

EUROPEAN LEADERS MEET IN SARDINIA

Sardinia, September 9, 2002

Italian Prime Minister Silvio BERLUSCONI invited his European counterparts today to an informal meeting on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia.

Jean Pierre RAFFARIN of France, José Manuel DURÃO BARROSO of Portugal, Jan-Peter BALKENENDE of the Netherlands, Jean-Claude JUNCKER of Luxembourg, José Maria AZNAR of Spain, EPP President Wilfried MARTENS, EPP Secretary General Antonio LÓPEZ ISTÚRIZ and EPP-ED Chairman Hans-Gert POETTERING attended the Italian PM's invitation.

The leaders regretted Wolfgang SCHÜSSEL's non-attendance and wished him luck for Mid-November elections.

The Austrian chancellor called for early elections today after a fourth member of the governing coalition resigned.

The meeting was carried out in a climate of 'friendship, cordiality and close cooperation', Martens said.

The centre-right leaders talked about the future of Europe, agreeing on four chapters of the Document 'A Constitution for a strong Europe' to be presented to the next EPP Congress in Estoril.

The 4th chapter on institutional reforms will be developed in further discussions, though they agreed that more transparency in the decision-making processes is necessary in order to construct an enlarged Europe which is capable of acting and of safeguarding democracy and human rights.

'Estoril will be a fundamental step, but it won't bring the end of the discussions', Martens said. 'We have already agreed to hold another informal meeting in February 2003 in France'

The European premiers also focussed on the European Stability Pact and the crisis over the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic.

Kaliningrad has become a major stumbling block to improved relations between Russia and the EU. Moscow is pushing Europe to gradually lift the requirement that Russians obtain entry visas, and to waive visa requirements for Russians travelling overland between Kaliningrad and the rest of the country.

The leaders also supported Edmund STOIBER's position on Iraq. Stoiber, the Bavarian governor leading the opposition Christian Democrats into the September 22 election, has said it is necessary to keep up pressure on Saddam Hussein to admit UN weapons inspectors (UNSCOM) and fully respect the resolutions of the UN Security Council. They also rejected the attitude of chancellor Gerhard SCHRÖDER.

The important role of the EPP in the new political Europe, and the coming challenges were also discussed at the meeting, which reveals that 'centre-right parties respond to the citizens needs and are the most responsible and innovative force in the construction of Europe', the EPP President said.