

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

With 90 MEPs from 19 countries, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) is Parliament's third biggest political group. Determinedly federalist in outlook while respecting diversity, the group's aim is to tilt the balance of power towards the political centre.



The division of responsibilities among the political groups has resulted in the ALDE chairing three parliamentary committees: Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs; Fisheries; and Transport & Tourism. It also holds two of Parliament's 14 Vice-Presidencies. When it comes to the size of the ALDE's national delegations, the top three countries are led by Italy followed by the United Kingdom and France. Occupying the halfway point between the two "large" political groups and the smaller groups, the ALDE group is more than capable of ensuring that its distinctive voice is heard (but it is also often cast in the role of bridging the political divide).

Five Priorities for 2006

A UK MEP since 1994, the group's leader, Graham Watson, underlines what it is that makes his group special: "Liberals and Democrats have a clear ideology; we know what kind of society we seek to create." As a means of achieving the sort of society that it wants to see, the ALDE has set out five priorities for 2006:

- 1) Arguing for a long-term European budget which meets the needs and challenges of EU policies, particularly in the areas of scientific research and technological innovation.
- 2) Keeping up the pressure on Member States for implementing the reforms needed to promote economic growth and employment.
- 3) Encouraging all European initiatives aimed at improving the environment and guaranteeing long-term economic sustainability.
- 4) Winning back the confidence of European public opinion, so that in due course an open and honest debate on Europe's constitutional future can be held.
- 5) Ensure that the EU acts in line with the values that it espouses, especially with regard to third country relationships.

Vision and Leadership

In Graham Watson's view, the 21st Century's biggest challenges (population growth and migration, climate change and international crime) can only be met at a supra-national level, which requires greater awareness on the part of European institutions. As he says: "The Commission has given us a "Plan D" for dialogue. But we need a "Plan V for vision" and a "Plan L for Leadership."

The ALDE's leader clearly set out his group's vision when he said that: "The ALDE group seeks to promote the values of liberty, justice, community and the rule of law, both at home and abroad. The forces of Liberals and Democrats also combine to deliver the benefits of economic dynamism with an agenda for social justice."

The ALDE group's recent political battles have focused on opening up the market for services to greater competition and for an end to the practice established by some European institutions of taking decisions behind closed doors. In a nutshell, it's a stance which blends liberalism with democracy.