

Klaus Welle & Sara Pini *Editors*

The EPP's Way to Number 1

The Rise to Europe's Leading
Political Force and Lessons Ahead

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Martens Centre
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Party Names

Original name	English name	Country	Abbreviation
Alianza Popular	Popular Alliance	Spain	AP
Anavatan Partisi	Motherland Party	Turkey	ANAP
Centro Cristiano Democratico	Christian Democratic Centre	Italy	CCD
Centro Democrático e Social – Partido Popular	Democratic Social Center – People’s Party	Portugal	CDS-PP
Christelijke Democratische en Vlaams	Christian Democratic and Flemish	Belgium	CD&V
Christelijke Volkspartij	Christian People’s Party	Belgium	CVP
Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christian Democratic Appeal	Netherlands	CDA
Christlich Demokratische Union	Christian Democratic Union	Germany	CDU
Christlich-Soziale Union	Christian Social Union	Germany	CSU
Conservative Party	Conservative Party	UK	CP
Cristiani Democratici Uniti	United Christian Democrats	Italy	CDU
Democrazia Cristiana	Christian Democracy	Italy	DC
Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë	Democratic Party of Albania	Albania	PDSH
Det Konservative Folkeparti	Conservative People’s Party	Denmark	C
Dimokratikós Sinagermós	Democratic Rally	Cyprus	DISY
Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido Nacionalista Vasco	Basque National Party	Spain	EAJ-PNV
Fianna Fáil – The Republican Party		Ireland	FF
Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség	Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance	Hungary	Fidesz

Original name	English name	Country	Abbreviation
Fine Gael		Ireland	FG
Forza Italia		Italy	FI
Høyre	Conservative Party	Norway	H
Hrvatska demokratska zajednica	Croatian Democratic Union	Croatia	HDZ
Kansallinen Kokoomus	National Coalition Party	Finland	Kok
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	Christian Democratic Movement	Slovakia	KDH
Kristdemokraterna	Christian Democrats	Sweden	KD
Kristendemokraterne	Christian Democrats	Denmark	KD
Les Républicains	The Republicans	France	LR
Moderaterna (or Moderata Samlingspartiet)	Moderates (or Moderate Party)	Sweden	M
Néa Dimokratía	New Democracy	Greece	ND
Občanská demokratická strana	Civic Democratic Party	Czechia	ODS
Österreichische Volkspartei	Austrian People's Party	Austria	ÖVP
Partido Demócrata Popular	People's Democratic Party	Spain	PDP
Partido Popular	People's Party	Spain	PP
Partido Social Democrata	Social Democratic Party	Portugal	PSD
Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	Spain	PSOE
Parti social chrétien	Christian Social Party	Belgium	PSC
Partito Democratico	Democratic Party	Italy	PD
Partito Popolare Italiano	Italian People's Party	Italy	PPI
Politiki Aniksi	Political Spring	Greece	POL.AN.
Rassemblement pour la République	Rally for the Republic	France	RPR
Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union	Slovakia	SDKÚ
Slovenská demokratická koalícia	Slovak Democratic Coalition	Slovakia	SDK
Slovenski Krščanski Demokrati	Slovene Christian Democrats	Slovenia	SKD
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Germany	SPD
Unió Democràtica de Catalunya	Democratic Union of Catalonia	Spain	UDC
Unión de Centro Democrático	Union of the Democratic Centre	Spain	UCD
Union pour la Démocratie Française	Union for French Democracy	France	UDF
Union pour un mouvement populaire	Union for a Popular Movement	France	UMP

Youth Organisations

- **CDJA** (Christen-Democratische Jongeren Appèl, Christian Democratic Youth Appeal, the Netherlands)
- **CVP-Jongeren** (Christelijke Volkspartij-Jongeren, Christian People's Party-Youth, Belgium)
- **Fidelitas** (Hungary)
- **FIG** (Forza Italia Giovani, Forza Italia Youth, Italy)
- **JKKD** (Junior klubu křesťanských demokratů, Junior Club of Christian Democrats, Czechia)
- **Jeunes PSC** (Jeunes Parti social chrétien, Youth of the Christian Social Party, Belgium)
- **Jeunes UMP** (Jeunes Union pour un mouvement Populaire, Youth of the Union for a Popular Movement, France)
- **JU** (Junge Union, Young Union, Germany)
- **NG PPCD** (Noua Generație Partidul Popular Creștin Democrat, New Generation of the Christian Democratic People's Party, Moldova)
- **NG SLS** (Nova Generacija Slovenske ljudske stranke, New Generation of the Slovenian People's Party, Slovenia)
- **NNGG** (Nuevas Generaciones, New Generations, Spain)
- **ONNED** (Organosi Neon Neas Dimokratias, Youth Organisation of New Democracy, Greece)
- **YC** (Young Conservatives, UK)
- **YFG** (Young Fine Gael, Ireland)
- **YUDF** (Mladezhki Saiuz na Demokratichnite Sili, Young Union for Democratic Forces, Bulgaria)

Contents

The Way to Number 1	1
<i>Klaus Welle</i>	
 Part I. The Beginning	13
 The Basic Programme of Athens: The Glue of Values and a Route Guide for a Europe in Turmoil	15
<i>Jos J. A. M. van Gennip</i>	
 Part II. Breaking Through – The Way to Majority	31
 Wilfried Martens’s Vision for the EPP (Interview With Marianne Amssoms)	33
<i>Federico Ottavio Reho</i>	
 From Alianza Popular to Partido Popular: The History of a Refoundation	39
<i>José María Aznar</i>	
 The History of a Beautiful Political Friendship: The British Conservatives and the EPP	49
<i>Anthony Teasdale</i>	

Forza Italia's Entry Into the EPP: A Natural Destiny	59
<i>Antonio Tajani</i>	
A European Legacy: My EPP Experience	65
<i>Mikuláš Dzurinda</i>	
 Part III. Creating a Joint Youth Structure: YEPP	71
 The Path to Founding YEPP	73
<i>Gareth Gregan</i>	
The Creation of YEPP	79
<i>Fredrik Reinfeldt</i>	
The Consolidation Phase	85
<i>Leo Varadkar</i>	
 Part IV. The Integration of the EUCD into the EPP	91
 A Stronger EPP for a Stronger Europe	93
<i>Alojz Peterle</i>	
From Vision to Power: The EPP's Journey Through Enlargement and Strategy (Interview With Wim van Velzen)	99
<i>Teona Lavrelashvili</i>	
 Part V. Mission Accomplished – The EDU	105
 The EDU – A Building Block for the EPP	107
<i>Sauli Niinistö</i>	
Cooperation Between Christian Democrats, Conservatives and Other Like-Minded Parties: Through a Minefield to the EDU	111
<i>Andreas Khol</i>	
 The EDU: Laying the Foundations for a Centre–Right Lead in Europe	121
<i>Alexis Wintoniak</i>	

Part VI. On the Right Track? – The Enlargement of the EPP 30 Years Later	131
Yes, But ...	133
<i>Jean-Claude Juncker</i>	
Remaining Loyal to Our Roots	137
<i>Ria Oomen-Ruijten</i>	
The Power of Leadership: Wilfried Martens and the EPP's Political Strategy (Interview With Marc Van Peel)	145
<i>Teona Lavrelashvili</i>	
Part VII. The Enlarged EPP in Practice	149
The EPP on Its Path to Becoming the Largest Group and the Increase of Competences for the European Parliament	151
<i>Hans-Gert Pöttering</i>	
Wilfried Martens and Our Ambitions for the EPP	159
<i>A. López-Istúriz White</i>	
Putting the Person at the Centre: How to Successfully Preside Over an Enlarged EPP (Interview With Joseph Daul)	165
<i>Sara Pini</i>	
Reassessing the Effectiveness of the European People's Party	175
<i>Karl Magnus Johansson</i>	
Part VIII. Conclusion	185
What's Next?	187
<i>Klaus Welle</i>	
Annexes	191
Index	233

List of Tables

Cooperation Between Christian Democrats, Conservatives and Other Like-Minded Parties: Through a Minefield to the EDU

Table 1	EDU founding members	114
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The EDU: Laying the Foundations for a Centre–Right Lead in Europe

Table 1	EDU founding members	122
Table 2	Full list of EDU members as of 17 October 2002	125



The Way to Number 1

Klaus Welle

The challenge

My first day as the newly elected secretary general of the European People's Party (EPP) in October 1994 started with a rather rude welcome. My deputy Guy Korthoutdt told me that whatever ideas I had, I should forget them. There was no money. And to underline that point, new paper would not be available—we all had to write on the back of paper that had already been used. The office was situated in rented space close to the Midi railway station in Rue de la Victoire. A visit from German chancellor and CDU party chairman Helmut Kohl would have been impossible given the limited size of both the lift and the staircase.

Politically, it was not looking very bright either. The EPP had lost every single direct election to the European Parliament since 1979 to the Socialists and had just added another defeat that summer. The Italian Christian Democratic party, Democrazia Cristiana, a pillar of the EPP for decades, had dissolved into numerous pieces. Articles were being published about the end of Christian Democracy.

Inside the EPP there was a long-standing feud over whether or not to cooperate with liberal and conservative parties. This had led to the creation of the European Democrat Union (EDU) as a platform outside the EPP through

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which to do exactly that. The German and Austrian Christian Democrats were participating in this, as well as the Spanish Partido Popular and the Greek Néo Dimokratía, while the more traditionalist Benelux, Italian, Irish and French Christian Democrats remained vehemently opposed to that idea and practice.

But the EPP had its strong points as well. It was the only European political party headquartered outside the premises of the European Parliament, underlining its proper independence from the parliamentary group. The EPP summits of heads of state and government, which were held ahead of meetings of the European Council, were attractive events given the loyal participation of the German chancellor, the major figure in European politics. Wilfried Martens, as president of both the transnational party and its group in the European Parliament, was fully dedicated and engaged. The EPP worked seriously on political programmes that provided a common base for its member parties and Members of the European Parliament. The beginnings of an opening up to parties of different traditions had been made with the acceptance of the membership of Partido Popular.

Helmut Kohl dissatisfied

Despite this, Kohl, the major political figure within the family, was still not satisfied. He withdrew his political support from Thomas Jansen, the German EPP secretary general until 1994. Kohl held Jansen responsible for the 1992 Athens Programme (see Annex I), which Kohl perceived as an attempt to cement the EPP on a traditionalist line. This would have made opening up to conservative and liberal political forces—similarly to how German Christian Democracy was built after the Second World War—more difficult and thus would have hindered the building of a majority coalition in Europe. As he regularly put it, ‘We have not built Europe to leave it to the socialists.’

In April 1993 Ambassador Bernd Fischer, head of the International Relations Department of the CDU, asked me, on behalf of Kohl, to become deputy secretary general of the EPP. The plan was that Enrico Letta, later prime minister of Italy, would become the secretary general. The idea envisaged was to build a tandem leadership formed of the president of the European Young Christian Democrats, Letta, and myself as the president of the Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC), the youth organisation of the EDU. Due to the collapse of Democrazia Cristiana, Letta later withdrew his candidacy and indeed did not even show up for the election originally planned for summer 1993—which opened up the space for me.

At the time I was in charge of foreign, European and defence policy at the CDU central office in Bonn, with responsibility for the party's advisory bodies in this field. I had also drafted the new CDU party programme on Europe, which had been adopted at the CDU Congress in Düsseldorf in 1992. As chairman of DEMYC and the one responsible for international relations on the national board of the CDU youth organisation, Junge Union, I had ample experience of both programme work and interparty relations, and especially of cooperating with people beyond the boundaries of traditional Christian Democracy. EPP president Wilfried Martens knew and valued me from our joint work on the EPP programme for the European elections in 1994 and seems to have suggested me for the new role to the German chancellor. By the time I had moved to Brussels, I had also successfully prepared the content side of the CDU campaign for the European elections in June 1994.

Quick piecemeal progress

Once I was in the role, some of the necessary progress could be achieved piecemeal.

The Finnish and Swedish permanent observer parties became members of the EPP. This was not without complications: the Swedish party leader, Carl Bildt, feared that joining the EPP fully could unbalance Swedish relations with Germany and Britain given that the British Conservatives were not members of the EPP transnational party. They also insisted that the working methods of the EPP should become more similar to those of the EDU. Even though Norway had voted against EU accession, Høyre became firmly anchored in the EPP.

Programme work remained decisive for the integration process. The 1995 EPP Congress was marked by rather bitter debates about the social market economy, which some of the new entrants linked to socialism. In the EPP, the party programme was voted on democratically based on detailed amendments and majority decisions. This came as a shock to those who were outvoted on issues of critical substance for them. For President Martens and myself, programme work was the basis for solidifying the EPP in its enlarged composition.

As secretary general I proposed to the political bureau that member parties' associations—such as the youth and women's associations—should be admitted as members of associations recognised by the EPP. That led to successful negotiations between the European Young Christian Democrats and DEMYC to form a united youth structure, the Youth of the European People's Party

(YEPP), which would become formative for a new generation of leaders such as future prime ministers Frederik Reinfeldt and Leo Varadkar. A comical side effect was that I had to reject my own application for DEMYC to be recognised as the second youth structure of the EPP. The EDU student organisation European Democrat Students was recognised as the student organisation of the EPP.

Kohl wanted the EPP summits to be smaller, limited to key decision-makers—ideally just the prime ministers with the EPP president and secretary general. The solution found instead was to bring together the EPP heads of state and government with the elected members of the presidency of the party. That created the incentive for major opposition leaders to run for vice-president, providing them with easy access to the most important leaders, and strengthened the federal leadership of the EPP. Key future European leaders, such as José Manuel Barroso, were thus immersed into the party.

Financially, the contribution of the EPP Group in the European Parliament was able to be seriously increased, first to one-third of that of the member parties and then to one-half, which—together with their provision of two additional staff members and the contributions of the new member parties—gave the EPP some breathing space. The EPP was able to move into a new headquarters in Rue d'Arlon 67, close to the European Parliament.

Growing the party

How to grow a European political party? In business you would differentiate between internal growth and external growth, which is the result of mergers and acquisitions. During my university education in Witten/Herdecke, especially under Prof. Dr Karl Homann, we had been trained to apply economic concepts to all walks of life outside the economy. Why not look at our membership as having strengths or weaknesses in key political markets?

It became apparent that moving to number one would require a serious increase of representation in both Italy and France because of the numbers of Members of the European Parliament they elect and the weakness of the EPP in those countries. Our representation in Portugal and Denmark also needed strengthening. Furthermore, in view of the upcoming enlargement, the approach towards Central and Eastern Europe could not just focus on traditional Christian or Catholic parties, most of which were not reaching double-digit results in elections.

Political nominalism, the self-definition or political self-identification as belonging to a specific political tradition such as Christian Democrat,

conservative, liberal or socialist, had to be replaced in the ever-larger Europe by a party's ability to sign up to a particular political programme and the space it occupied on the political spectrum.

Christian Democrat self-identification depends upon whether there has been a major church/state conflict in the country's history. In countries where this has never happened, such as the Nordic countries which are state-church nations—that is, those in which the head of state is also the head of the (Protestant) state church—that was excluded in advance, except for small religious minorities. In France, religious communities had decided not to fight the liberal state in the nineteenth century because they expected the return of the monarchy, which would then have solved the issue.¹ In Italy, the experience of *Democrazia Cristiana*, as the assembly of all Catholics in one political party, nearly independent of political belief, similar to the German *Zentrum*, had finally failed, but its electorate was still there.

The EPP had to move from the Italian concept of Christian Democracy as all Catholics in one party to the German concept of uniting the Catholic Christian–social tradition with Protestant liberal and conservative ideas, as achieved after the Second World War. Given that the Spanish *Partido Popular* had also brought together Christian Democrat, conservative and liberal traditions, the strongest political forces inside the EPP were now built like that, while the Italian model had faltered.

This also provided an opportunity to preserve the Christian Democratic genetic code in what was an increasingly secular environment, and to avoid the fate of the dinosaurs. Classical Christian Democratic ideas, reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable—such as the social market economy, subsidiarity, the people's party and federalism—could be preserved outside of a religiously inspired political context in an enlarged programmatic party.

Does the European Parliament have to be Socialist-dominated?

In 1996 I provided Martens with a strategy paper entitled 'Does the European Parliament Have to Be Socialist-Dominated?', which was later published in abbreviated form by the British Conservative delegation² and as a speech in

¹ S. N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996).

² K. Welle, *Must the European Parliament Be Dominated by the Socialists?*, Blue and Gold Discussion Papers: Conservatives in the European Parliament (London, 1997).

the EPP yearbook for 1997 (see Annex II). It compared our strengths and weaknesses in parliamentary representation to those of the Socialists, which showed that becoming number one would require serious efforts, especially in France, Italy and Portugal, but also in terms of prospective alliances in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, such as Hungary.

Martens decided to present the paper to the EPP summit for a strategic debate about whether to further widen the EPP membership or not, which I was invited to introduce. Strong support from Kohl and the Spanish prime minister, José María Aznar, was countered by serious criticism from the more traditionalist wing of the party. The question was now openly on the table, but the opportunities needed to be addressed one by one, of which the most divisive proved to be the question of Forza Italia, while progress in Portugal and France proved to be more straightforward.

Portugal

The Portuguese PSD belonged to the liberal political family in Europe but had undergone some internal debate about the best political membership, provoked, among others, by its youth organisation, which invited me to speak at one of their events in Porto. I was then informed that I would also meet party leader Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in Lisbon. Marcelo gave me a long talk about why they wanted to join the EPP and six bottles of excellent red wine—quite difficult to transport back on the plane to Brussels—and the issue was settled. Aznar vacated his seat on the EPP presidency in favour of a certain José Manuel Durão Barroso, and the rest is history.

Italy, or the policy of a common roof

Democrazia Cristiana disintegrated when it was no longer needed as an anti-Communist bulwark following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Even before this it had had to contend with its heterogeneous political tendencies through the organisation of *correnti*, which were subgroups closely linked to individual political leaders.

