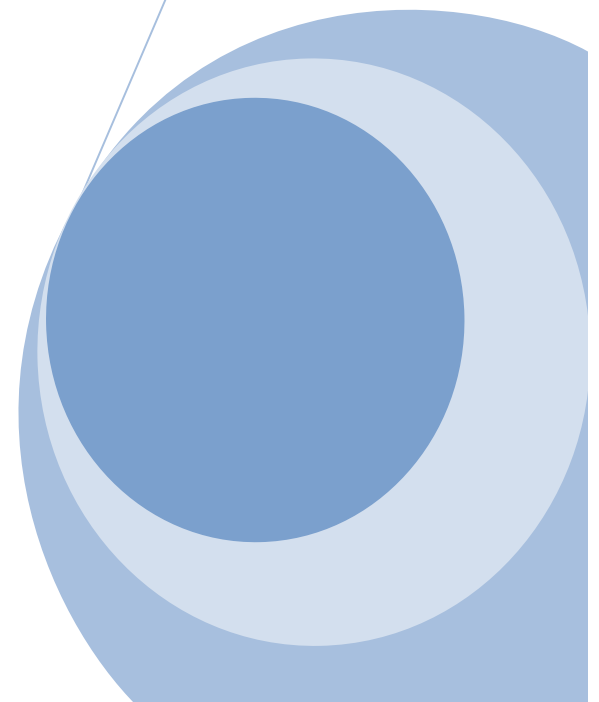


# **Seizing the Opportunity of Europe**

Europe and the Austrian Liberals



# SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OF EUROPE

As a political party, the Liberales Forum is the Austrian member of the European Liberal Party ELDR (European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party).

The ELDR currently consists of **56 member parties** across Europe. The Liberal Democrats were the first to create a European political family in 1976 in view of the first European elections. In 1993, the ELDR was established as a true transnational political party, which has its seat in Brussels (Belgium).

Today, the ELDR provides 10 out of 27 commissioners, responsible for civil rights, free and fair competition, Europe's prospects for the future (science and research) as well as for a successful course in the enlargement of the European Union.

The European Liberals have different approaches to some issues. However, in questions of principle and in their vision of a democratic Europe they are united:



### The ELDR principles in a nutshell:

**> Democracy, the rule of law, human rights, tolerance and solidarity**

*The ELDR Party believes in a Europe based on the fundamental Liberal principles of liberty, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, tolerance and solidarity.*

**> A fair, free and open society**

*We believe in a fair, free and open society which harnesses the abilities of each and every one of its citizens to participate fully in society, presenting them with the opportunities to fulfill their potential, free from poverty, ignorance, and discrimination.*

**> A prosperous Europe**

*To achieve these goals, we are striving to complete the internal market as a truly common economic area without internal frontiers and to reform Europe's economy to make it more prosperous and competitive, with more jobs and stable prices for consumers, based on the principle of globally inclusive international free trade.*

**> Sustainable development and peace in the world**

*We are working to promote sustainable development and to protect our environment. We are campaigning for a safe and just society, ensuring a more peaceful and stable world.*

**> EU enlargement**

*As the most consistent and long-standing advocates of an early and wide enlargement of the European Union, we are delighted to have welcomed into the Union our friends from the new Member States. We are firmly resolved to further deepen, reinforce and enlarge the European Union.*

**> A transparent, democratic and accountable Europe**

*We campaign for a more transparent, democratic and accountable Europe, taking decisions only on those matters which require European solutions. We are in favour of a systematic application of the subsidiarity principle in order to bring decision-making as close to the citizen as possible.*

**> A European Constitution**

*The ELDR supports a constitutional settlement for Europe. Liberal Democrats all over Europe have always campaigned for a strong constitution as the basis of democracy.*

The programme of the Liberales Forum has developed against this background and sets its own emphases.

***The Austrian Liberals believe in a democratic, federal, strong, efficient, peace-keeping, liberal-minded and tolerant Europe, aware of its responsibility for its citizens and of Europe's role in the world. With 27 Member States and 500 million citizens, Europe is a major element on the global scale and must ensure its contribution towards a peaceful and prospering world.***

Creating such a Europe is a task that must be undertaken by men and women citizens and is not the result of negotiations between state chancelleries. For this reason, the concepts of a united Europe are based on a ***liberal image of humankind***, viewing the

human being as the **starting point for society and polity**. Mankind is empowered with free will and capable of responsible action. Political Liberalism endeavours to ensure and promote opportunities for autonomy and self-fulfilment for individuals and for social groups. This implies as much liberty as possible for as many people as possible. However, freedom requires a structural framework, that of the democratic, constitutional state. Such a state guarantees the development of a competition-oriented market economy and the right to property. However, the social order must also give the individual sufficient opportunity to acquire property. It must also offer guarantees against any form of discrimination due to gender, origin or political conviction.

Hence, economic, political, social and cultural liberalism are not contradictions, but inseparably linked to one another.

The concepts of the Liberales Forum are based on its **understanding of man, society, state and European integration**.

