

The Capitalist Ball. Every autumn or winter several hundred people gather on a dance floor in Brussels. There's dinner and a free bar. The walls are decorated with portraits of liberal pioneers such as Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman.

The Capitalist Ball is arranged by the Belgian free market think tank Centre for the New Europe, CNE.

CNE is a member of the Stockholm Network, a European network of 135 market-oriented think tanks. Norwegian Anne Kristine Jensen has danced at the Capitalist Ball several times.

"The Ball usually attracts MEPs and the American Ambassador is a regular. Representatives from private enterprise who sympathise with the ideas are also present" (Says Jensen).

Jensen worked as a Project Manager for the Stockholm Network from 2004 – 2007.

"A lot of the European liberal think tanks are funded by private enterprises, but some are reluctant to talk about it. But the enterprises have an interest in supporting freer markets, they sympathise with the capitalist ideas" (Says Jensen).

The battle for Eastern Europe. On the 5th of December last year there was a party at the National Liberal Club in London. The evening resembled the Oscars, but the awards were not given to the best movies or the best actors. Here, the awards were given to "Best think tank" and "Best contribution to free market ideas". The nominees were market oriented think tanks from all over Europe and the guests included British politicians and the American Ambassador to the EU, who also gave the main speech. The event was held by the Stockholm Network, named after the Swedish think tank Timbro.

The Stockholm Network was founded 10 years ago by the British journalist and activist Helen Disney. Since then the Network has grown from 5 to 135 think tanks.

"The growth has given us a complete network and a significant influence on the European policy agenda. We do a lot of work in Brussels, but also in the different countries. We meet with ministers and explain to them about our research. I believe people are more willing to listen to the think tanks

now that they are not just seen as an Anglo-American idea", says Helen Disney, CEO of the Stockholm Network.

Stockholm Network believes strongly in competition, but Disney doesn't experience any serious competition from think tanks on the left. "No, but some of these organisations are very active online and even more innovative than we are". (Says Disney).

The Stockholm Network works for market oriented policies, competition, lower taxes and privatisation of health care.

"We try to look 10-15 years ahead and to be controversial. Flat tax is very controversial in Britain, but the fact that it's happening in other countries opens the debate" (Says Disney).

The Stockholm Network has contributed to the process of implementing flat tax in 15 European countries, for example in Russia, Bulgaria, Romania and Estonia.

"The Eastern European people have lived under communism and are therefore more positive to market economics. The enlargement to the East has led to the establishment of many new think tanks in Eastern Europe". (says Disney).

The Stockholm Network is co-hosting a big gathering of liberal think tanks this October in Tbilisi.

More than 200 representatives from European and American think tanks are meeting for the 5th time at the "European Resource Bank Meeting". Politicians and academics will also be present in the discussion on "the spread of free market economics". The seminar is sponsored by both the American think tank Cato Institute and Coca-Cola.

While working as a project manager for the Stockholm Network, Anne Kristine Jensen was involved with Eastern European issues.

"Eastern Europe became a pioneer for market oriented policies. Reforms that are seen as impossible to gather support for in Western Europe are already happening in Eastern Europe. Some of the big American think tanks give financial contributions to the Eastern European think tanks. "They have huge budgets and a strong interest in supporting the work carried out in Eastern Europe", says Jensen.