The political space left by Democrazia Cristiana after 1993 was filled by several smaller successor organisations—namely the PPI, the CDU and the CCD, which were competing for recognition by the EPP—as well as by Forza Italia.

I suggested to Martens that rather than privileging one party over the other, we should provide a common roof for all of them and address a political space rather than an organisational structure that was visibly still very much in flux.

The PPI and the CDU asked the German CDU/CSU delegation leader Günther Rinsche and myself to broker a compromise on who was entitled to use the *scudo crociato* (crossed shield) party logo and who could use the name Partito Popolare Italiano, which we successfully did with their leaders, Gerardo Bianco and Rocco Buttiglione, on the fringes of an EPP summit in southern France at the end of 1994—and sealed the deal with a glass of champagne from the mini-bar. I visited Pier Ferdinando Casini, the leader of the break-away CCD, in Rome and invited him to join the EPP, which he did. The three quarrelling successor organisations of Democrazia Cristiana were thus united under a common European roof.

The case of Forza Italia proved much more divisive. I had been told that the outgoing president of the European Parliament, Egon Klepsch, had tried to invite Forza Italia to join the EPP Group after the 1994 elections but had failed to achieve support within the EPP. In 1996 Martens allowed me to meet with Silvio Berlusconi confidentially in Rome, asking me to be in listening mode only. After also having received the green light from the then PPI leader Franco Marini in a meeting in Piazza del Gesù, I did.

These efforts resulted in regular meetings in 1997 with the Forza Italia delegation leader Claudio Azzolini in the presence of a representative of the PPI, EPP Group vice-president Pierluigi Castagnetti. Martens privately discussed the case with Kohl in Bonn but reported back that no clear indication had been given by the chancellor about the road to integration.

Attempts by the French Gaullists, the major Irish party Fianna Fáil and Forza Italia to form a new party to the right of the EPP finally led to decisive action. I sent a two-page fax to Kohl a couple of days before Christmas 1997, informing him of the development, and received his approval to prepare the way for Forza Italia to be integrated into the EPP. An extraordinary meeting of the EPP presidency, organised on 22 January 1998 in St Augustin (see Annex III) by leader of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and EPP vice-president Otfried Hennig, explicitly endorsed the integration of Forza Italia into the EPP Group.

The EPP Group proved strongly divided over the issue. The more traditionalist Christian Democrat members formed a discussion circle, the ‘Athens Group’ (see Annex IV), named after the 1992 Athens Basic Programme, to block the process. The delegation leaders on the other side established a breakfast circle called ‘Sparta’, to which I was invited and which is still in existence.

In a secret and tumultuous vote, the Group accepted by a majority the joining of the members of Forza Italia, which also paved the way for the party's later integration into the EPP. Following their admission, the Forza Italia delegation has proved to be the most loyal in the EPP Group in terms of their voting record. Antonio Tajani has become one of the family's most respected leaders.

France

Forza Italia joining the EPP Group robbed the French Gaullists of the prospect of establishing their own strong European political party. Meeting the head of cabinet of the RPR party leader Philippe Séguin in early 1999 established a first contact and gave me the opportunity to clarify that the EPP was open to establishing closer relations. The RPR was well known among EPP member parties as an active member of the EDU, and Jacques Chirac had engaged personally and very successfully hosted an EDU party leaders' meeting in Paris's city hall.

Finally, in his first period of only a few months as party leader, around the European elections of 1999, Nicolas Sarkozy took the decision. As the new secretary general of the EPP Group, I received his phone call announcing that the RPR would join not only the EPP Group but also the party. He added, 'not like the British Conservatives'.

The Group now united for the first time all the components of the French centre and centre-right, which preconfigured the creation of the UMP under President Sarkozy. A close confidant of President Jacques Chirac, Joseph Daul, would later take over the leadership of first the EPP Group and then the party.

Tidying up

The political space of Christian Democrats and conservatives in Europe was organisationally divided not only in two, but in three: the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD), established in 1965, which also covered the space beyond what is now the EU; the EDU, as a platform for cooperation between Christian Democrats and conservatives; and the EPP, which organised common action in the EU.

The EUCD had gained new importance with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the necessity to identify partners in Central and Eastern Europe, as their countries were on the way to EU membership. At the same time, this allowed the development of partnerships without yet admitting those parties directly

into the EPP, given that many party structures were not yet stable, divisions happened and it was difficult to prejudge which party would finally prevail.

In spring 1996 Kohl invited a small circle of EPP leaders into the chancellery in Bonn, including the head of the CDU/CSU delegation in the European Parliament and myself, to discuss party matters. The circle included the likes of Jean-Claude Juncker, whom he lovingly called Junior; Jean-Luc Dehaene; Carl Bildt; Martens; and Aznar. Besides providing an opportunity for Aznar to detail his European convictions, it also served to conclude that the EUCD should now be dissolved. As secretary general of the EUCD as well, it was up to me and EUCD president Wim van Velzen to come up with a plan.

We designed the dissolution of the EUCD as a process of integration into the EPP ahead of the EPP congress in February 1999, but based on individual applications and merit. The stability criteria to be met assured the EPP that these political forces were relatively established. The individual, merit-based process was for real: in the first attempt both the Croatian HDZ as well as the Albanian PDSH failed and therefore had to try again after 1999.

The EDU followed the same path after 1999 under the leadership of President Sauli Niinistö. The Austrian ÖVP, which had invested the most into this cooperation, hosting the executive secretaries Andreas Khol and then Alexis Wintoniak in Vienna, approved the merger through their party leader, Wolfgang Schüssel. Wintoniak, Jori Arvonen (representing the EDU president) and I were asked to deal with the technical aspects of the operation.

The political space of Christian Democrats and conservatives was finally united in a single political organisation. All of them? No, the British Conservatives were left without a structure for European party cooperation and, in 2009, also left the EPP Group, of which they had been increasingly reluctant members for two decades.

The way to Number 1

European elections are decided before, during and after election day. The capacity to build a strong alliance of national parties through ‘mergers and acquisitions’ is decisive. The diverging national histories of developing political self-consciousness makes this a challenging process across the whole political spectrum.

President Macron was ready to join a renamed Renew Group in the European Parliament, but refused to accept the liberal label, which is toxic in France, and therefore stayed out of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) party. The Italian Partito Democratico, a merger of left-wing

Christian Democrats with parts of the historical Communist party of Italy, could not agree to self-identify as Socialist and therefore required that the name of the Socialist group in the European Parliament be changed to 'Socialists and Democrats' before it would join.

The EPP went through this process first, and probably in the most consistent manner. It has been rewarded by winning six European elections in a row and being the party of the Commission president for five terms under Barroso, Juncker and Ursula von der Leyen, thus leading the continent of Europe.

This is the way to Number 1.

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Klaus Welle has chaired the Martens Centre's Academic Council since April 2023. He previously served as chair of DEMYC (1991–4), before going on to serve as secretary general of the EUCD (1994–9), of the EPP (1994–9), of the EPP Group in the European Parliament (1999–2004) and of the European Parliament (2009–22). He is a Guest Professor in Practice at the London School of Economics, a Visiting Professor at KU Leuven and a Leader in Residence at the Moynihan Center of the Colin Powell School for Global Leadership in New York.

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Part I. The Beginning

The Basic Programme of Athens: The Glue of Values and a Route Guide for a Europe in Turmoil

Jos J. A. M. van Gennip

The end of Christian Democracy?

The summer issue of *Foreign Affairs* of 2014¹ carried a prominent article titled ‘The End of Christian Democracy’—just a month after an unexpected positive outcome for the European People’s Party (EPP) at the European elections. Few had thought that the Party would remain the largest in the Parliament—and maintain that lead in the two following elections!

Thirty-five years ago, in 1989, the picture was quite different. The EPP suffered a defeat, and the Socialists were the winning party, bringing Jacques Delors to the presidency of the Commission. Chancellor Helmut Kohl exclaimed that the Christian Democrats had not built Europe just to surrender it to the socialists—and he had a point.

Fear of the Communist threat was vanishing under the influence of *perestroika*. The socialists themselves became more moderate and moved to the centre, the churches were losing considerable parts of their congregations, rural populations and parts of the lower middle class—our traditional supporters—were shrinking, and there was another determinant factor. Christian Democracy is in essence an answer to the thesis of most (not all) advocates of

¹J. W. Müller, ‘The End of Christian Democracy. What the Movement’s Decline Means for Europe’, *Foreign Affairs*, 15 July 2014.

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the French Revolution that Christianity and the ideals of that Revolution are incompatible. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, philosophers, theologians and church leaders, but also a number of trade unionists and rural leaders, were of the opinion that, on the contrary, Christian convictions and values were a perfect fundament both for democratic engagement and for taking responsibility for the social needs of the time. In the twentieth century this concept was promoted by thinkers and leaders such as Don Luigi Sturzo, Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Oswald von Nell-Breuning, Romano Guardini and Albert Dondeyne (the master teacher of Wilfried Martens). Notwithstanding their diversity, they had in common that they all originated from countries that in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century were invaded physically and ideologically by the forces of the French Revolution. Henceforth, Christian Democracy was limited, with a few exceptions (for instance, Ireland), to those countries, which not coincidentally were the initiators of the European integration process, with those parties as the pioneers. But with the gradual expansion of the European unification process to include other countries, from the founding 6 to the 12 of 1992, there were hardly any (at least powerful) counterparts in the new member states which were of the same tradition. Did that mean a *structural* disadvantage and the gradual marginalisation of Christian Democrats in a Europe that was essentially founded by them? Should we really be punished because, in the youngest member states, socialist and liberal parties had been established that could associate automatically with their respective families in the European Parliament, while the Christian Democrats had been, so to speak, left alone?

Straighten your backs, gentlemen!

Kohl's answer was no. This marginalisation did not have to be regarded as necessary or automatic. This was especially true because in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a strong sentiment in Europe that the newly acquired freedom and prosperity should be translated into an anti-socialist political movement. This feeling was strengthened by the observation that a number of former Communist parties tried to retain part of their power by disguising themselves as social democrats! And jumping on the bandwagon of the perceived new liberal world order, some liberal political parties in Europe were trying to strengthen their position by adopting the use of the concept of 'liberalism' which was then current in the American political sciences. This, once

again, was to the detriment of Christian Democracy, as it was perceived by many scientists as an outdated ideology: one that had been useful in the combat against Communism but that had since lost its purpose.

Some saw a way out. Why not transform the already existing relationship with a number of conservative groupings into a political formation on the European level? A number of these parties were already united in the European Democrat Union, even including a few members of the EPP: notably the German CDU, the Spanish Partido Popular and the Austrian ÖVP. At the outset, Kohl had in mind especially cooperation with the British Tories. But relations with the Tories and later with the Scandinavian conservative parties were more complex. In the past there had been no ideological problems when working with the Conservatives in the UK. This was true of, for example, the Conservatives under Ted Heath, the social-minded British prime minister who had brought his country into the European Community and who was inspired by the ideologue Edmund Burke. (Like the Christian Democratic thinkers, Burke had been averse to the French Revolution.) But with the Tories of the radical and Eurosceptic neoliberal Margaret Thatcher, it was another story!

Especially in the Benelux countries and in the group of trade unionists within the CDU (the Christlich Demokratische Arbeitnehmer), there was deep suspicion about cooperating with Thatcher's Tories. The Netherlands had recently witnessed a very complex process of unifying the three Christian Democratic parties. The outcome was a strengthening of the Christian-social character of the new CDA party, but it was at right angles to most of the other members of our family. These concerns frustrated those who could see that the narrowing of Christian Democracy at the European level would mean structural marginalisation. Especially within our Group in the European Parliament, the discussion about opening up to 'non-genuine' parties became heftier and heftier. The pressure from CDU circles to give in was strong, and the mistrust between the German chancellor and the president of the Group, the very popular former Belgian prime minister Leo Tindemans, resulted in an unbearable stalemate. This was occurring in the run-up to the negotiations for the Maastricht Treaty, in which the EPP prime ministers and the party itself were once again supposed to play a positive key role during this new historic moment for Europe. Time was running out . . .

Could one find a compromise, a breakthrough? In December 1991 the Netherlands' Prime Minister Lubbers invited his Belgian colleague Wilfried

Martens to his residence in The Hague. The pressure on the leaders of both the EPP and the CDA was immense. Their parties wanted to avoid at any price a watering down of the Christian Democratic character of their movement. But Kohl demanded that the EPP should be opened up.² In an hours-long meeting, the Dutch and Belgian delegations agreed on a proposal that would, on one hand, open the door to non-Christian, centrist, democratic movements, but on the other hand, would not weaken the original character of the EPP, but instead strengthen it. Newcomers would be expected to sign up to this reinforced character of the European formation they aspired to join. And for this strengthening and deepening to become a reality, five concrete measures were proposed.

First, a *basic principles programme* should be formulated. What were the determining values and sources of inspiration? What was the positioning of our Group in the political spectrum? What was the defining vision for the future of Europe? What were the fundamental societal choices, and could there be a shared analysis of the developments within culture and society? In other words: how were the profile and character of this new European political formation to be defined?

Second, an *academic institution* of its own would deepen the new EPP with its orientation towards content and values. This European foundation should be modelled on the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which had so greatly contributed to the success of the CDU in West Germany.

Third, a truly vital political movement demanded *education and training* for its most interested adherents. In particular, the younger ones, and those from the countries in the other half of Europe who wanted to become acquainted with contemporary Christian Democracy, should have access to summer courses and fellowships.

Fourth, there should be an ambitious *programme of publications and media presence* for the strengthening and deepening of the political awareness of our own followers. This would also address the curious phenomenon in academia and especially in political philosophy of a strong mismatch between the attention given to Social Democracy and liberalism, on the one hand, and to Christian social and political thinking, on the other, neglecting that the latter were and had been the key elements in the political choices made in post-war Europe and in its preference for the social market model.

² A. van Kessel, "Straighten Your Backs, Gentlemen!" How the Dutch Christian Democrats Lost out to Their German Kindred Spirits in the Debate on the Profile of the European People's Party', doctoral dissertation, Catholic University Nijmegen, 2003.

These three last provisions, which would sustain the ambition that this new European grouping would really be an association based on values and in continuity with its Christian Democratic original members, were mostly agreed upon. However, all these ambitions demanded a certain degree of autonomy: both independent financial resources and a formal status. And so we demanded, as the fifth element, *the formal recognition of European political formations*, meaning the formal status of the EPP as a formation that was not fully dependent on its constituent parties.

These five elements were baptised in the months before the meeting in The Hague, in the container concept of 'the bunker strategy'!

At a special meeting in the prime minister's residence in The Hague, the so-called Catshuis, between delegations from Belgium and the Netherlands under the chairmanships of Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands and Prime Minister Wilfried Martens of Belgium, this bunker strategy was approved as the starting point of the negotiations. The Academic Institute of the CDA was invited, as well, as the possible rapporteur for the new Basic Programme of the EPP.

Would this strategy, the opening of the EPP to non-Christian Democratic parties together with the preservation of a Christian Democratic identity for the new formation, prove a viable compromise or even the best of two worlds? Would it be acceptable, above all, to the German chancellor and to the most important aspirants?

Just anti-socialist or an identity of its own?

Absolutely unrealistic, and moreover undesirable, were the earliest reactions of those in the EPP who wanted above all a broad coalition against the Socialists. The motivation to keep them out of power and for us to become the strongest and defining force in Europe was enough for them. Furthermore, it was superfluous: what was left of the 'left' after the fall of the Berlin Wall? And it was undesirable, said voices from the liberal tradition within the EPP itself, who were afraid of a Christian and especially a Catholic hegemony in European politics and who wondered whether there would be enough common ground at all to agree on an ideological basis, other than the dislike of the left. Helmut Kohl had serious doubts about the possibility of a real, common ideological fundament among the different traditions, including the British Conservatives.

But Martens as president of the EPP and Lubbers as chair of the European Council persevered. The easiest point was the precondition of the recognition

of European political formations. Coincidentally, at the time the presidents of the Socialists and of the Liberals were also Belgian politicians. In the run-up to the Maastricht negotiations, they agreed on a formula of recognition in wording that eventually enabled the financing of certain activities such as research and formation. At the following summit they were able to put this through despite the hesitations of certain countries and a dislike in many bureaucratic and diplomatic layers.

The eventual formulation of a common basic principles programme turned out to be more complicated. Martens and Lubbers finally succeeded in convincing Kohl that such an endeavour could have real prospects. A task force was installed under the chairmanship of Wilfried Martens, with a coordinating role of the Academic Institute of the Dutch CDA as rapporteur (I happened to be the director at the time), and naturally, with the participation of a member of the cabinet of the German chancellor.

In his memoirs Martens describes how challenging this project was. Bringing together the various ideological traditions, mobilising the brain-power of the member parties, but also sometimes suppressing 'the mockery' of certain collaborators within the EPP organisation itself who had little respect for the religiously inspired roots of their own institution. It was clear: if we really wanted to establish a political formation with its own identity encompassing the Christian Democratic tradition (which in itself was not uniform); the conservative vision of society, economy and culture; and parts of the liberal ideology, that alone would already be an enormous challenge. This was not to mention the concept of strict separation between church and state as embodied in the idea of *laïcité*, the principle of our potential French allies, the party that is currently called Les Républicains. The task force with this agenda had to start its work immediately after the Maastricht Treaty. The elections in 1994 should not be a repetition of the defeat of 1989. The era of the new Europe after the fall of the Wall should again be a Christian Democratic one, and the next congress of the EPP in November 1992 in Athens should be the turning point, with a strong content-based identity of its own.

A surprising discovery

Could the different traditions, convictions (or the lack of them) and interests really be brought together in a binding, innovative and appealing document, no less a basic principles programme, a common doctrine for the approximately 20 old and new members?

