

ALDE Congress Online

At the weekend we **met with old friends and new from our European sister parties for ALDE Congress**, albeit via a Zoom link, as the Congress was online for the first time. It was my privilege to lead a diverse Lib Dem delegation of around 40, which in addition to the official categories for diversity, included several UK nationals resident in the EU and a few EU citizens resident in the UK.

Ahead of the Congress we had met to propose amendments and again to discuss the amendments tabled by other delegations. These are negotiated in the "Working Groups", which usually take place onsite at the beginning of Congress. Online they were held several days in advance of Congress and a high proportion of delegates were unavailable. Some were unaware that this was the real forum for debate. The procedure is not unlike the European Parliament Committee stage where the political groups negotiate compromise amendments. At the final plenary voting session there is no debate and delegations work to voting lists.

The Working Groups did not go to plan, as the scheduled sessions of two and a half hours each ran to 6 and 5 hours respectively. Even delegates who started the sessions were often not there by the end. I was sat with original text on one screen, amendments on another, proceedings on my iPad, delegation WhatsApp and the voting platform both on my iPhone plus a print-out of our voting line.

The four Resolutions that we were entirely opposed to all fell or were withdrawn. One was a detailed political programme resembling an election manifesto. Our colleagues from the Netherlands (D66) proposed to delete the entire motion on the grounds that it was not appropriate to replace our entire political programme via a Congress motion from one or two delegations. We would have taken a similar view if such had appeared at our Federal Conference. Another was a resolution that would have made ALDE a party of individual members, rather than of national political parties. This was contrary to EU funding rules and systems. A third called for a European Army and the fourth called for health to become largely an EU competence; causing us real difficulties over the NHS when we re-join the EU. Don't worry! These all fell.

We also faced a couple of resolutions where we had fundamental problems, but they were not beyond saving with some radical amendment. One was on LGBT+ rights and religion. I delegated David Chalmers and Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett to deal with the issue. With skilful rewording they turned the text away from finger pointing at particular religions to one based on principle. **The negotiations with the movers were also not straightforward. David and Adrian did a great job.**

The other called for the entire economy to be subject to the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). I had drafted a compromise with Billy Kelleher MEP of Fianna Fail which was to use an expert panel to advise on which sectors

should be added to ETS, but the movers stuck to their purist vision. I decided to play hard ball and advised our delegation to support the Swedes in removing the paragraph altogether. The deletion passed in the Working Group but had the effect of shaking the movers to accept the compromise, very late in the day, at the final vote. I was too slow typing “abstain” into the WhatsApp group but the deletion fell by one vote anyway and my compromise text sailed through.

Urgency resolutions were discussed, amended and passed during the Congress itself on Belarus, Ukraine/Crimea, antisemitism, land expropriation in South Africa and the Northern Ireland Protocol. **Our delegates, including Joyce Onstad, Markus Gehring and Hannah Bettsworth made some telling interventions to improve the texts.**

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[Priti Patel is turning her back on refugees](#)

Priti Patel says refugees should come to the UK through safe and legal routes, and is threatening to punish any who don't.

The Conservative Government is failing to provide any safe and legal routes for refugees to take.

But at the same time, **the Conservative Government is failing to provide any safe and legal routes for refugees to take.**

The Government's latest figures show that just 353 refugees were resettled in the UK in 2020-21 – a drop of 93% since the previous year.

The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary to those in need, but now the Conservatives are turning their backs on refugees.

Their failure to provide safe and legal routes is pushing desperate, vulnerable people into the hands of people smugglers and human traffickers.

Priti Patel's tough rhetoric and cruel policies only increases their profit margins. “We thank your government for our full pockets,” one smuggler told the Guardian recently.

That's why the Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to make an ambitious, ten-year commitment to resettle 10,000 vulnerable refugees a year

from Syria and other dangerous conflict areas. Because that's how we will actually combat these criminal gangs and prevent people from making dangerous attempts to cross the Channel and the Mediterranean.

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And what about the people who do come to the UK seeking sanctuary, having left their homes fleeing war or prosecution? **They should be welcomed with compassion, not kept in limbo for months while their claims are processed.**

Those same statistics reveal that 50,084 asylum seekers have been waiting more than six months for a decision from the Home Office – a number that has doubled on Priti Patel's watch. That's the scandal she should be tackling, but none of her endless series of cruel proposals will actually help solve it. In fact, they'll just cause even longer delays.

The Home Office is clearly not fit for purpose. So instead of making it harder for refugees to claim asylum, let's take these decisions away from the Home Office altogether.

A new arms-length, non-political agency should take over, with the staff, training and resources to process applications quickly, decide cases fairly, and get them right first time. And let's finally lift the ban and **give asylum seekers the right to work.** They should be enabled to contribute to our society, not trapped for months on just £5.66 a day.

Liberal Democrats are fighting to fix the broken asylum system, so that everyone can have confidence in it, and everyone's rights and dignity are respected.

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[Unpaid carers mustn't be ignored any longer](#)

People looking after their loved ones too often feel forgotten.

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[Have your say on the disciplinary process](#)

We want your views on how to improve the party's independent complaints process.

Any organisation with a hundred thousand members will have conflicts: what matters is how we deal with them. Wherever possible the process needs to be quick and effective – and it must always be transparent, fair and independent of political influence. It is key that if someone actions are damaging to other party members or members of the public, they can't expect to be protected by who they know or what role they hold in the party.

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[Happy Pride Month](#)

Pride Month is a time of LGBTQ+ celebration, activism and commemoration.

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