A **federal Europe** must stipulate clear rules for the relations between European decision-makers, Member States and regions. This represents the basis for complete transparency in political decision-making, which will counteract the alienation on the part of citizens from politics in general and Europe in particular. **A strong Europe demands that national egoism should not impair Europe's dynamism**. Only a strong Europe, legitimized by democratic rules, can meet the expectations of its citizens.

**Consolidation AND enlargement of the European Union** are the prerequisites for a strong and democratic Europe that increases the opportunities for its citizens. Such a Europe must be founded on a **constitution** guaranteeing the rights of citizens and stipulating the rules for **fair competition**. Competition ensures prosperity and is based on the performance of the individual. It follows that performance must be worthwhile.

The **guarantee of basic rights and the inviolability of human dignity** are the foundations of such a constitution. These basic rights include participating in the political decision-making process and a fair share in social prosperity on the basis of the responsible action of citizens. Human dignity covers protection against any form of discrimination and a humane subsistence. No person may be discriminated against on the grounds of origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation. **Protection from discrimination** is not merely a moral obligation, but also a significant element in global security. Liberals vehemently combat nationalism, chauvinism, racism and any other form of discrimination. Society must intervene whenever it is not possible for the individual to exercise his rights and obtain a humane subsistence through his own responsible action. **Liberal Politics aim at increasing the individual's opportunities to lead a self-determined life**. Liberals are opposed to state paternalism and egalitarianism as well as unrestrained egoism.

Citizen-friendly politics means **guaranteeing security in freedom**. Security is a comprehensive concept covering the protection of citizens' lives and property and the safeguarding of social and political rights on the basis of a dynamic economy and the intactness of health and the environment.

The financial crisis has made it clear that an **effective financial market authority** must be developed. Working financial markets are the precondition for the individual securely to build up assets, to provide innovative and efficient enterprises with adequate loans and to stabilize consumer demand. On principle, rules have to be valid worldwide, and it must be ensured that they are observed. European harmonization would be a first step on this path; on the global scale, Europe has a word to say in negotiations on worldwide rules.

Ensuring fair competition requires a framework to produce the same competitive conditions within Europe. For this reason, Liberals are opposed to over-regulation and demand **a reduction in bureaucratic regulation** wherever it does not act to safeguard free competition or protect health and the environment. Liberals vigorously advocate a **common European taxation law** to prevent tax dumping. Incomes should be treated the same way, regardless of their source, and the differing treatment of income deriving from employment and income deriving from capital must be abolished.

The harmonization of **basic social rights** can prevent social dumping. A **common social security law** in Europe will increase **mobility** and thus the opportunities for self-determined lives for citizens. But social security payments must not be abused to implement tax increases indirectly. Ensuring **common minimal standards in education and free competition between different types of school** are the prerequisites for recognizing vocational qualifications throughout Europe. **Exchange programmes on all levels of the educational system** must be promoted to a greater extent and rendered more attractive.

**Respect for different cultures** does not only apply on the international level, but **also within Europe**. But recognition of the democratic constitutional state is also the precondition for minority rights. Liberals believe in the right to asylum and regulated immigration. To safeguard these areas, the war against organized human trafficking is just as important as a development co-operation that gives the destitute of the world the opportunity to help themselves.

Thus, Liberals believe in the **Common Foreign and Security Policy** that emphasizes the role of Europe in the world. In this respect, the European Union is exemplary as the greatest peace project in the history of mankind. In a world characterized by tensions and conflicts a strong Europe is important. It is evident that **national egoism weakens Europe's role** in the world, especially its peace-making and peace-keeping capacities. Common neighbourhood policy, development co-operation on the basis of mutual respect and an active role in international organizations are the core elements of a Common Foreign Policy. Respect for other cultures is self-evident. However, in the course of this co-operation human rights issues should not be disregarded.

Europe's responsibility in the world also necessitates a **credible European armed force** that can, if necessary, safeguard peace and stability in a world of conflict. Europe has a major role to play in peace missions. In this respect, a common European policy can significantly increase credibility and effectiveness.

**Ensuring the basic provision** with energy and raw materials can only be solved on a European level. There is no place for national egoism here. A concept aiming at resource-saving consumption and developing new technologies can enable European energy autonomy long-term. An offensive, co-ordinated, common **European Research Policy** is closely tied to this objective. In global competition, Europe may not drop behind its rivals and must be attractive to top researchers from all over the world. Here, too, the consistent combating of chauvinism and racism is of eminent significance.

Transparency and the reduction of bureaucracy are the prerequisites for ensuring **political empowerment**. The European Union must strengthen the rights of parliament vis à vis the European Council and the European Commission, as is provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon and the Draft for the European Constitution.

A strong Europe must be open to the **process of enlargement** and pursue an **active neighbourhood policy**. But there can be no discount on the criteria laid down by Europe in Copenhagen. It must be ensured that new Member States meet **European standards**. Priority should be given to the western Balkan nations and to negotiations with Turkey, to which Europe has offered the prospect of accession if European standards are met.

As regards neighbourhood policy, Liberals welcome the deepening and institutionalization of co-operation with the states adjoining the Mediterranean and view the Mediterranean Union as a paradigm of international co-operation. Close collaboration with Russia and the other successor states to the former Soviet Union is not just a question of safeguarding the supply of raw materials, but also promotes the development of democracy in these parts of the world.