In the preparatory task force the process of inventorying, drafting and negotiating was cumbersome and not easy. But something else also became clear: the rich traditions and concepts of the members could in all their diversity strengthen each other, have an additional value. The southern members brought in the flavour of the thinking of Maritain and Mounier, the personalism that had inspired their ideologues in the 1930s and 1940s. The Dutch contributed their classical approach, that upholding the principle of the separation of church and state was compatible with references to biblical notions. The German-speaking members underlined the importance of the constituent values of fundamental equity, justice, solidarity and, foremost, freedom, combined with responsibility, a notion that would become more and more relevant to this day. And their experiences in state building after the war brought them to underscore the principle of subsidiarity, so relevant for the construction of Europe. The Catholic tradition also became manifest in the duty of all politics to protect the common good and the general interest, more than the sum of individual interests, thus distancing our formation from the liberal vision of the *homo economicus*.

Indeed, we could start, and we could agree in the first chapter of what would become the final document, with a concept of personhood, maybe the most important characteristic and most important paragraph: 'We Christian Democrats, members of the EPP, affirm the inalienable dignity of every human being.'³ In the following paragraph this concept is complemented with a reference to the Judeo-Christian values that every man and woman is 'a person . . . irreplicable, totally irreducible, free by nature and open to transcendence'.⁴ Later on is emphasised the dependence on others and 'for many of us . . . the belief that we are called on to contribute to God's work of creation and freedom'.⁵ The leading thinkers of Christian Democracy and Christian social thinking from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Burke, Maritain, Sturzo, Gil-Robles, von Nell-Breuning and also Bonhoeffer, would have been proud of the formulation of these values and this concept of mankind. They would find their ideas incorporated into the doctrinal basis of a movement that was called upon to take decisive responsibility far into the twenty-first century.

³European People's Party, 'Basic Programme (12–14 November 1992)', in T. Jansen and S. Van Hecke, *At Europe's Service. The Origins and Evolution of the European People's Party* (Berlin: Springer, 2011), 287.

⁴Ibid., 288.

⁵Ibid.

Care for the environment as a value

The Dutch prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, was also proud of this discerning approach, but even more so of the reference, for the first time, to another value: ‘respect for the created world’.⁶ The formulation was a compromise in itself: not the idea of stewardship as it was used in the debates on the environment in his country, or that of the preservation of or care for creation, as concern about climate and the environment was labelled by the World Council of Churches, but here, this softer expression: respect for the created world! Still, 1992 was also the year of the first, epochal conference of the UN on this new challenge, the UN Rio Conference on Environment and Development, in which Lubbers played a pivotal role and which was also with his strong support the cradle for the Earth Charter movement. Lubbers was not alone. In the autumn of 1991 Wilfried Martens in a conference of the CDA had made a profound plea for the inclusion of care for the environment and recognition of the limits of economic growth in our socio-economic and political thinking. Christian social thinkers were instrumental in the blueprint for the post-war economic choices of a number of Continental countries, the social market economy. And as we had experienced, according to Martens, that in the long run the cooperation, not the struggle, between labour and capital was beneficial to both, so we should now strive for a socio-ecological market system. Thus, more than 30 years ago, a prophetic voice for inclusion of the environment in what some prefer to label our Rhineland Model. Had we systematically and consistently followed these pleas and developed our own ecological agenda with the blending of other values such as subsidiarity, solidarity and the concept of the responsible person, we could have had our own green policies without leaving this theme as the quasi-monopoly of the left. But, in any case, the Athens Programme did not consider the environment just a point of attention but the responsibility and care for it *a central value*, comparable to our responsibility for the weakest in society and as part of the common good—three decades before it became a dominant issue at the European level.

Understanding the signs of the time

Values are indispensable, but it is only their confrontation with the reality of contemporary developments which can make them the road signs for political and social action: see, judge, act! But seeing already demands lenses, which are

⁶Ibid., 292.

not neutral and which presume opinions and concerns. In the Athens document the prologue is as important as the chapter on values—and equally surprisingly, starting with the observation that ‘our democracies are experiencing a profound crisis of values challenging the political system right down to its foundations’.⁷ No cry of victory after the demise of Communism and certainly not the end of history. ‘The end of ideologies is not really in sight. Rather, competition between ideologies is occurring at other levels.’⁸ The prologue then goes on to highlight old and new ideological temptations, starting with neoliberalism! Yes, 32 years ago the authors of the Programme had already foreseen the consequences of what according to many has become the real flaw of the post-Communist era, notably, the embrace of the excessive free market ideology, *le capitalisme sauvage*, and the privatisation of core tasks of government. ‘Neoliberalism . . . ignores the social dimensions of the free market economy. . . . [T]his leads to conflict and confrontation, affecting solidarity which must also be a valid part of the international context’⁹—from 1992!

Of course, there was also a warning against socialism, for historical reasons the arch-enemy of Christian Democrats and conservatives: even though it has given up the class fight, ‘it remains suspicious of civil society . . . and gives too much priority to the activity of the State. . . .’¹⁰

But there are other ideological dangers: the purely pragmatic approach to problems in society and—again a prophetic sound—‘a misplaced nationalist ideology’!¹¹ And prophetic was the prediction three decades before it became the central political issue of the 2020s: major migration movements, in connection with another challenge, the ‘gap between rich and poor’¹² in the world. The basic elements for the consensus achieved in European society are being threatened by a rising wave of racism and nationalism. Although 1992 marked only the beginning of civilian utilisation of the Internet on a certain scale, there was another warning of high actuality: ‘the meaningless flow of information, especially when deformed by the media, may result in the total disappearance of responsibility and the invasion of irrationality into politics’.¹³ This statement preceded by 25 years the victory of Donald Trump and the existential threats in Europe posed by the extreme right.

⁷ Ibid., 284.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 286.

¹³ Ibid.

The problem of the ageing of the population of Europe was also recognised, as was, among other things, a globalisation process without the rule of law. It can be observed that in this overview, the analyses, research and vision of the leading academic institutions of the members of the EPP, and especially of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, were summarised and distilled.¹⁴

The document continues with an exceptional reference to something outside the sphere of politics. There is a crisis of values among the European citizens themselves, ‘a withdrawal into the private sphere; the growth of materialism, individualism and cynicism, together with the collapse of universal ideals.’¹⁵ Do we hear in this the echo of Calvinistic doctrine, one of the sources of religious inspiration for a few members of our political family? Not fully, because the prologue ends with the remark that we want to make a positive contribution and ‘to appeal to what is “best”, to the “constructive” aspect which exists in each human individual, and to give contemporary expression to the ideals of social Christian personalism’.¹⁶ No statement could have described more clearly the identity the authors of the Athens document would give to the new, post-Communist EPP. And, alas, it would not become clearer in the decades that followed.

Confusing priorities

Not every paragraph was as prophetic or relevant as the prologue or the chapter on values. In hindsight one wonders about certain expressions of optimism, choices and omissions. One would have expected a real vision about the half of Europe which had just been freed from Communist dictatorship—mainly by its own population. But here prudence was the master. At the time that Pope John II was stressing that Europe had two lungs and that these were part of a historical and spiritual unity, in our Programme we could not go further than to say that ‘the other Europe’¹⁷ must find its way back by gradually becoming integrated into the European Community. But this came with

¹⁴ A few years later, Anthony Giddens wrote the essay *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998). That document was heralded as the very renaissance, ideologically, of the left, whilst Athens got scant attention. This was symptomatic. In political sciences in Europe, and in North America as well, you see an unbalanced focus on ideological developments within the socialist movement or liberal parties vis-à-vis Christian Democratic or Christian social thinking, whilst political parties with full or partly Christian Democratic roots are more often at the steering wheel of the contemporary history of our Continent!

¹⁵ European People’s Party, ‘Basic Programme’, 287.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 307.

a number of precautions. And the *regatta* principle which would follow had certainly not been foreseen: negotiations not so much country by country but with a group of the most qualified candidates for accession at the same time and as a whole. Within a few years that formula would become dominant and would lead to the historic outcome of an enlargement of no less than 10 new members in 2004. However, 12 years earlier prudence and reticence still prevailed. In part this was because of the tension between, on one hand, the urgent agenda of institutional strengthening, and on the other, dealing with the aspirations of a number of countries on the Continent which were at best only halfway in their transition from a state to a free-market economy. Also remarkable is the scant attention paid to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which was raging at the time. This was probably due to the fact that within the member states (and so within the EPP) there were strongly different and sometimes hostile views on how to deal with the war and about the future of the—defunct—Yugoslav Federation.¹⁸

And there were other paradoxes. At the time, we made a deliberate choice for a *federal* Europe, federal as well as communitarian, with a stronger role for the Commission—we even envisaged it becoming a Chamber of States. Given the frustrations of the previous years, a strong plea was included for limitations of the veto power of individual member states. In nearly every paragraph one grasps the fear that the accession process would even further hamper the direct and effective decision-making capacity of the EU: '[T]he Community must remain capable of achieving the objectives it has set itself *even in the event of the accession of new Member States*.'¹⁹ On the other hand, on the central issue of security we see restraint and prudence; and surprise: the dormant western EU should become the real vehicle for new defence and security policies.

Less ambivalent were the blueprints for the organisation, impact and effectiveness of the European Community in its transition to the EU. Here, the Athens Programme would play a pivotal role in the strengthening and deepening of cooperation, with the notion of a European citizenship and for the EU a real constitution of its own. Thatcherite policies stressing the priority of enlargement at the cost of deepening the EU were thwarted successfully. But if anyone had thought that the Athens document was going to be primarily internally oriented, they were mistaken. We defined our Europe as 'open

¹⁸ At the same time Martens and I were received by Konstantinos Mitsotakis. At the time he must have been aware that the embargo against Serbia was being broken through the illegal transportation of, at least, oil via Greece, thus enabling Serbian troops to fight Dutch, Belgian and other Blue Helmets.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 302, emphasis added.

towards the world',²⁰ with an engagement in multilateralism, the fostering of democracy and 'the universal establishment of human rights',²¹ with the right and the duty to intervene when peace or human rights are violated. Here an avenue was opened for a historical dimension, with all the complications and shortcomings that arose in the years that followed—including a growing hesitation about the EPP's emphasis on values. There were also the first steps towards a strong environmental policy 'as one of the greatest challenges of the 1990s',²² with the—reformed—market as an important player, and not bureaucracy or more state interventions. The to-do list became even more extensive: a European social policy, a socio-economic system that reconciles family life with working life, a much stronger development policy towards developing countries ('the new name for peace is development'²³) and the strengthening of internal security and fighting crime, notably by setting up Europol. Even more forward looking was the plea, more than 30 years ago, for 'a common immigration and asylum policy'.²⁴

A breakthrough was reached in the passage about the indispensability of unions, associations and churches in the European unification process and a meaningful European citizenship. Finally, there was a recognition of the principle of 'horizontal subsidiarity'. And, of course, a repetition of the agreement of Maastricht on European political formations. The relevant paragraph from the Maastricht Treaty was quoted verbatim. On the final page came the summary, which was all encompassing:

European integration is based on principles which are an essential part of Christian Democratic thinking and are now widely accepted: subsidiarity as a guiding principle in social and political organization, the decentralization of powers, a social market economy, a respect for spiritual and ethical values, an opening up to the rest of the world and a respect for the created world.²⁵

With unanimity, the new Basic Programme was approved on the last day of the Athens Congress. Unanimity was, by the way, not the same as enthusiasm. There remained scepticism among some member parties and individuals about this strong values-based orientation of the EPP, which would result in efforts 20 years later to weaken this approach. But in the new EPP Platform

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 311.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 306.

²³ *Ibid.*, 312.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

of Bucharest (2012)²⁶ this values orientation remained essentially intact. It was hoped that it would become an illuminating beacon in the decades to come. Drafters, academics and thinkers went home with a message of hope and satisfaction. Something fundamental had been achieved, something that bridged contradictory positions, that few had thought possible a year earlier.

Illuminating beacon?

At the beginning of the 1990s there was a certain consensus amongst political analysts about the paradox that the successful policies of Christian Democracy to overcome the Communist threat and even to contribute substantially to the annihilation of the Soviet system would at the same time mean the end of the dominant position of Christian Democracy itself. The glue of its anti-Communism had become obsolete, secularisation had emptied its natural reservoirs and the gradual enlargement of the Union would mainly bring in voters with neither traditional nor doctrinal ties with the original movement.²⁷

But the outcome of the first elections in the *Länder* of former East Germany proved, against all expectations, that even in mainly secular regions, programmes as well as individuals from the Christian Democrat family could gain enough trust to win elections. In the years that followed, that became a trend in a number of new member states.

But for many traditional Christian Democrats, this came with a price. Although new member parties had to subscribe to the Athens Programme, the spirit unavoidably became weaker; the secularisation process continued on an unforeseen scale, including within the old member parties; and on occasion neoliberal economic policies became very tempting. Above all, the enlargement process in the 1990s, the financial crisis in the next decade, the euro crisis in the 2010s, and the deteriorating geopolitical and security situation in the 2020s shifted attention away from doctrinal discourse to absolutely necessary pragmatic policies. And the EPP's academic institute? In the bunker strategy, the plan was that it should be a permanent power source for the extension, deepening and translation of our core values. Therefore, what

²⁶ European People's Party, *Party Platform*, EPP Statutory Congress (17–18 October 2012).

²⁷ In particular, the choice of the Civic Forum in Poland became a setback. This dominant political force was, after all, the political embodiment of Solidarność, the trade union based on Christian social principles. When it was invited by Kohl to join the Christian Democratic family, its leader and first prime minister of the new government, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, replied, 'Yes, I am Christian, and yes I am democrat, but that does not imply that I am a Christian Democrat!' As cited in M. Gehler, P. H. Kosicki and H. Wohnout, *Christian Democracy and the Fall of Communism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 39. In the course of time the successors of the Civic Forum joined the EPP after all.

happened with what is now the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies? It took nearly 15 years before the famous paragraph about the recognition of political foundations on the European level could be implemented. It faced all kinds of complications and all sorts of resistance, not least from the EU ambassadors.²⁸ But thanks to the perseverance of the Parliament, and in particular, of Hans-Gert Pöttering as president of the EPP Group, and later, of the secretary general, Klaus Welle, the academic institutions got off the ground and expanded to become high-ranking think tanks. However, in the 10 years after Maastricht, times had changed. The Martens Centre found its relevance not so much in the debate on values but rather in pressing issues such as the enlargement of the EU, the geopolitical situation, developments in Russia, the erosion of democracy, the migration issues, and financial and economic policies. All were extremely relevant, but as a result, the values discussion was restricted. The fate and the strength of the Athens Programme ended up therefore in the hands of a number of motivated Members of the European Parliament and also a small group of member parties, who called themselves The Group of Athens, under the leadership of John Bruton, the former *taoiseach* (prime minister) of Ireland.

Twenty years after Athens, the situation within the EPP, and in Europe, had changed so dramatically that a new Basic Programme seemed necessary. Again, Martens took the chair, and again he invited me to become co-rapporteur. In what would become The Platform of Bucharest, the central characteristics of the Athens Programme were repeated and remained the guiding tenets of the most stable political force of the EU. Although the position of the traditional Christian Democratic parties has also changed substantially (they have become a numerical minority), the need for a political movement which is more than just pragmatic, more than just anti-socialist and based on the central values of Christian humanism seems to be greater than ever. A new generation is longing for politics with a vision, values and respect for traditions and the meaning of life. What is called for is an awareness that to meet the great challenges of our times, we need a vision of humankind and its indispensable social relations; a dedication to the *common* good and not just our own personal needs; and an orientation to such values as

²⁸ In the first draft report about the outcome of the Maastricht Conference by the participating ambassadors of the EU, the agreement on a provision for the facilitation of European political formations was not mentioned at all, likely due to their objection, or at least indifference. Again and again this item had to be brought up, and Wilfried Martens, in particular, had to press the matter continuously. At last, in 2007 the Academic Institute of the EPP was founded under the very neutral name—so as not to provoke new opposition—Centre for European Studies. Later on it was renamed—rightly—the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

freedom, justice, solidarity, subsidiarity and care for creation. In this, Athens can remain a beacon.

John Bruton, the former *taoiseach* of Ireland and one of the pillars of a strong values orientation for the EPP, once said in a meeting of the Academic Council of the Martens Centre, when he was a bit disappointed about the lack of interest in the values discussion: ‘We are under attack, but we are still here!’

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Part II. Breaking Through – The Way to Majority

Wilfried Martens's Vision for the EPP (Interview With Marianne Amssoms)

Federico Ottavio Reho

Wilfried Martens (1936–2013) was one of the foremost Belgian statesmen of the twentieth century and an important European political figure. He began his political career at an early age, participating in student and youth organisations. He served as president of the CD&V, the Flemish Christian Democrats, and was prime minister of Belgium between 1979 and 1992, the longest tenure in the country's history. He was one of the founders of the European People's Party (EPP) in 1976 and served as EPP president from 1992 to shortly before his death in 2013, once again the longest tenure so far.

From 1994 to 1999 he was also a Member of the European Parliament and the chairman of the EPP Group within it. In 2007 he founded the EPP's political foundation, which was renamed in his memory in 2014. During the 1990s Martens presided over the process of transforming and enlarging the EPP beyond its Christian Democratic founding members to also include centre-right parties with more liberal and conservative leanings. This process led to the EPP becoming the transnational party family of the European centre-right and the dominant political force in EU institutions, a position which it retains to this day.

Marianne Amssoms served as a close aide to Wilfried Martens from 1992 to 1999. She joined his team as a parliamentary aide immediately after completing her university studies and following his last term as prime minister,

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which ended in March 1992. At that time, Martens was still a member of the Belgian Senate, serving on the Foreign Affairs Committee and presiding over the Committee on European Affairs. As Martens's role in the EPP grew more prominent, Amssoms moved to the EPP headquarters, where she spent the next two years learning everything about the party's operations and stakeholders from Martens's then chief of staff, Ilse Schouteden. Following Martens's election to the European Parliament in 1994, she assumed the roles of chief of staff and spokesperson until the end of that legislative term in 1999.

On Thursday 24 October 2024, I met with Ms Amssoms virtually to talk about her recollections of Martens. She began by reflecting on Martens's generosity in entrusting such a sensitive role to an inexperienced young woman fresh out of graduate school, despite the fact that many more-seasoned individuals were likely eager to serve under him. This revealed something, she suggested, about Martens's forward-looking vision and willingness to bet on young people and empower them.

