

Lyon 2006 - Opening Speeches

EIN Summer University & European Ideas Fair

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The EIN has grown very rapidly within the space of a few years. It has accumulated a database of more than 1,000 participants across Europe, with no less than 12 working groups in the main network linking seven task forces from our broadening family of think tanks and foundations.

We're very lucky that our political family has pioneered this concept because we believe that it has already been able to help feed ideas into the policy-making process. I'll give you one idea of which I'm personally aware, and it's related to the term 'absorption capacity' of how one interprets the questions of the criteria for enlargement to the European Union. From reflections in the network, I tabled an amendment into the Brok Report which asked for the Union to be defined, because it became clear from our discussions that it wasn't possible to define the term 'absorption capacity' unless you knew what the European Union was itself, and indeed what its frontier limits or its border limits are.

I heard from one member of the Council very recently that the conclusions in June would not have been the same without this reference or this term in our parliamentary report. Unlike other European political parties, I believe we're constantly improving our ability to work together in the search for the best ideas. Networking, using the Internet, allows the participation of all those who wish to be involved and is inexpensive. It is in my view the way of the future. Perhaps building large edifices with highly paid staff in one location is a more outdated way of doing politics - to which the Socialist party, not surprisingly, is strongly attached. This year the area of greatest progress in our process has undoubtedly been linking more closely the network, and the think tanks and foundations. Assisted by the Karamanlis Institute we held our mid-term review in Athens in early June, which undoubtedly enabled a deeper understanding between those of us in the network and the think tanks to see how best we could make sure that they could feed into our political process. They also now have an electronic newsletter, which will be a means by which increasingly the interaction of our political family across frontiers will be able to interchange ideas.

Not least, too, we've made real progress with our relationship with the EPP.

Within the network we have identified four major challenges in front of us in the months and years ahead:

- Globalisation and economic reform;
- Demography and immigration;
- Terrorism and security, and;
- Energy and the environment.

I would strongly urge you to think the unthinkable. It may well be that some of the ideas you come up with will not be appreciated by a few, but we're not a decision-making system. This is not another group meeting of the EPP-ED Group. This is an ideas centre where we can develop ideas in common and shape a common vision of our future, so that national political parties or the European party can take the decisions on the ideas that we produce.