What struck you the most about Martens when you began working for him?

He was a firm believer in the European idea and deeply committed to advancing it. His tenure as EPP president was not that of a politician nearing the end of his national career and merely seeking a new post to extend his power and influence. Rather, he was engaged in a cause that he wholeheartedly believed in. He belonged to a generation and breed of politicians that is now largely extinct. He had a clear vision for Belgium and Europe, and his politics centred on turning that vision into reality. He was willing to build broad alliances, both in his own political camp and beyond, to achieve this. His thinking was long term, and his approach collaborative and inclusive. Much of this is missing in contemporary politics, which has largely lost strong, driving ideals and is now focused on the short term, and is polarised and confrontational. He embodied a different kind of politics, one that has nearly disappeared.

In a way, what you are saying is that values and ideals came first for Martens, with policies viewed as the means to realise them. How was this reflected in his approach to enlarging the EPP, if at all?

It was evident in the fundamental importance Martens placed on strengthening the EPP's identity and programmatic foundations as the essential basis for a successful enlargement strategy. He recognised that, on the one hand, size was crucial for advancing the EPP's values, and he believed the party should expand beyond traditional Christian Democratic parties if it wanted to maximise its influence in the larger, more diverse EU that was emerging after the fall of the Eastern bloc. On the other hand, he was keenly aware of

the risk of diluting the EPP's principles by including parties that did not necessarily share the founders' spirit. For this reason, he saw the EPP's 'deepening' and 'widening' as two parallel objectives to be pursued simultaneously, much like the EU's own 'deepening' and 'widening' efforts. To him, these were two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, one of the key tensions Martens had to navigate as EPP president in the 1990s was that between, so to speak, the traditional Christian Democratic 'orthodoxy' (represented, for example, by parties from Benelux, Italy and Ireland) and pressures to enlarge the EPP to include conservative and liberal parties. The latter's main sponsors were the EPP members from Germany, led by the formidable Helmut Kohl. How did Martens see that tension, and how did he successfully navigate it?

The emphasis on both 'deepening' and 'widening', as I have mentioned, is certainly part of the answer here. More broadly, I believe Martens's ability to navigate seemingly intractable tensions stemmed from two extraordinary political leadership skills that defined his approach to decision-making and achieving breakthroughs. First, I have never met anyone with a more masterful sense of timing. His political instinct for when to act and his strategic patience, when needed, were remarkable. Deeply attuned to personalities and political contexts, he had an uncanny sense of when to press forward or encourage someone to reconsider their stance in the direction he wanted. Second, he excelled in the art of pragmatic compromise—a skill he had refined throughout his career in Belgian politics, running governments that demanded constant mediation among parties, coalitions and regions. This ability to bridge divides and find common ground served him well as EPP president.

And yet the process of enlarging the EPP to transform it into Europe's dominant political force had its fair share of bitter controversies. Each country's context was different, and the admission of each new party candidate to the EPP presented difficulties in various degrees and of various types. Could you share your recollections about Martens's stance on the most important national and party cases?

The two cases that stand out the most in my memory are those of Spain's Partido Popular and Italy's Forza Italia. Martens was 'all in' for José María Aznar and the Partido Popular: he invited Aznar to EPP summit meetings, went out of his way to secure Helmut Kohl's support for him and was by his side in Madrid on election night. He truly did everything he could. The situation with Forza Italia was, however, very different for several reasons. After the collapse of Italy's Democrazia Cristiana, the EPP had developed partnerships with several of its successor parties and personalities, most of which were adamantly opposed to Berlusconi's involvement. Italy's political landscape

appeared far more complex, unstable and fluid than Spain's, making it much harder to navigate. In addition, Berlusconi's personality and political views were controversial: Martens faced fierce criticism over his association with the Italian tycoon, not only from the Belgian press, but also from his own party, the CD&V. Accepting Forza Italia was undoubtedly a more pragmatic and opportunistic decision than endorsing the Partido Popular's membership, and Forza Italia also participated much less actively in EPP meetings and structures. The inclusion of parties such as the Austrian ÖVP, various Scandinavian conservative parties, Portugal's PSD and even France's Gaullists (to name just a few that joined in the 1990s) went comparatively smoothly. The British Conservative Party, however, posed a unique challenge. While the party was part of the EPP Group, it never formally joined the EPP. Some of its Members of the European Parliament were pragmatic, but others were deeply Eurosceptic and heavily influenced by the anti-EU sentiment of the British tabloids back home.

Did the fact that, during his tenure as EPP president, he was first a sitting prime minister (1990–2) and later a former prime minister contribute to his success in leading the EPP? How? Moreover, Martens is the person who has combined the roles of EPP president and EPP Group chairman for the longest period so far (1994–9). Do you feel that this helped him succeed?

His experience and status as a former prime minister were invaluable. He knew all the key players across the political parties, had direct access to them and understood their agendas. His credibility was well-established thanks to his previous work with them and his strong track record on European issues. I believe that combining the roles of EPP president and Group chairman was also important to his success, as the two positions created valuable synergies in terms of contacts and decision-making.

A key strategic concern behind the enlargement and transformation of the EPP in the 1990s was the risk of a new party emerging to the right of it that might include such forces as the French Gaullists, the Irish Fianna Fáil and Forza Italia. How did Martens view right-wing forces, and how did he envisage the EPP's position and role vis-à-vis them?

The conservative right-wing forces driving strategic decisions in the 1990s were very different from those that have emerged in recent decades. Martens lived long enough to witness some of these newer developments. In his final years, he openly voiced concerns about instances of democratic backsliding and the shift in right-wing politics that was moving away from the European mainstream ideals. This turn to the right deeply worried him.

You have known the EPP both before and after the transformation fostered under Martens's presidency. Could you give us a sense of the key differences and changes in terms of party structures, influence, methods of work, but also substantive political and policy positions?

The EPP's growing size amplified its power and influence, but also came at a cost. It became harder for Martens to engage with everyone one-on-one. Meetings and agendas grew larger and more complex, leaving less time for in-depth discussions. Cultivating personal relations became harder, with more layers added to decision-making, such as the need for pre-meetings. In terms of values and policies, there was a lot more compromising, greater effort was required to find common ground and final positions became watered down. This meant that national delegations within the EPP Group had to compromise more than before, accepting outcomes that diverged further from their preferred national positions. This widened the gap between domestic expectations and European outcomes. However, in essence, I do not think that the EPP changed drastically over those years.

In your opinion, what key lessons for the future should the EPP draw from the process that led to it becoming no. 1 in order for it to remain no. 1?

I would emphasise the importance of relationships, human interactions and working across the aisle. Cultivating personal connections was central to Martens's ability to find common ground and bridge differences. For example, a key part of his EPP leadership in the 1990s was his 'pilgrimages' to countries of the former Eastern bloc, where he built relationships with the emerging political class and laid the groundwork for future developments. Without this groundwork, the EPP's enlargement would likely not have succeeded to the same extent. This personal, real-life approach could help to address the growing divisiveness and polarisation in today's politics, and provide a response to the disillusionment that drives many voters to protest against the system. Another lesson to take on board is the power of defining and articulating a compelling vision, and of anchoring decisions and actions firmly to that vision. In today's fragmented landscape, this commitment to unity and purpose is perhaps more crucial than ever.

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From Alianza Popular to Partido Popular: The History of a Refoundation

José María Aznar

We are living in a time when many of the social realities that have been in place up to now are in a state of crisis and are being subjected to sustained questioning. Among these are the legitimacy of political parties and the very foundations of representative democracy, both of which have been under fire from those promoting antipolitics and populism of all kinds.

These contemporary concerns must be seen in context. Criticism of political parties is as old as parties themselves. It has accompanied them throughout their whole history, since the origins of constitutionalism and the establishment of the parliamentary regime in Europe.

Pluralism and parties

Spain's constitution enshrines the higher values of our legal system: freedom, justice, equality and political pluralism. Recognising pluralism as a fundamental value may seem obvious today, but for a long time, for centuries even, unanimity was considered a sign of the health of a state.

Pluralism had no place in the democracy of ancient Greece. And nor does it appear in the work of the first theorists of sovereignty and the modern state: Bodin, Hobbes and Rousseau did not address it. The Jacobin hatred of

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intermediate bodies, of everything between the isolated individual and the omnipotent state, is well known. In the extremist rhetoric of Saint-Just, 'every faction is criminal' and conspires against the sovereignty of the People.¹

It was not until liberal democracy was established that political pluralism became an accepted value. And it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the constitutional recognition of political parties began. At a certain historical moment, reality had to be recognised: in the heart of modern societies, dissent occurs naturally. We no longer live in societies held together by unanimous creeds. Based on this reality, the consecration of pluralism does not seek to exacerbate differentiation and confrontation, but to impose tolerance, respect and mutual recognition on different visions.

Thus, the constitution becomes the channel through which dissent can find its own path without overflowing. Conflicts are subject to the law, and a diversity of opinions and interests can be reconciled—through calm discussion—with the common good.

Parties and factions

Political parties play a fundamental role in this process. Giovanni Sartori very lucidly analysed the conception of parties as parts of a whole in a political system of *concordia discors*, a consensus enriched and nourished by dissent and discrepancy.² His thesis reclaimed a classic postulate: healthy pluralism requires parties, not factions. This is a key distinction that we must bear in mind today. It was formulated and developed in the eighteenth century by one of the classic figures of political thought, Edmund Burke. According to Burke, a political party is 'a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principal in which they all agreed'.³

A political party can be thought of as organised political opinion. Cicero said the same when referring to the Roman antecedents of modern parties: what unites their members is *idem sentire de republica* (the fact of feeling—thinking—the same about public affairs). When parties are not sustained by a hope and faith linked to certain ideas, principles and solutions, only one of

¹ A. Soboul, *St Just – Discours et rapports* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1977), 170–1.

² G. Sartori, 'Understanding Pluralism', *Journal of Democracy* 8/4 (1997), 58–69.

³ E. Burke, *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. I (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1889), 530.

two types of relationship remains among their members: personal affection or personal interest. And then they are no longer parties; they become factions.

Today, amid a storm of criticism in which it is very difficult to distinguish demagoguery from thoughtful judgement, any political leader must be tireless in reiterating certain clarifications. Representative democracy does not consist of a succession of organised minorities that gain access to power in order to seize the state as if it were booty for a number of years. When the Spanish Constitution institutes pluralism as a fundamental democratic principle and solemnly declares in its sixth article that parties are the basic means of expression of this, what it is really saying is that discrepancy must give rise to debate and agreement, so that each party defends its own position, but always puts the interests of the country first.

Parties are called upon to formulate projects, programmes and proposals that are coherent and flexible at the same time. This is because parties are, above anything else, as the Spanish philosopher Julián Marías said, ‘the organs of political imagination’, aimed at awakening the social body from its inertia and setting it in motion towards a form of collective life that is at once possible, appealing and intelligent.⁴

Without parties, a modern, representative democracy is inconceivable. In a mass society, only parties enable the citizens to take political action. They bring together different interests, beliefs and opinions. The current form of democracy, that is, liberal or representative, is a system of peaceful competition for power, based on the revocability of office and respect for the law. Genuine limits must be set to demagoguery so that the various political parties recognise a common playing field where common rules of the game operate.

Precedents of a refoundation

I wanted to mention all of the above because my understanding of what a political party should be goes beyond what usually interests the professional politician. I believe that in Spain it is more important to pay attention to the institutional dimension of the parties than to what is entailed in political mobilisation—that is, the recruitment and loyalty of clienteles, communication techniques and vote capture. Any democracy is made up of several essential ingredients that depend on the health of the party system: alternation in power, accountability of government action, selection of elites, civic

⁴J. Marías, ‘Partidos Políticos’, *La Vanguardia Española*, 26 June 1977, author’s translation.

education and so on. Only parties far removed from being factions can guarantee the proper functioning of a representative democracy.

In 1988 it could still be said that Spain was a 'young democracy'. But even so—a decade after the recovery of liberties—there was not a very encouraging prognosis for the centre–right. Since 1982 the centre–right had been destined to be the alternative to hegemonic socialism, but despite this, there was a widespread perception that its political space could only aspire to be a long-suffering substitute, not a genuine alternative for government.

In this context, when I was president of the regional government of Castilla y León, I gave a lecture in Madrid on 29 February 1988⁵ at the Club Siglo XXI, an important forum for debate. The topic of my lecture resonated widely, especially because it voiced concerns that were in circulation and needed concrete expression.

I did not soften the tone of my prognosis: 'In my opinion, a certain sense of fatality runs through Spanish political life. The belief that there is no concrete way to defeat the Socialist Party'. I wanted to point out the premises that would guarantee the success of any strategy:

Is there no real alternative to this Government, nor to its way of governing, nor to its leader, nor to the party that supports it? My answer is yes. Of course there is a way to do it. . . . We need to meditate on the mistakes we may have made in order to remedy them. . . . If we do not do so, everything will continue more or less as it has been until now, that is to say, a socialist government, a controlled society, and an opposition satisfied with a role—maybe an insignificant role—that allows it to participate in the play.⁶

And I ended my speech by formulating what I understood to be the key to any electoral success: 'In the end, it is a question of knowing if we are determined to maintain a strategy of resisting without winning, or if—on the contrary—we are determined to design a strategy to win. I do not share the views of those who set as their objective a permanent consolidation'.⁷

My intervention invited the party, then Alianza Popular, to put an end to the position that translated into an accommodating resignation and to embark resolutely on a constructive challenge to socialist power. At the time I was clear about the axes of that project: from economic policy to foreign policy, including institutional reorganisation and democratic regeneration. I also

⁵ J. M. Aznar, speech at the first conference in the Club Siglo XXI, Madrid, 29 February 1988, author's translation.

⁶ Ibid., author's translation.

⁷ Ibid., author's translation.

wanted to encourage the party to discuss all of these matters and to approach them from a clearly liberal perspective at the congress that Alianza Popular would hold the following year, which would be the first milestone in the party's urgent refoundation.

The two milestones of the refoundation

The ninth congress of Alianza Popular was held in January 1989. The return of Manuel Fraga, the party's historic leader, served to promote the integration of all the Christian Democratic and liberal currents that had moved away in the months before. The party changed its name to Partido Popular to make visible its reconciliation with the historical and political heritage of the European tradition as embodied in parties such as the German CDU and, in general, with what the European People's Party represents. At this point I must mention, with grateful affection, the inspiration and good advice of relevant European figures in our political family, and very especially that of Wilfried Martens, who accompanied us throughout the process of refoundation, creating an unforgettable bond with me, to which I remain faithful.

Decisions of an organic nature were also taken, creating six vice-presidencies, one of which was entrusted to me. However, at that time I still felt that the party was being weighed down by some personal agendas, which were taking priority over what seemed to me to be the fundamental matter: the definition of a political project. In the European elections of that year, the results did not go our way and Fraga's succession stalled. It was at this moment that President Gonzalez chose to dissolve the Parliament and bring forward the general elections to 29 October 1989. The manoeuvre obviously aimed to catch our party off guard and achieve the greatest electoral profitability for the declining but still hegemonic socialism.

It was in these difficult circumstances that I had the honour of being appointed national candidate and executive vice-president of the party. The collapse of the party in those elections was avoided, we saved face and, from my new position of responsibility, I was able to accelerate the pace and guide the direction of the party's refoundation.

That refoundation was completed and consolidated at the Seville Congress in 1990. We had a clear strategic objective: to challenge the socialists of the PSOE for all the political space remaining to its right; that is, to compete on equal terms, favouring the simplification of the party system and, therefore, the stability and alternation of the Spanish democratic process. I maintain that party atomisation, radicalisation and democratic failure are concomitant

phenomena. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon democracies during the interwar period are the best proof of the prophylactic effectiveness of the two-party system when it is genuinely constitutional—that is, when it simultaneously favours genuine pluralism and the governance of the state.

In Seville we made clear the vision of a Partido Popular determined to no longer be a resigned opposition but to become a real alternative, with a vocation for government and the morale of victory. It soon became obvious that not only were we consolidating our own positions but, in addition, we were recovering the centrist legacy of the UCD in the Spanish Transition, to the point of being on an equal footing with the PSOE and capable of penetrating its voting grounds.

The ‘journey to the centre’ that began to be recognised at that time was not a marketing operation: it was supported by a programmatic proposal that made us recognisable and that we then honoured in government through its implementation. Our policies were written into a programme with the strong will to translate them into normative provisions. They included a reduction in public spending, tax cuts, free choice in education and healthcare, administrative austerity, environmental protection, recovery of institutional credit and rejection of all political negotiations with terrorists. We had eight years to demonstrate to the Spanish people that our proposals were more than just words and that the Partido Popular could be described as a reformist, focused and independent party on the basis of its effective commitment.

As a result of that Seville Congress, an idea that seems essential to me became an integral part of the political culture of the party: that the future of the right should not depend on the left, on its occasional weakness or its intermittent tolerance. I summarised this, as the national president of the party, in a sentence: ‘I ask you to move from a morale of resistance to a morale of victory’.⁸ And we did: our morale of victory materialised at the ballot box a few years later. And although that is another story, useful conclusions can still be drawn about how to win an election.

Thirty-five years later

It would be nonsense to think that, Spain and Europe face the same challenges, from the same premises and with the same tools as in 1989. Spain, Europe and the world have changed dramatically since then, and there is no

⁸ *El País*, ‘Aznar presenta el congreso del Partido Popular como el de la alternativa al PSOE’, 1 April 1990, author’s translation.

need to give examples of this historical acceleration. But along with so many transformations, I believe that in the exercise of politics, in the life of the parties and in historical evolution, there are constants that we must not lose sight of.

It is still true that a party cannot be a de-ideologised faction, but nor can it be a debating club or a sect; it must combine programmatic clarity and executive flexibility. It is still true that political prudence is as far from naivety as it is from cynicism. That is why I believe that, with the necessary updates, the core values that identify the Spanish centre-right and the party that represents it are still the nation and freedom.

It is still true that democracies owe their existence to national loyalty: a loyalty that is supposed to be shared by government and opposition, by all political parties and by the electorate as a whole. Without national loyalty political disagreements create no common ground and public debate collapses.

Moreover, I continue to believe in freedom as the core political value of the centre-right. Freedom and equality are the values on which political modernity is founded. The democratic right and left defend both, even if they do not understand them in the same way. The difference here is not that one side cares more deeply about one than the other. The issue, rather, is that on the centre-right, we are convinced that we have a better understanding of the mechanisms of wealth creation and we dismiss the procedures of the left as counterproductive—especially for those who have less.

Our distrust of socialism is not derived from the hoarding selfishness that the left attributes to us but from the need for stimuli that encourage creativity, effort and the capacity for innovation that are innate to human beings. Imposing egalitarian uniformity in property and income sterilises and impoverishes us all because all incentive disappears. Hence our defence of market freedom, entrepreneurship, and property and inheritance rights.

Those who insist on developing policies that pursue equality—not of opportunity but of results—have no choice but to interfere constantly in the activity and lives of citizens, to plan their existence, to suffocate them with fiscal exactions and, ultimately, to practice despotic dirigisme. On the contrary, in societies with high social mobility and low rigidity, an adequate degree of equality of opportunity and sustainable welfare systems, the possibilities of social promotion for those who occupy the lower strata in terms of influence and income increase significantly.

It remains true that, from medieval charters and privileges to modern constitutionalism, the instruments that limit public power—the very idea of ‘limited government’—are not part of the historical legacy of the left. The

self-proclaimed virtue of its motives has generally made it less scrupulous when it comes to imposing them by a simple majority vote.

As well as these values of freedom and nation, I believe that the centre-right position also defines a way of 'being' in politics, an attitude. I believe that at the core of this attitude is a series of scrupulous demarcations: between politics and public surveys, between leadership and marketing, and between centrality and equidistance.

I am in favour of integration and open attitudes, but with the maximum clarity. It is desirable to broaden the basis of trust, but care must be taken not to give up more than is acquired. What is important is that the final balance is positive. We must add support to what we already have: consensus grows stronger through extension than it does through substitution. Defrauding loyalists almost never leads to the incorporation of new loyalists.

I still believe that it is not true that the sole objective of a party is to seize power with no other purpose than to retain it. It is, indeed, about governing. But governing based on solid political and democratic principles, and in alignment with those principles once power has been attained.

Society demands authenticity and that politicians address society with their own convictions. People are not fed up with politics, but with bad politics. And that includes the brutal frankness of the populist narrative, which is as inauthentic and prefabricated as the euphemisms it claims to denounce.

I do not believe—I never have—that the steering wheel of historical progress is in the hands of the left and that the centre-right is only responsible for the brakes. I have never accepted the tacit agreement according to which the speed of the changes introduced by the left can be discussed, but not their direction. To accept that peacefully is to make the agenda of any radicalism irreversible.

Finally, I still believe in a Partido Popular, which, in Spain, has been an alternative to the most corrosive socialism of recent years and, on a continental scale, continues to guide the European process with fidelity to the values that make Europe, above all, a civilising reality that is recognisable and true to itself.

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The History of a Beautiful Political Friendship: The British Conservatives and the EPP

Anthony Teasdale 

When the UK joined the European Community in January 1973, the new Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the governing Conservative Party established their own political group, the European Conservative Group (ECG), rather than join either of the existing centre-right forces in the Parliament—the large, essentially Christian Democrat, European People's Party (EPP) or the smaller, French-dominated, Gaullist Group. When direct elections were introduced in 1979, the ECG changed its name to the European Democratic Group (EDG). The British Conservatives alone won 60 MEPs, making the EDG the third largest group behind the EPP and Socialist Groups—with 15% of the Parliament, they could often determine the outcome of left-right votes in plenary sessions.

In my first political job, I worked for the EDG from 1982 to 1986 as its policy adviser, at various times for economic and monetary affairs, external trade policy, and social and employment policy, and saw this situation at first hand. Although Henry Plumb, leader of the Group from 1982 to 1987 and president of the European Parliament from 1987 to 1989, joked that it was 'neither European, democratic nor a group', it was without doubt a talented, happy and influential ship, united by a practical desire to build a more united Europe delivering practical benefits for citizens, notably through the development of a fully functioning single market, which it played an important role in helping design and carry forward. In day-to-day business, the EDG often coordinated its voting positions on issues with the EPP and/or the Liberal

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Group, forming part of a variable set of de facto political alliances which existed in all but name.

Over time, it became increasingly clear that the biggest problem for the Conservative MEPs came not from their relations with any of the other political groups in the European Parliament, with which they generally worked well, but from the hardening attitude towards European integration of the then British prime minister and Conservative Party leader, Margaret Thatcher, especially after her Bruges speech in September 1988,¹ which set out a decidedly intergovernmental vision of Europe's future. In particular, Thatcher's attitude towards Jacques Delors, the highly active and ambitious president of the European Commission, soured decisively as his pursuit of the single market spilled over into advocacy of a 'social Europe' and a single currency. The 45 Conservative MEPs in the 1984–9 Parliament found themselves increasingly in the cross-fire between a minimalist party leadership at home and the process of intensifying integration at European level. The idea started to take hold that they might want and need to form part of a bigger and wider political grouping, in which they would both feel more comfortable and enjoy stronger political cover as Conservative politics in Britain became increasingly divided on European issues.

The application made by the Conservative Party for their MEPs to join the EPP Group in 1991 came during what turned out to be a relatively brief window of opportunity for pro-Europeanism in British politics—essentially between the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister in November 1990 and 'Black Wednesday', namely the UK's ejection from the exchange-rate mechanism of the European Monetary System in September 1992. During this 23-month period, Thatcher's pragmatic and moderate successor, John Major, sought to reposition his party as a more mainstream force in European politics, proclaiming famously that Britain should be 'at the very heart of Europe'. In this, Major was moving with the tide of British domestic public opinion that was becoming increasingly pro-European, reflecting excitement around the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and momentum to complete the single market by the end of 1992. The triptych of Major as prime minister, Douglas Hurd as foreign secretary and Chris Patten as Conservative Party chairman—supported by the shrewd and skilful tactics of Christopher Prout, the Conservative MEPs' leader in the Parliament itself—proved to be a powerful combination in advocating and securing entry for the MEPs into the EPP Group in April 1992.

¹ M. Thatcher, Address to the College of Europe in Bruges, 20 September 1988, reproduced in R. Harris (ed.), *The Collected Speeches of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

The Conservatives' desire to join the EPP Group was also driven, more prosaically, by their poor performance in the June 1989 European elections. Having fallen back to only 35 MEPs, on 34% of the popular vote, in that contest, they were very aware that, if they suffered further losses in 1994—as indeed they were to do, falling to 18 seats, on 27% of the vote—they could find it increasingly difficult to continue to sustain a separate Conservative political grouping in the Parliament. In this context, their attempts to widen the membership of the EDG—which had always included the Danish conservative party since the ECG days—had suffered a spectacular reverse, when the only new political party to join, the Spanish centre-right Partido Popular, 'defected' to the EPP Group after only three years with the Conservatives, in 1989.

The Partido Popular's accession to the EPP soon proved to be part of a wider pattern. It became clear that the EPP transnational party was itself undergoing its own process of reappraisal, as its key leaders and strategists—notably its new president, Wilfried Martens, from 1990, and its new secretary general, Klaus Welle, from 1994—were gearing up to welcome a range of parties into its fold that hailed from beyond the confines of classic Christian Democracy. The new EPP strategy was to be, in Welle's words, one of 'mergers and acquisitions' of other centre-right and liberal parties, both from within the existing EU and from the accession states of Central and Eastern Europe, in effect choosing to dilute their classic Christian Democrat core in return for greater size and power. In Western Europe, this expansion strategy embraced not only the largest parties from the Spanish, British and Danish centre-right, but also the Finnish and Swedish conservative parties, which joined the group in 1995; Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, joining in 1998; and Jacques Chirac's RPR, joining in 1999.²

The British Conservatives in effect found safe harbour within the EPP, which proved in turn to be a growing and dynamic political force in Brussels and Strasbourg. Working for the EPP Group for most of the period between 1993 and 2007—including as head of the Group's office in London and as head of its policy strategy and legislative planning capability in Brussels—I saw this progression in power at close hand, conscious of the growing self-confidence and impact of both the Group and the wider party as a force in EU politics. At the 1999 European elections, even before the Eastern enlargement of the Union (in 2004), the EPP Group managed to displace the Socialist Group as the largest political caucus in the European Parliament, a position

² See K. Welle, *Must the European Parliament Be Dominated by the Socialists?*, Blue and Gold Discussion Papers: Conservatives in the European Parliament (London, 1997).

which (albeit with a declining share of members) it has maintained ever since. The EPP Group rose from 23.4% of the total Parliament before the Conservative MEPs joined in 1992, to 27.5% in 1994, peaking at 37.2% in 1999, and then dropping back slightly to 36.6% in 2004 and to 36.0% in 2009.

During the 17 years when they sat with EPP colleagues, the Conservative MEPs enjoyed an unusually advantageous arrangement, known as ‘allied membership’ of the Group. Whilst such a status was open to MEPs without a national party affiliation or who came from national parties (like the British Conservatives) that were not constituent members of the EPP transnational party, the Conservatives negotiated certain additional rights that rendered their membership unusually flexible. They were able to contribute fully to the setting of the Group’s positions on all policy issues coming before the Parliament—and they did so, not only by their votes in plenary sessions of the Group, but by being elected to hold about a third of the Group’s coordinator (spokesperson) positions on the 20 parliamentary committees. At the same time, they remained free to diverge from Group policy whenever it might conflict with the domestic manifesto commitments on which they had been elected—and they enjoyed complete discretion in choosing how to interpret such commitments. This relationship was, for Conservative MEPs, the ‘best of both worlds’, as many Conservatives commented at the time, and quite unlike that of any other component of the Group.

Conservative MEPs were also able to secure key committee chairmanships in the Parliament, exploiting the leverage and throw-weight of its largest Group—with, for example, Caroline Jackson chairing the Environment Committee and Malcolm Harbour chairing the Internal Market Committee, two of the most important committees in the EU legislative process. In short, they were fully embedded at the heart of Europe’s centre-right—and indeed of the EU political system—whilst being bound by few wider collective policy obligations. In practice, this situation was less problematic for the rest of the EPP Group than one might imagine: Conservative MEPs voted with their EPP colleagues around 85% of the time, with overall Group loyalty (excluding the British) coming in at around 95%. At the request of John Major’s successor as Conservative Party leader, William Hague, the EPP Group was even renamed the EPP–ED Group for a decade (from 1999 to 2009), to highlight the distinctiveness and freedom of action of its ‘European Democrat’ allied members (Hague initially wanted the Group to be renamed ‘Group of the EPP and Conservative allies’, but he pragmatically settled for the ‘ED’ reference suggested by Carl Bildt, then leader of the Swedish conservative party).

There were, of course, inevitably, some ideological divergences within the EPP Group, consequent upon the fact that Christian Democracy and conservatism were and remained distinct political philosophies—ones which have traditionally taken differing approaches to Europe, even if these approaches have often diverged more in theory than in practice. A very strong belief in the desirability of building a united Europe after the Second World War—and doing so by overcoming and superseding the confines and logic of the classic nation-state—was from the start, and has remained, fundamental to Christian Democracy as a political philosophy. The idea that the countries of Europe could and should enjoy a ‘destiny henceforth to be shared in common’,³ forming in effect a new transnational political community, was central to the thinking of all Christian Democrat leaders in the immediate post-war period, notably Konrad Adenauer in Germany, Alcide De Gasperi in Italy and Robert Schuman in France. Advocacy of ‘federalism’ in Europe—in the sense of developing a common ‘supranational’ layer of government, with its own free-standing institutions, located above the nation-state—held few fears for the standard-bearers of the new Christian Democratic tradition.⁴

Characteristically, Conservative politicians in Britain have eschewed the language of federalism and tended to view Europe as a more pragmatic and practical construct, designed less to promote a *destiny* shared in common than to help address *problems* shared in common, exploiting the economies of scale and added value of joint action on a continental scale. The building of a new Europe has been seen not so much as an end in itself, than as a means of safeguarding and empowering the participating countries—what Alan Milward once called the ‘European rescue of the nation-state’.⁵ So, in Britain, the emphasis has been notably upon the benefits of a single market, which, by definition, could never be achieved by individual countries acting on their own. Conservatives, like Gaullists in France, have also tended to welcome innovations that underline the centrality of member state governments in the work of the EU system, through the European Council and the Council of Ministers, rather than those that enhance the role of the more supranational European Commission or European Parliament. This scepticism towards supranational institutions in London was often awkward for the Conservative

³Luxembourg, Ministry of State, ‘La déclaration commune des Ministres signataires’, *Bulletin d’information*, 31 October 1952, no. 10, 194–5.

⁴See A. Teasdale, ‘Centre–Right Politics Decoded: Conservatism and Christian Democracy in Europe Today’, in K. Welle and F. O. Reho (eds.), *Christian Democracy, Conservatism and the Challenge of the Extremes* (Utrecht: Eburon, 2025).

⁵A. S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 1992).

MEPs, who frequently found themselves 'fighting for Brussels in Britain, and fighting for Britain in Brussels', as Christopher Prout once neatly put it.

In practice, however, such differences of philosophy did not prevent the development of a distinctive pattern of strong, convergent political action by most of the forces of the mainstream centre-right in Europe. During the 1990s and 2000s, the EPP (in its transnational party and group forms) provided, quietly but effectively, a strong and resilient framework in which Christian Democrat, conservative, Gaullist and other centre-right forces in Europe could cooperate successfully on literally thousands of EU legislative proposals, as well as evolve a broad-based common view of how in practice the EU should develop in the future. This was a major, if largely unsung, political success story, and it was one in which the British Conservative MEPs played an important role.

This successful arrangement was shattered by an entirely ideological and wholly counterproductive act of political vandalism, when David Cameron, who became leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, decided that his MEPs should leave the EPP Group. He effected that change, after one false start, four years later, in a move that was deeply regretted by the majority of the MEPs themselves. The departure was the time-lagged consequence of a concession that Cameron had made towards some domestic party opponents of EU membership in the 2005 party leadership contest, and it was one which he wrongly believed would have no wider political consequences. It was an example of a tendency sometimes witnessed in politics—more often on the left than the centre-right—of destroying something which works in practice, on the grounds that it cannot work or should not work in theory. To his surprise, Cameron's action was not mirrored in the reaction of the other forces to the right of the old EPP family that had joined them (at least from Western Europe) in the 1990s or 2000s. The mainstream parties of the Scandinavian, French and Italian centre-right stayed with their EPP colleagues, becoming increasingly firmly embedded within that political family.

The Conservative MEPs had successfully resisted a first attempt by Cameron to force them out of the EPP Group in 2007. Ring-led by one of his local MEPs, James Elles, who was also serving as a vice-president of the EPP Group, a clear majority of the Tory MEPs refused to countenance the move, signing a secret memorandum (duly communicated to their party leader) that argued that departure from the Group would serve the interests of neither their party nor their country, and that crucially they had no intention of moving. Forced on the defensive by this unexpectedly firm resistance, Cameron invited his Czech opposite number, Mirek Topolánek, to propose that the formation of a new Conservative Group be postponed until the next European Parliament

was elected in 2009. By then, a combination of natural or early MEP retirements, and disingenuous commitments made by other incumbents in order to secure their own renomination, meant that all of those standing on the Conservative ticket in the election were prepared to commit to join a new political group, assuming that technically it could be formed. That is what duly occurred in July 2009, when the new European Parliament convened and the Group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) was created.

David Cameron's determination to force the departure of his MEPs from the EPP Group was reflective of a wider inability on his part to understand the nature of European politics. Although he refused to accept such arguments in advance, the reality was that leaving the EPP family not only reduced British Conservative influence on policy outcomes in the European Parliament, it weakened linkages at party and governmental levels more widely. One of the reasons why hard-line Eurosceptics so wanted him to make the break was precisely because they knew it would help undermine Britain's successful membership of the EU and turn the Conservative Party further against Europe. In effect, whether through casualness or indifference, Cameron fell into a trap laid for him by others.

In any case, British Conservative dominance of the new ECR Group was to prove relatively short-lived. The Conservative MEPs had no choice but to leave the Group in January 2020, when the UK itself exited the Union, the consequence in turn of an even more seismic and catastrophic political misjudgement by Cameron. Instead of forming an important part of a powerful centre-right, anchored inside an EU that they themselves were able to influence and shape as key players from within—a status that they had enjoyed from 1992 to 2009—the British Conservatives ended up as marginal players, outside the mainstream in Europe, and responsible for their own country's departure from the Union. Their biggest bequest to the Union was the gift of an increasingly right-wing, 'national conservative' alliance of parties that has been gradually slipping away from the decentralist, free-market and Atlanticist philosophy that the Conservatives had celebrated and espoused (in the ECR-founding Prague declaration⁶) when the alliance was formed in 2009. Ironically, David Cameron and his successors have helped to implant and give organisational form to a new political movement—located in the space between the mainstream centre-right and right-wing populism—that is now reshaping politics in Europe in a way that they neither foresaw nor wanted. In the process, a beautiful political friendship has been broken.

⁶ECR, 'The Prague Declaration' (March 2009).

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Forza Italia's Entry Into the EPP: A Natural Destiny

Antonio Tajani

Alongside the epochal changes to countries in Eastern Europe that were brought about by the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the political shifts these events caused in Western Europe changed the paradigm for many traditional political parties. In countries where Communist parties had been strong, the major centrist parties, having held the crucial role of countering the Communist danger for decades, slowly began to dissolve, leaving the moderate electorate searching for new reference points. In France, for instance, Jacques Chirac's reformed neo-Gaullists eroded Giscard d'Estaing's electoral space. In Italy the Christian Democrats experienced a profound institutional crisis and our newly constituted party, Forza Italia, under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi, quickly became the pole star for the moderate electorate.

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The 1994 European elections and a political shift in the European Parliament

The results of the first continental elections following these events, the renewal of the European Parliament in June 1994, reflected this new dynamic, with the number of seats won by the popular¹ parties of these two large countries drastically reduced. In Italy the ballot attested to the triumph of Forza Italia, which won 27 seats, enough to create a parliamentary group of its own: Forza Europa. In contrast, only 9 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)—compared to 26 previously—were elected for the PPI, which had inherited membership of the EPP from Democrazia Cristiana. During the legislature all the parliamentary groups began to reflect on how best to deal with the ongoing transformation of the political spectrum. Forza Europa and the French RPR joined forces with other delegations, forming a new political group, following the reform that prohibited single-party groups: the Union for Europe (UFE).

At the time, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty had just given the European Economic Community a further political boost, and within the EPP a debate inevitably arose: should it remain a group of traditional Christian Democratic parties, despite the risk of the party becoming less influential in the newly formed EU, or should it open up in the light of the ongoing political and social changes? A number of EPP member parties were concerned about the possible denaturalisation of the popular family, particularly in the Benelux countries and Ireland. Many others had a different vision, and these included one of the great EPP leaders of those years and a protagonist of major geopolitical changes for Europe and the entire world, Helmut Kohl. The chancellor of the newly united Germany understood that leaving space on the right of the political spectrum would lead the EPP into decline. By contrast, opening up to the new moderate forces would guarantee the party a leadership role in the EU for the next 30 years. The EPP had already started to welcome to its membership parties that were not entirely Christian Democratic, such as the Spanish Partido Popular in 1991. Indeed, the support of the Spanish leader José María Aznar was fundamental to keeping the EPP on course for its expansion. The dialogue between the EPP and the delegations belonging to the UFE Group began to intensify during 1998. At the time, the members of the UFE were working towards forming their own European party and had

¹ The author uses 'popular' to refer to the Christian Democratic political doctrine of popularism, which was developed by Don Luigi Sturzo in the early twentieth century.—Ed.

convened a constituent meeting in Vienna with the expected participation of Silvio Berlusconi.

How Forza Italia became a member of the EPP

However, the unexpected happened when, on 5 May 1998, the Italian region of Campania was hit by devastating floods that caused 161 deaths and displaced thousands of families. Berlusconi, at the time the national leader of the opposition, immediately decided to show his solidarity with the flood victims and, as a result, did not attend the meeting of the new European centre-right in Vienna. This unforeseen natural disaster resulted in a limp start for the UFE, as Berlusconi would have been the most prominent leader in the new party. These circumstances provided an opportunity for the EPP family and accelerated the process of Forza Italia becoming an EPP member. With the 1999 European Parliament elections looming, there was a new push for Forza Italia to join the EPP as many member party leaders did not want a rival force to exist that would be capable of attracting parties and votes on the centre-right. The objective was set: Forza Italia had to join the EPP before these important elections. Wilfried Martens, at the time president of both the Group and the party, played a key role in convincing the sceptics within the EPP, starting with his own party, the CD&V, which was among those that were reluctant to permit the entry of forces that were not purely centrist. This was not the only challenge: the PPI had struck a deal to enter the centre-left government coalition in Italy and therefore began to campaign against welcoming Forza Italia into the EPP.

The most critical moment occurred when it was proposed that Forza Italia should not join as a whole delegation but that each elected MEP should be admitted individually into the EPP Group. Thanks to Silvio Berlusconi's intuition, Forza Italia accepted this suggestion, despite its political cost. Within Forza Italia there were some members who opposed this option, as the EPP was seen as the party not only of former Democrazia Cristiana members, but also of several former Italian socialists and liberals. The admission of the Forza Italia deputies was planned for the Group meeting of June 1998. In the days preceding the meeting the tension was palpable. The MEPs from the PPI, together with the delegations from Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and some small Spanish parties not allied with Aznar, threatened not to participate in the vote. This would have made it impossible to reach the quorum required for the validation of the new membership. At the eleventh

hour a compromise was reached, and almost all the Forza Italia MEPs finally joined the EPP Group.

After the period of 1994–8, during which Italy had been underrepresented in the EPP, it finally returned to being a protagonist due to the presence of Forza Italia and thanks to the determination of our late president, Silvio Berlusconi. Since 1998 Forza Italia and the EPP have shared a common history, and this will continue for a long time to come. At the European elections of 1999, Forza Italia presented itself under the umbrella of the EPP, and, thanks to the election of a strong Italian delegation of 22 deputies, the party was successful in rebalancing the composition of the new institutional structures of the EU. In 2002 I was elected vice-president of the party for the first time; indeed, I received the most votes of any of the vice-presidents elected at that time; during the subsequent legislature, Forza Italia was the national party delegation that voted in line with the EPP voting lists more than any other.

Conclusion

Since the 1999 elections, the EPP has remained the strongest transnational party in Europe, always managing to appoint its leader—José Manuel Barroso, Jean-Claude Juncker and now Ursula von der Leyen—as the head of the European Commission. Forza Italia continues to be a proud member of the EPP and a staunch defender of our common values. We have been protagonists under the successive leaderships of Wilfried Martens, Joseph Daul and Donald Tusk, and continue to be so today, under Manfred Weber. We know that the EPP is the only party that can deliver a more prosperous, competitive and secure EU, and we will continue to bring forward our ideas and principles, and those of the great popular leaders before us: from Don Luigi Sturzo to Robert Schuman, from Alcide De Gasperi to Konrad Adenauer and from Helmut Kohl to Silvio Berlusconi.

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A European Legacy: My EPP Experience

Mikuláš Dzurinda

One could say that I have been a Christian Democrat since birth. My grandfather was imprisoned for defying the Communists—he refused to surrender his livestock. My father was stripped of his position as an elementary school principal by the Communists because he refused to join their party and openly attended church. My mother suffered a similar fate.

After the fall of Communism in the former Czechoslovakia, I joined the emerging KDH. Soon after, I became its vice-chairman for the economy. The movement quickly became a member of the European People's Party (EPP), but it was not until I became prime minister in late 1998 that I first gained experience with the party. I became prime minister under the banner of the SDK. This party was created through the rapid transformation of a coalition of five political parties into a single party. This was done because my predecessor, the autocrat Vladimir Mečiar, had passed legislation that abolished the possibility of forming electoral coalitions, believing that this would prevent us from winning. As prime minister, I began to be invited to EPP leaders' summits by Wilfried Martens and the EPP. I valued these meetings from the very beginning and always looked forward to them; they allowed me to quickly learn from those who were more experienced, as I was only 43 years old. It was always a privilege to listen to Helmut Kohl, Wilfried Martens, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Jean-Claude Juncker, José Maria Aznar and Wolfgang Schäussel,

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among others. These leaders represented a remarkably homogeneous, solid and powerful community of competent politicians, united by two common bonds: values and the European dream.

A test of leadership: balancing party and government

My position changed significantly in early 2000 when I founded my own political party, the SDKÚ. Having been prime minister for over a year, I was facing increasing pressure from the then-chairman of the KDH, Jan Čarnogurský, to dissolve the SDK and return its Members of Parliament—who had been elected on a unified SDK list—to their original coalition parties. I could not do it. Many members were resistant to the idea, and I would have undermined my own legitimacy and that of the entire parliamentary caucus had I given in. After all, we had all run on a joint ticket under the banner of the SDK. I am certain that if I had yielded to this pressure from one of the five original coalition party leaders, the government coalition would have collapsed and Mečiar would have returned to power, as he had done twice before. This would have meant the definitive end of the dream of joining the EU and NATO for the democratic, pro-Western part of our society.

At the beginning of the year 2000, I became very close to Wilfried Martens. By then I was no longer just prime minister but also chairman of the governing party. I will forever be grateful that I did not have to explain much to him. He was intelligent, experienced, perceptive and hard-working—he immediately understood all the issues, and my new political party was given the green light for rapid entry into the EPP.

The government I headed was incredibly diverse. It included former Communists and dissidents, liberals and conservatives, and Catholics, protestants and atheists. We had Greens, traditional Social Democrats and, for the first time since 1989, three Hungarian representatives—an acknowledgment of the substantial Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

The European mentor: how Wilfried Martens shaped Slovak politics

It is with the Hungarian minority in Slovakia that I associate a particular experience, one that Wilfried helped to shape. After the ‘unplugging’ (the defeat of the populist and nationalist Vladimir Mečiar), the Hungarians

sometimes did not know what to do with themselves. Suddenly, they wanted everything or almost everything at once: strengthening those schools at which Hungarian was the language of instruction, Hungarian segments on public radio and television, bilingual signage in municipalities where at least 10% of the population was Hungarian and so on. And because Mečiar and the nationalists had attacked me and my government, often labelling me a traitor to Slovak national interests, I had to approach fulfilling the demands of the Hungarian community in a conciliatory but also prudent and sensible manner.

Wilfried sensed at one point that I was struggling. We met often, not only in Brussels but also in Bratislava. He attended not just our congresses but various other events. He was impressed by the radical nature of our government coalition's reforms—both economic and political—as well as our aggressive pursuit of catching up with Czechia, Poland and Hungary on the path to the EU. He always took a keen interest in how I was doing and whether he could help in any way. Memorably, he invited me, as prime minister and chairman of the SDKÚ, to a meeting in Brussels, along with three representatives of Hungarian parties—a liberal, a conservative and a Christian Democrat, because even the Slovak Hungarians were internally structured and politically organised on an ideological basis. Wilfried played it brilliantly: he welcomed us warmly, offered us coffee and said, 'So, Mikuláš, let's hear it.' So I began to speak, but not as if I was complaining or whining to the EPP president, but in the same way that I had spoken with my Hungarian colleagues in Bratislava. I simply urged the Slovak Hungarian party representatives to be patient, and to take gradual steps that would lead to the achievement of their goals, without us giving the nationalists free ammunition. After an hour I realised that Wilfried was not intervening at all. It was as if he was not even there. However, his presence and authority served to ensure that our 'internal' meeting yielded a result that we had not been able to achieve in Bratislava. After two hours, we left as if transformed. We had renewed confidence and the knowledge that the European family was on our side. We knew that we must not mess it up with petty domestic squabbles.

Wilfried Martens played a significant role in enabling me to lead the government for two consecutive electoral terms. Within eight years, we had implemented reforms that transformed Slovakia beyond recognition. The flat tax rate became popular both domestically and internationally. We emerged from isolation and integrated Slovakia into the EU and NATO. Subsequently, we joined the Exchange Rate Mechanism II, which is essentially the final step before entering the eurozone. To this day, Slovakia remains the only country among the Visegrád Four with the euro as its currency.

The price of power: a reflection on political leadership

Naturally, with time came fatigue and a ‘test of mettle’. After eight years, it is normal for opposition and even governing parties to face a leadership challenge. At that point, it is also natural to ‘reshuffle’ the party leadership. I did so only four years after handing over the government—in 2010. Perhaps I was influenced by the fact that in 2004 the SDKÚ had won the European Parliament elections in Slovakia, and in the 2006 parliamentary elections, after eight years in government, we achieved our historically best result as an independent party—winning 18.3% of the vote, and putting us close to forming a third government. Only my original party—the KDH—prevented us from doing so.

After the change of the party leadership in 2010, a weakness began to manifest itself that had been inscribed in the DNA of the SDKÚ from its very inception. We had been formed as a governing party with the goal of maintaining power—our single aim was to push through our programme. We had been created from the top down—a decision made by myself and my closest political allies, who had been ministers at the time. We had clear values, which is why we had always been steadfast and were consistently able to push through our programme. However, many of those who joined us after the party’s founding came to us for other reasons, often self-serving ones. They did not have such clear values. And they were gradually leading the party towards decay.

Ideals, influence and the end of a party

The first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, suggested that ‘states are sustained by the ideals from which they were born’.¹ It seems to me that this also applies to political parties. With Slovakia’s entry into the EU and NATO, as well as the party’s transition to opposition and the fading of the governing-party ethos, the reason for the SDKÚ’s existence seemed to disappear. The party began to be hesitant about collaborating with the new government, as its hidden interest seemed to be to dismantle the SDKÚ. The SDKÚ members’ nostalgia for being in power was stronger than their values and will to serve the community.

¹ *Lidové noviny* [The People’s Newspaper], ‘Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk vzdal se úřadu presidentského’ [Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk Has Resigned From the Office of President], vol. 43, no. 627, 15 December 1935, 1, author’s translation.

Our experience is not unique; similar stories can be found both in the past and today. These are the stories of established, ideologically crystallised parties which, with the passage of time and under the pressure of various influences, begin to wither and often disappear. This process is also being affected by the new ‘power’ tool that is social media. With this tool, skilled manipulators can devalue the ethos of values and turn the political arena, in the best case, into a show and a competition for the most Instagram likes, and in the worst case, into a forum for the spreading of disinformation, nationalism and hatred. Populism and its style of politics are being promoted to the detriment of content, not to mention the honouring of reforms. That is why extreme views on both sides of the spectrum, and especially from the right, are currently being promoted.

Conclusions

My father often told me: ‘You must know who you are and where you belong’. The older I get, the more I understand this. Today it is crystal clear to me that the EPP can only survive if it stays true to its values—if it remains steadfast, resilient and willing to resist fleeting trends. In referring to such trends, I am thinking especially of the media and politicians who pose as modern and progressive, but who are often foolish and irresponsible and who are leading us down a blind alley. They relativise values and mock traditions. The EPP must also withstand nationalists, intolerant extremists and separatists. We can only do this if we preserve our inner freedom and integrity. We must remain faithful to European values and be determined to defend freedom—of thought, expression and action—always and everywhere. Of course, this freedom must be inextricably linked with responsibility.

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Part III. Creating a Joint Youth Structure: YEPP

The Path to Founding YEPP

Gareth Gregan

On 21 January 1997, almost 300 people representing 42 youth political organisations gathered for a weekend of debate and discussion at the Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels. The event would become the founding congress of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) and was the final step in a long journey towards building a single European umbrella organisation for the youth of the Christian Democratic and conservative parties affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP).

The foundation congress was the culmination of a long process between representatives of two organisations: the European Young Christian Democrats (EYCD) and the Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC). The EYCD was the youth organisation of the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD), while DEMYC was the youth organisation of the European Democrat Union (EDU).

Cooperation between centre-right European youth could already be observed in the framework of the Nouvelles Équipes Internationales in early post-Second World War Europe. The Jeunes des Nouvelles Équipes Internationales, founded in 1948, would later become the Union des Jeunes

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Démocrates Chrétiens des Nouvelles Équipes Internationales and then the Union Internationale des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens – section Europe.

As would become the case with YEPP, its two predecessor organisations were the culmination of various development iterations. For the EYCD, the path to its creation began in 1967, a few years after the establishment of the EUCD, with the creation of the Union Européenne des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens. As many of the members of the EUCD came from countries outside the then European Community, the Commission pour l'Intégration Européenne—later the Committee of the Nine and, following the 1981 accession of Greece, the Committee of the Ten—was formed to address specific Community-related issues. This forum would become the most important arena for cooperation among young European Christian Democrats. In 1984 it merged with the Union Européenne des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens, and the EYCD was formed.

While DEMYC was founded in the early 1970s, it was not until 1978 that its parent parties built on the existing links and formed the EDU, a Europe-wide association of conservative and centre-right political parties. DEMYC became a permanent observer of the EDU assemblies in 1979 and took an active role in creating the International Young Democrat Union. In contrast to the EYCD, which tended to limit membership to Christian Democratic organisations, DEMYC counted conservative and even liberal member parties among its ranks.

By the 1980s it had become clear that the continued existence of two separate organisations with broadly similar objectives, values, membership and functions was serving to weaken both. Not only was this a waste of money and resources, but it was also creating arbitrary divides in both organisations. In the EYCD an alliance had formed of 'pure' Christian Democratic youth organisations that were not members of DEMYC. They often worked to oppose initiatives spearheaded by those who were members of both organisations. Within DEMYC, a distinction could be made between those who were EYCD members and those who were not. Moreover, according to Fredrik Reinfeldt, then president of DEMYC and later the first YEPP president, a conflict was brewing between those who advocated an anti-European line—such as the British Young Conservatives—and those who supported more European integration.

By the early 1990s, both DEMYC and the EYCD had reached different points of crisis and faced difficult decisions about how to proceed. DEMYC was struggling for relevance. Its reluctance to support further European integration had created distance between itself and the EPP, which was furthered by the EYCD's designation as the official EPP youth organisation. In contrast,

the EYCD had developed a positive working relationship with the EPP, which was reflected in the election of then EYCD Secretary General Marc Bertrand as an EPP vice-president. However, this positivity would not endure. Around this time, EPP President Wilfried Martens and Secretary General Klaus Welle sought to modernise the EPP by welcoming conservative and other centre-right parties, in particular those from newer EU member states, into the organisation. Friction emerged when EYCD Christian Democrats from the Benelux countries, Italy and Ireland moved to oppose the decision.

This coalition of 'small' organisations (the implosion of the Italian *Democrazia Cristiana* in the early 1990s must be remembered) stood against the 'bigger' organisations, which happened to be members of DEMYC. Tensions grew until, in 1994, at the EYCD congress in Bogensee, near Berlin, the 'larger' organisations, including the German Junge Union and the Spanish NNGG, suspended their participation. They criticised the EYCD for not being representative enough and for acting too much in favour of the 'smaller' organisations. In other words, the EYCD was criticised for not adjusting to the expanding nature of the EU that many of its member organisations supported.

The paralysis within the EYCD was now complete. For the 'pure' Christian Democrats, it was clear that without the bigger organisations, such as the Junge Union and NNGG, the EYCD would quickly lose its credibility. For an organisation such as the Junge Union, which defined itself as the youth organisation of a people's party with both Christian Democratic and conservative roots, it was unthinkable not to be part of an association of Christian Democratic or conservative youth organisations. The view of its members was that Christian Democrats and conservatives should not be split but should join forces at the European level and stay 'united by one conviction', according to former board member Markus Pösentrup. In the same period, the British Young Conservatives left DEMYC because they felt it had become 'too European' and 'too federal'. Their departure also helped DEMYC to move towards European integration.

Developments within the EPP accelerated the process of uniting the two disparate organisations. Upon his election as EPP secretary general in 1994, Klaus Welle firmly believed that young conservatives and Christian Democrats should work together. Through the EPP's political bureau, he proposed that associations of the EPP could only remain recognised as such if they were open to all national associations of the EPP. This forced the EYCD's hand, as until that point it had not been open to all of the youth associations of the EPP member parties. Preserving its status as an official EPP youth organisation meant beginning negotiations with DEMYC. Welle's experience meant

he was ideally positioned to bridge the gap between the two organisations, having served as DEMYC president and as an EYCD board member. As an indication of how hostile the relations between the two could be, his election as DEMYC president was viewed as something of a scandal in EYCD circles, and he was asked to resign from the EYCD board. It was also somewhat humorous that one of Welle's first acts as EPP secretary general was to reject a letter that he himself had written on behalf of DEMYC requesting that it be recognised as the EPP's second official youth organisation. This rejection was accompanied by a recommendation from Welle that the Junge Union should leave DEMYC and remain active in a single EPP youth organisation.

With the EPP's support, the political bureau of the EYCD and the executive committee of DEMYC established an EYCD–DEMYC joint working group in 1995. This working group was tasked with examining ways of cooperating at the European level in the future. The idea was to bring together the best of both worlds, not to impose a single membership on the various national youth organisations. The working group met in January, April, May and July 1996. At the same time, discussions took place in DEMYC's executive committee and the political bureau of the EYCD. It soon became clear that all sides could agree to work towards establishing a broad umbrella organisation of Christian Democratic, conservative and other centre-right youth organisations. In other words, in the first half of 1996, preparations for the foundation of a new association took place alongside negotiations between DEMYC and the EYCD. A consensus was established for a 'Declaration on the Basic Values and Principles' and on the statutes of the new organisation. Based on these documents, an inaugural congress was to be convened. In the second half of 1996, the national member organisations of DEMYC and the EYCD were informed. In a letter dated 21 July 1996—and signed by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Winfried Weck and Matthias Peterlik on behalf of DEMYC, and Sandro Brodbeck, Brian Murphy, Valentin Hajdinjal and Marc Bertrand on behalf of the EYCD—the founders of the new organisation, named the Youth of the European People's Party, made it clear what was at stake. They wrote the following:

The results of our work are by nature a compromise. It is impossible in a negotiation such as this to satisfy in all respects the demands of every organisation. . . . The creation of YEPP and the decision over whether to join is ultimately one for each national or regional organisation. We firmly believe the package we have negotiated offers the best prospect for success.

A general consultation involving all the members of both organisations was held in Brussels in November 1996. It was a great success. A discussion took place based on three documents: the Declaration on the Basic Values and Principles, the statutes and the rules of the congress. As the working group had done such a competent job, few changes were made. Some amendments were made to the Declaration to make it more aligned with Christian Democratic values. The number of vice-presidents was also a point of discussion. The original three was increased to nine to make the board more representative, considering the variety of national member organisations. Once these issues were settled, everything was ready for the dissolution of both the EYCD and DEMYC and the foundation of YEPP.

The founding congress was organised in Brussels from 31 January to 2 February 1997. It was hosted by the Belgian organisations CVP-Jongeren and Jeunes PSC and organised by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Winfried Weck, Matthias Peterlik and Belén Ureña from DEMYC, and by Sandro Brodbeck, Brian Murphy, Valentin Hajdinjal and Marc Bertrand from the EYCD. It took place on the premises of the Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, in the city centre of Brussels, close to Brussels North station, and welcomed about 300 participants representing 42 organisations from 33 countries. On the afternoon of Friday, 31 January, there was a meeting of the heads of the delegations, which was followed by the opening session of the congress. The congress was inaugurated by EPP President Wilfried Martens. In his speech, he appealed to the new organisation to become a privileged speaker within the EPP. On Saturday morning the plenary session continued, and the first board was elected, composed of 13 members (one president, one first vice-president, one secretary general, one deputy secretary general and 9 vice-presidents), as well as 2 financial auditors. In the afternoon three working commissions were established: one on the future of Europe, one on stability and security in Europe, and one on the work plan for the incoming board. The first two produced statements later distributed within YEPP. No fewer than eight resolutions were accepted: on the Council of Europe, employment in Europe, famine in the world, drug trafficking, Internet and child abuse, transport and merchandise across the Alps, East Timor and terrorism.

The long journey to bring young centre-right Europeans together had reached its destination. The work could now begin.

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The Creation of YEPP

Fredrik Reinfeldt

One of the things you cherish the most when you get older and after you leave your active years in politics is the memory of all the experiences and of the opportunities you had to see every corner of Europe as a result of being active in the youth structures of your parties. This has given me a lifelong respect for history and the importance of political leadership in developing society. It took me to nearly every nation-state in Central and Eastern Europe just as they were coming out of Soviet repression and beginning to forge their own futures. It also enabled me to visit many countries around the Mediterranean Sea and all the way up through Europe to my home area in the Nordics.

What meant the most was the opportunity to meet like-minded people during the stage of life when everyone is eager to do more and curious to learn more from and about others. When you engage in politics, your experience usually starts locally, where you live or where you attend school or university. The issues that you deal with are important but often very concentrated on how to build and secure a safe and sound local neighbourhood. That is how it started for me as well. To be able to combine that with learning more from politically interested friends with sometimes very different cultural and political challenges created the opportunity for increased respect and a chance to reflect on my own beliefs. I think this is a very important lesson for anyone who engages in politics.

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If you want to do something both really complicated and thrilling at some point in your life, then you should try constructing a new international organisation. You will immediately learn that there are always people ready to defend what has been, but there is seldom anyone asking about what is to come. And this often applies regardless of age.

Paving the way for a new youth organisation

It is therefore with some pride that I look back to the mid-1990s and the creation of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) in 1997. Three factors created the opportunity to establish this new organisation.

The first and most important was the transformation of cooperation among the countries of Europe from the weaker relationships of the European Community to the more far-reaching ambitions of the EU after the Maastricht Treaty came into force. This meant a rapid increase in political policies that looked upon the EU as an aspiring political union and not just as a group of nation-states that were coordinating a single market. The political family on the centre-right needed a response to this new challenge. The historical cooperation between sister parties, which had often been comprised of comparing policy and reform experiences, was now being replaced by bodies that formulated solutions that did not stop at the borders of the nation-states. The centre-right's answer to this was the European People's Party (EPP) and subsequently the formation of YEPP.

The second factor was the possibility of bringing conservative and Christian Democratic parties together in the same family. This was more of a challenge and one that looked different in nearly every country. In Germany the CDU/CSU and its youth organisation, Junge Union, could be said to be the forerunners of the EPP and YEPP. The two traditions, conservative and Christian Democrat, were already working together in the same party in that country. But in many other places, including my home country of Sweden, these two traditions had their own parties. And they were so different that they sometimes stood against each other. In international cooperation this had also given rise to two different structures for the conservative and Christian Democratic parties and their youth wings. For many who had become involved in these organisations, it was tough to accept something new. I was able to help push the process of convergence forward, since at the start of the negotiations I was the chair of the Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC), the organisation for the youth of mostly conservative parties.

The third factor was that by establishing YEPP it de facto created a divide within the conservative movement that has since grown and split the parties on the right between those on the centre-right that are pro-European and more often market orientated, and those that are more hardcore Eurosceptic and nation-first parties. This became very personal for me and many of my friends in DEMYC. For many years we had a close and good relationship with the Conservative Party in the UK. But I remember arriving in London in the early 1990s and meeting representatives from the Young Conservatives who were wearing pins with a red cross over the EU flag. This was unacceptable to us. Sweden, together with Finland and Austria, was aspiring and preparing to join the EU. My party, Moderaterna, was the strongest force in decades to be driving forward a pro-European position in Swedish politics. For us, joining the EU was a way to end Swedish separatism and the misguided conception of neutrality as being neutral in values between the Soviet Union and the West. Moderaterna wanted to look to the West and to be integrated with the like-minded people of Europe. For me it was clear that the only alternative the British Young Conservatives were giving us was an invitation to admire and long for the reinstallation of the British Empire.

The real hurdle: counting votes

The creation of YEPP came after several meetings of the preparatory team in Brussels—with representatives from both DEMYC and the European Young Christian Democrats—often in the same room of the same hotel. Some of us had never really met before we sat down, but by concentrating on meeting a common challenge, our respect for each other gradually grew. I think this experience was very similar to others I had later in my political life.

One would think that the most complicated part of any such undertaking would be sorting out the political differences. This was not the problem as we were now clearly a group composed of pro-European political forces. The main problem was deciding on how to weight the voting system. Having worked through this problem during a couple of lengthy meetings, I gained a deeper respect for similar voting procedures, for instance, the one created in the Lisbon Treaty.

There are two options: either you follow the UN principle of giving everyone one vote each or you create some sort of balance between bigger and smaller members. If you cannot accept the concept of one person, one vote, you immediately have to define what is to be measured in terms of size. Is it the number of members in your youth organisation? The success of your

parent party in the latest election? The size of your country? We understood that we had to enter the risky landscape of trying to find a balance between all these factors and realised that once it was put into practice, we would probably never be able to change anything.

The toughest outcome of our voting system was placing a *de facto* cap on the number of votes held by the smaller nations, even those where the EPP member party was the politically dominant party. In these countries the high percentage of support their parent parties received in general elections was not reflected in the number of votes the youth organisations had—simply because the size of their populations was much smaller than those of the most populated European nations. The issue of the cap nearly ended the process of establishing YEPP. Ultimately everyone looked at the outcome from their own viewpoint, and the smaller countries would have been the biggest beneficiaries of a one nation, one vote system. Of course, the question we were all asking ourselves after finalising the statutes and the voting system was whether all the hours put into creating the voting system would ever be followed up by using it in practice. Well-functioning cooperation rarely needs voting mechanisms to make progress.

When we attended our first congress, in January 1997, we were happy to be greeted by the EPP President Wilfried Martens. On the board with me were many of those who had made the creation of YEPP possible. Both of my German allies, Winfried Weck and Michael Hahn, had been instrumental in the creation of YEPP. Winfried became my first vice-president and Michael Hahn took over as president when I stepped down after two years. My board also included many gifted contributors, including Belen Ureña from the NNGG in Spain, Eva Mitsopoulou from ONNED in Greece and Joanne Harmon from Young Fine Gael in Ireland. After I became prime minister of Sweden some years later, I was also glad to meet my old deputy secretary general, Jan Kees de Jager, in his new capacity as minister for finance in the Netherlands.

In the early days of YEPP, the focus was still very much on the electoral cycles in the nation-states. We wanted to meet the leaders, understand the main challenges and learn more about the campaigns in those countries where our member organisations were fighting to win over voters. It was especially important to hold our meetings in Eastern Europe, often with special support from various institutions, to acknowledge that such meetings were an important part of building a well-functioning democracy.

I found these long weekends in many countries fascinating: we very often visited churches and historical buildings, met party leaders and prime

ministers, and ate food and drank beer with local cultural links. We listened to each other; we had fun together; and we were also able to formulate our common vision for Europe. It is a privilege to have been a part of all of this.

From the past, a new hope for the future

The second half of the 1990s, when YEPP was formed, was a time of hope for democracy and Western values such as freedom and trust in institutions, a time now seemingly long gone. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the coming together of Europe, the opening up of Russia after the Soviet era and the still strong position of the US in the world all gave hope to ideas based on a belief in human nature. It was also the time when China started its impressive economic growth alongside what seemed to be an unbreakable link to increased freedom for its people and increased openness to the world.

In that atmosphere, I think we all felt that we were part of something hopeful, and we had a will to work with democratic tools to create more space to help individuals and families forge a better future for themselves. For me, there is an important lesson to be learned—that what once was true can always be so again, however dark the forces are that stand against you. For those of us that were part of the generation that formed YEPP, and in many cases continued to serve in various political positions, what we were in favour of was more important than what we felt we were against. That is a lesson I have also carried with me outside of the political sphere.

Fredrik Reinfeldt is a Swedish economist and lecturer. He was prime minister of Sweden from 2006 to 2014 and chairman of Moderaterna from 2003 to 2015. He was chairman of the Young Moderates (1992–5) and DEMYC (1995–7), before becoming a founding member and the first president of YEPP in the period 1997–9.

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The Consolidation Phase

Leo Varadkar

Introduction

I was not in attendance at the founding of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP), but I was present for all of its early years, first as international secretary of Young Fine Gael, representing my youth organisation in the YEPP Council, and at seminars, summer schools, congresses, chair's conferences and other meetings.

While that was not so long ago, it was a different age. Plane tickets were still printed on distinctive light paper and arrived in the post or had to be collected, emails were relatively new and could not be sent from your phone, the euro was new, and the great enlargement of the EU to the east and south was imminent. It was also an optimistic time. It was the era of the 'Washington Consensus', characterised by widespread support for globalisation and free trade, when support for the market economy reigned supreme. It appeared as though Russia could be on a democratic, Western path, and backsliding on democracy and the rule of law in places such as Poland and Hungary was unimaginable. There was, of course, also darkness. War was being waged in the Balkans, with the US once again having to step in when Europe failed. And the split widened within Europe and between Europe and the US over the invasion of Iraq.

L. Varadkar (✉)
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In 2001 I was elected to the YEPP board as a vice-president. Young Fine Gael had been a leading organisation in the European Young Christian Democrats (EYCD) and valued the fact that we had secured election to all three of YEPP's boards since its foundation. With YEPP being a much bigger organisation than the EYCD, smaller and more progressive and centrist organisations feared being marginalised, and we felt we had a key role to play in ensuring this did not happen.

The third board was the first composed of members who had little or no experience of participation in the Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC) or EYCD. We focused on consolidation—on deepening and widening YEPP—the original marriage having been a clear success, notwithstanding some annoyance that DEMYC had not been closed.

As an individual, I loved participating in YEPP meetings. Doing so gave me a chance to travel and see so much of Europe as a young person—something I would not have been able to afford otherwise. It was a unique opportunity to meet young people from all over Europe with a similar outlook and interests, and it gave me valuable insight into how other parties and countries thought and operated at a political level. This became hugely useful to me as prime minister of Ireland when we grappled with Brexit and I had to tour the capitals of Europe seeking solidarity with Ireland and support for our red lines: no hard border between North and South, no diminution of Ireland's place in the single market and above all the protection of the Good Friday Agreement which had brought peace to Northern Ireland. While my officials could brief me in depth on the positions held by other governments, my participation in YEPP and the EPP gave me insights they did not have into the party politics and political culture of each country. I believe Ireland was blessed that the chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk were all part of our political family. Roberta Metsola, president of the European Parliament, and I were born on the same day and first met when she was on the board of the European Democrat Students (EDS) and I was on the board of YEPP. Other contacts included Jyrki Katainen, prime minister of Finland, and Yannis Smyrlis, future president of YEPP, whom I knew from ONNED, the youth organisation of *Néa Dimokratía* in Greece, but whom I now met with regularly as he was an aide to Konstantinos Karamanlis, prime minister of Greece. I encountered many others as Members of the European Parliament or staff members, such as Markus Pösentrup, Sidonia Jędrzejewska and Michael Hahn, or as EPP staff members, such as Galina Fomenchenko.

I was elected to YEPP's third board at the Estoril Congress in Portugal. It was the first congress at which YEPP's presidency was contested, with

Rutger-Jan Hebben (CDJA, the youth organisation of the Dutch CDA) defeating Daniel Bautista (NNGG, the youth of the Spanish Partido Popular). In this way YEPP honoured the commitment that the presidency would initially be rotated among conservatives, people's parties and Christian Democrats. It was significant that this was not much of an issue. Both candidates received support from across YEPP and not just from the organisations closest to them ideologically. It was the candidates' experience and their vision for the organisation that mattered. I think this is proof positive that the organisations that formed YEPP had gelled at this point, with Young Fine Gael often finding common cause with ONNED and the German Junge Union, as well as with the organisations traditionally closest to us from the Benelux countries.

In his address, incoming President Hebben set out his vision to broaden and deepen YEPP. Broadening meant growing the organisation by taking in new members. Deepening involved political debate, coming to common positions and promoting them within other youth forums and within the EPP.

Hebben and the third board were clear. We would not simply offer membership to any large non-socialist organisation. There were criteria to fulfil and a process to be followed to be granted the status of invited guest, observer, full member and in some cases, where democracy was not established, permanent observer status. This was not without controversy. Forza Italia Giovani had just been admitted despite opposition from many Christian Democrats and the other Italian member organisation, which were unimpressed with the organisation's populism and its leader, even though Forza Italia had already been admitted to the EPP. We had no partner in the UK and no member in France. The British Conservatives and the UK had already begun their slow march out of the EU, though that fate was unthinkable at the time. But the situation was different with France, and Jeunes UMP, the political vehicle of Sarkozy, soon became an observer and later a full member. Other new full members included the Hungarian Fidelitas, the Czech JKKD, the Bulgarian YUDEF, the Moldovan NG PPCD and the Slovenian NG SLS.

Deepening YEPP involved a focus on EU enlargement, stability in the Balkans and the future of Europe. YEPP published *The Future Is Ours: 10 Theses on the Future of Europe*¹ at a YEPP Council meeting in Geneva in January 2002 to outline a vision for how the EU institutions would function post-enlargement. The document was published to coincide with the Laeken European Council meeting that was to decide on the creation of a European Convention. As part of this engagement, YEPP partnered with DEMYC and

¹ YEPP Council, *The Future Is Ours: 10 Theses on the Future of Europe* (Geneva, 26 January 2002).

EDS in advance of the European Youth Convention, which brought together 210 young people at the European Parliament to develop common positions on EU institutional reform.

Describing the upcoming enlargement as ‘the political reunification of Europe after decades of division’, the paper reiterated YEPP’s commitment to an EU built on the principles of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, transparency and accountability. The paper was critical of the EU’s approach, claiming that ‘institutional reform processes have become the status quo of the EU’ and that ‘a lack of transparency of the procedures and package deals with incoherent results have led to mistrust and criticism from Europeans and have undermined public support for European integration’.

YEPP called on the EU to clarify the distribution of competences between the EU and the member states and the relationships between the institutions of the Union. When viewed with hindsight, many of the paper’s institutional recommendations did eventually become a reality, such as the call for the European Commission to transform into the executive arm of the EU and for European commissioners to be appointed based on there being one from each member state.

However, some of the propositions, such as the call to transform the European Council into the EU’s second chamber, rename it the Chamber of States and have it composed of two representatives from each member state, did not come to pass. Nor did YEPP’s call to grant the European Parliament the authority to dismiss individual European commissioners.

I played a crucial role in the Youth Convention, having been elected as one of three rapporteurs who would present our recommendations to the ‘senior’ Convention, which was chaired by former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. YEPP worked with EDS and also the socialist and liberal youth organisations to ensure that our input and influence were maximised in the Youth Convention on the election of rapporteurs and also on the key votes. This annoyed some of the other young people who had gained their places at the Convention through non-governmental youth organisations, but we were happy with what we achieved.

Similarly, we sought to increase our influence in the European Youth Forum, which was traditionally dominated by left-leaning student, youth and political organisations. Sidonia Jędrzejewska put in an enormous amount of work to secure her election as vice-president and to make sure our voice was heard. We sought to influence the EPP by taking up positions on its policy working groups and by being active and visible at the EPP Congress. However, I do not think we achieved our full potential on this front.

YEPP was fortunate that it was well-funded in the early years. There was the surplus inherited from the EYCD, membership fees and a subvention from the Commission. This allowed us to co-fund member organisations to host seminars and enabled us to reimburse the travel costs for participants from Central and Eastern Europe, which was essential to their participation. In later years, YEPP's financial position would worsen, and the organisation fell into debt, which limited its activity until the debt was resolved.

But during those active times, YEPP was forward-looking in the topics it debated and the resolutions it agreed on. About 50 were agreed during the term of each of the early boards. These included resolutions on sustainable development (Winterthur), building a European identity (Berlin), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Vilnius), Euromed (Malta) and regional policy (Brussels). Even then, migration was a hot topic. YEPP's second paper on migration struck a liberal note, stating that the organisation rejected the characterisation of migrants as 'welfare scroungers, job snatchers, and involved in the criminal underworld.' It argued that Europe would need migration given its ageing society.² But after the 2015 migration crisis, YEPP would take a harder line in common with its parent parties.

I think the creation of YEPP as the single youth organisation of the EPP was a genuine success. Care was taken in the early years to maintain the balance among the organisations that were Christian Democratic, conservative and people's parties. The issue of having more than one member organisation in a member state was managed as carefully as it could be, though not without losing some valued but smaller organisations from Italy and Spain. The method of electing the board almost as an agreed list was useful in ensuring balance across regions and organisation size as well as ideological tradition. The organisation successfully enlarged and deepened as the years went by and became a useful training ground for people who went on to have careers in politics at the domestic and European levels. I have no doubt it played its part in keeping the EPP on top.

² G. Grogan, *Youth of the EPP: 25 Years on the Right Side of History*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (27 April 2023), 15.

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Leo Varadkar served as Ireland's prime minister from 2017 to 2020 and from 2022 to 2024, as deputy prime minister from 2020 to 2022 and as a cabinet minister from 2011 to 2024. He was leader of Fine Gael from 2017 to 2024 and a Member of Parliament from 2007 to 2024. Prior to this, he was the international secretary for and a board member of Young Fine Gael (1997–2001) and vice-president of YEPP (2001–3).

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Part IV. The Integration of the EUCD into the EPP

A Stronger EPP for a Stronger Europe

Alojz Peterle

I accepted the invitation to contribute to this publication with deep gratitude as my generation was the first one to enjoy the ‘smile of history’ after decades of a divided Europe, and both the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) and the European People’s Party (EPP) played crucial roles in this new chapter of our history.

What EUCD membership meant for us

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Christian Democratic parties on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain were the main drivers of democratisation and the foremost promoters of the ‘European idea’ in their countries. I remember how proud and happy my party, the SKD, was when it became the first Slovenian party to gain membership of the Christian Democratic Union of Central Europe. Established in New York in 1950, this organisation was the framework for cooperation between the historical democratic parties from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in exile. It merged with the EUCD in 1992.

I must mention in this regard how attentive the Austrian ÖVP was during that time. Ministers Alois Mock and Erhard Busek were true Europeans with a good understanding of CEE. The conferences organised by the ÖVP on the

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Mozart ship in 1989 and 1990 gave the new political parties in the then still Communist countries a unique opportunity to discuss their future in the European context. I remember Václav Havel, József Antall and Franjo Tuđman, among others—there were even Christian Democrats from Moscow. We were finally ‘on stage’, and that resonated strongly in our countries.

There was another reason why the EPP and the EUCD, but also the European Democrat Union (EDU) and the Centrist Democrat International, were important for Slovenia, Croatia and other not yet internationally recognised countries. High-level official visits to Germany, France, Belgium and other major countries were not possible for us, but within the international political organisations we had the chance to talk to other prime ministers on an equal footing. I remember my first talks in private with, among others, Helmut Kohl, Wilfried Martens, Jacques Chirac, Alois Mock and Jacques Santer, who were all leaders with a sense of history and clear visions, and who kept their word.

I will add an anecdote. Soon after I became prime minister, some young European Christian Democrats requested an audience. The chief of protocol told me discreetly, ‘Mr Prime Minister, I think this is not your level; ask a minister to meet them.’ My answer was, ‘These young visitors will be new leaders in Europe in a few years.’ Among those 12 visitors, led by Thomas Jansen, were Enrico Letta, Fredrik Reinfeldt and Klaus Welle. I still don’t regret the decision to meet with people of that ‘level’.

Membership of the EUCD was, for us, a quantum leap, from political non-existence under Communism to being formally recognised within our political family, a family that had a clear vision for Europe’s future. This membership not only meant sharing the same values and principles as our Western counterparts but also served as a clear sign to voters that our parties had partners in the West who supported our ‘European ambition’. It was also significant that Christian Democratic and conservative parties held the majority in the European Council at that time: our political relevance was reinforced by our belonging to the same family. At the same time, the EUCD, the EPP and the EDU also became stronger by accepting new parties from CEE which shared the ambition for a reunited Europe.

A vision for Europe

There was no need to teach Christian Democratic parties in CEE about European values. Christians in those countries had maintained these values during the Communist era. What our countries needed was not to adapt

themselves to Europe by adopting the *acquis communautaire* but rather to implement these European values. What was missing in Communist countries was respect for the dignity of persons and nations. As Christian Democratic leaders, our ambition was to put the person at the centre of our actions and policies. Our idea then was not just for our countries to become members of the EU, to join the better side of the world, but to be responsible players, drivers of a new quality of politics in Europe. This goal likewise translated into our efforts for the democratisation of our countries, which opened the way to the reunification of Europe.

Two EUCD congresses—Athens 1992 and Ljubljana 1996—paved the way for the merger with the EPP at the congress in Brussels in 1999. I remember how strong the energy was at that time, aimed at constructing a truly united Europe. It was inevitable and wise that the EUCD, the EDU and the EPP merged step by step into a strong political family. Our ambition, however, was not only a strong EPP but also a strong Europe. The idea of Europe that the EPP proposed was visionary, needed and well received.

As president of the SKD, vice-president of the EUCD (1996–9) and vice-president of the EPP (2006–9), I had the chance to act and to observe at first hand how this new cooperation provided added value to our efforts to build a stronger Europe. I remember, too, how CEE countries welcomed the attention of EPP president Wilfried Martens when he visited them in the early 1990s and later the similar attention of Hans-Gert Pöttering in the time of the great enlargement of 2004.

This historic enlargement, which occurred five years after the EPP and EUCD merged, marked a new page in Europe's political history, and reinforced the EPP's position as the leading force in the European Parliament. With historical distance, one can say that the EPP understood the signs of the time and was ready. This is why it took on the main responsibility for the European project.

I must share one more memory in this regard. I had the chance to discuss the future of Europe with Helmut Kohl three times. On each occasion, he shared with me his attitude: 'When I had a European idea, I discussed it first with the smallest member state. If it was acceptable for Luxembourg, it could work for the others as well.' I wish other top leaders would follow his method.

A community of values

The main reasons for the EPP's success were its understanding of the historic moment and its vision for the future of Europe. Christian Democrats were the main contributors to the new Europe that emerged after the Second World War, and they played the leading role in reuniting Europe after the fall of Communism.

Looking back at those times, one can say that the EPP was ready, not only in practice but also from a moral point of view. I am proud of belonging to the same political family as Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and other Christian Democrats who shared the basic belief that a new, democratic Europe should be based on the Christian Democratic concept of man, with respect for the dignity of each person and each nation.

We must remember that an enlarged EU does not necessarily mean a truly united Europe. But only a truly united EU will be able to achieve 'more Europe'. Being united means to share the same fundamental values and principles. We have to reconsider what it means today to respect human dignity and to work together. And one cannot have more Europe with less soul, as Schuman and Delors taught us.

The EU began as a community which shared the same basic values and principles. A union can survive only as a community. Community is also the answer now, when we are facing global polarisation and wars in our vicinity.

Conclusion

In the situation we face now, we cannot afford a weak Europe. We have to agree again on the diagnosis and therapy. We must not forget that the European Community began as a peace project. We must also be aware that the project of reuniting Europe has not yet been accomplished in South-Eastern Europe. In the Western Balkans there are still sources of possible conflict that may develop. The European prospects of the Western Balkan countries cannot be strong without a strong political will, clear strategy and timetable in Brussels. The same goes for Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the other countries with European ambitions.

The idea of community should also be the leading concept with regard to global relations and leadership. The question 'What should be first?', in terms of priorities, should be more important than 'Who is the first?' on the global scene. We need only one Europe, without new divisions.

We can build a strong Europe only with a strong EPP—strong not just in numbers, but with a clear and strong identity. I know the EPP can provide added value to the quality of European togetherness.

To be strong means to be ready.

Alojz Peterle became the first democratically elected prime minister of Slovenia in 1990. He served as deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in 1993–4. A cofounder of the Slovenian SKD, he was vice-president of the EUCD from 1996 to 1999 and of the EPP from 2006 to 2009. He was also a Member of the Slovenian Parliament (1990–2004), an MEP (2004–19) and a member of the presidium of the European Convention on the Future of Europe.

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From Vision to Power: The EPP's Journey Through Enlargement and Strategy (Interview With Wim van Velzen)

Teona Lavrelashvili 

Wim van Velzen served as chairman of the Dutch CDA from January 1987 to 1994. In 1994 he became a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), serving until 2004 and holding the role of vice-president of the European People's Party (EPP) twice. From 1996 to 1999, he was president of the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD), where he played a key role in aligning Central and Eastern European (CEE) parties with Christian Democratic values and overseeing the EUCD's integration into the EPP.

Van Velzen was instrumental in integrating Christian Democratic values into the broader European political framework, particularly through his contributions to the formation and growth of the EPP. On 2 October 2024, I met him virtually to explore his unique experiences during the EPP's formative years and the integration of the EUCD into its structure. Our conversation was enriched by van Velzen's vivid recollections of the EPP's early days and his insights into the complex task of incorporating parties from Central and Eastern Europe. He shared thoughtful reflections on the strategic decisions and visionary leadership that propelled the EPP to its position as Europe's number one political force.

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What were the founding principles of the EUCD, and how did they contribute to the formation of the EPP?

I think that the establishment of the EUCD in 1965 was a pivotal step towards creating a unified European Christian Democratic movement. Built on the values of democracy, human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity, the EUCD united like-minded parties across Europe, moving beyond mere cooperation. This transformation allowed us to articulate common goals with real political force, despite challenges from nationalism and ideological opposition within Europe.

The EUCD's founding wasn't an isolated development. We built on existing frameworks such as the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* and earlier organisations such as the International Secretariat of Christian-Inspired Democratic Parties, which had served as hubs for inter-European dialogue among Christian Democrats. The key difference with the EUCD was its clear mission to shape policy rather than simply coordinate discussions.

I believe that this foundational period paved the way for the creation of the EPP in 1976. We knew a more cohesive Christian Democratic voice was needed, especially with challenges such as de Gaulle's resistance to supranationalism and the expanding European Economic Community. The EUCD, with its commitment to shared principles, acted as the immediate forerunner of the EPP, creating a platform where Christian Democrats could pursue the common goal of a federated Europe.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the EUCD held a relatively limited political position in Brussels and other member state capitals, as the EPP managed key activities concerning the European Commission, Parliament and Council. Meanwhile, the EUCD maintained responsibility for relations with the Council of Europe and its member states. I believe this division allowed the EUCD to strategically foster political cooperation within the Council of Europe, which later became instrumental for the EPP, particularly as it expanded and pursued broader European integration.

How did the EUCD address the integration of new CEE parties, and what specific challenges emerged during this period?

Integrating CEE parties was no small task, especially given that many of these parties had limited experience with democratic governance and, in many cases, included members who had prior ties to Communist regimes. Decades of authoritarian rule had left these parties with limited experience in policy-making, governance and the handling of democratic institutions. New parties were created, but it was vital to verify whether their members aligned with the EUCD's democratic and Christian values.

Thus, we needed to ensure that any new members were genuinely aligned with our values, which required a rigorous vetting process. We decided to begin by offering observer status before granting membership status, which gave us the necessary time to evaluate each new party's commitment to our values, including democratic governance and respect for human dignity.

The influx of new politicians and parties led to challenges; for instance, several 'fortune hunters' attempted to join sister parties within the EUCD, sometimes planted by former secret services in CEE countries such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary. To prevent ideological breaches, the EUCD enforced strict verification standards. Wilfried Martens, in his capacity as both EPP and, later, EUCD chairman, attended numerous CEE meetings to support this oversight.

Another challenge was posed by 'reform Communists', who took power in some CEE member states during the initial post-Cold War period. While we had strong cooperation with Hungarian political figures such as József Antall, and we wanted to support other Christian Democratic actors, we learned that others that we thought were aligned with us were actually 'moles', cooperating with former Communist structures.

How did the EUCD's stance on minority rights within CEE countries contribute to its larger goal of European integration?

Indeed, in many CEE countries, ethnic diversity and social tensions were prominent issues, stemming from historical conflicts and demographic shifts under Communism. In Brussels we were not aware of the impact on CEE countries of the Versailles and Trianon treaties, in particular, of their impact on ethnic minorities. These tensions were prominent in countries including the Baltic states, Slovakia and Romania, where parties resisted working with minority-focused groups from the same nation.

In my view, promoting minority rights was essential for both regional stability and the reinforcement of unity and tolerance within the EPP. I think we understood early on that the ethnic diversity and social tensions in many CEE countries, stemming from historical conflicts and demographic shifts under Communism, required a strong stance on inclusivity.

To address these concerns, we developed a resolution on minority rights that became a foundational criterion for EUCD membership. This document outlined our commitment to tolerance and unity, which ensured that all member parties upheld these values. This stance was not just a moral imperative but a strategic one—it helped to create a standard of governance that promoted both European integration and the internal stability of our expanding membership. This commitment to inclusion and tolerance continues to be a defining element of the EPP's values today.

How did the EPP and the EUCD develop a strategy to challenge the dominance of the left in European institutions during the 1970s and 1980s?

To my mind, the collaboration between Klaus Welle and myself from 1996 to 1998 was crucial in developing a strategy that would solidify the EPP's role as a major political force in Europe. We focused on three main elements: assessing the electoral potential of CEE parties, organising seminars for young leaders and expanding the Robert Schuman Institute in Budapest. I think Klaus's vision was instrumental in emphasising proactive engagement—especially through MEPs—by fostering long-term alliances with CEE political figures and creating development pathways for emerging leaders aligned with EPP values.

Our plan included several strategies:

- *Regular electoral assessments.* We conducted ongoing evaluations to identify and strengthen partnerships in the CEE, targeting areas for EPP growth.
- *Young leaders seminars.* We organised seminars to equip new leaders with essential political skills and to build connections with EPP-aligned politicians.
- *Trainee programmes.* Initiated within the EPP group, these programmes were tailored for emerging politicians, grounding them in the EPP's framework.
- *Engagement of MEPs.* The active participation of MEPs in events with sister parties in the CEE helped build alliances and strengthen ties.
- *Evaluation of party development.* The EPP training institutes thoroughly assessed the progress and viability of CEE parties.
- *Expanded training at the Robert Schuman Institute.* Through ambitious training programmes, we prepared CEE leaders and activists in Budapest.
- *Workshops and seminars.* These were held in various member states, offering crucial guidance and insight into European governance.

This strategic shift yielded remarkable results. I believe that winning consecutive European Parliament elections (in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024) firmly established the EPP as a dominant voice. Additionally, with two-thirds of European commissioners affiliated with the EPP, this strategy significantly strengthened the EPP's influence across the EU institutions.

How did the EUCD's youth training initiatives influence the EPP's future leadership and political strength?

To my mind, one of our most impactful initiatives was investing in youth training programmes designed to prepare the next generation of EPP-aligned leaders. Through seminars, trainee programmes in Brussels and young leader

initiatives, especially via the Robert Schuman Institute, we enabled young leaders to gain hands-on experience in European politics, adopt democratic principles and grasp the complexities of policymaking.

I think this investment in future leaders created a deeply committed network aligned with our values and the EPP's mission. Many who participated went on to hold significant positions in their home countries and within the European Parliament. By developing this generational pipeline, we not only strengthened our influence across Europe but also ensured that our principles would continue to guide European governance in the future. This long-term investment in youth leadership is, I believe, a core strength of the EPP today.

How did the process of merging the EUCD into the EPP unfold in 1996, and what impact did this integration have on the EPP's effectiveness as a political force?

The 1996 merger, fully integrating the EUCD into the EPP, was a significant step in uniting Europe's centre-right political forces. From my perspective, overseeing this transition allowed us to operate as a cohesive entity, giving clarity to our mission and enabling us to focus on becoming Europe's leading political group. I think this consolidation played a vital role in our 1999 electoral victory and reinforced our ideological unity across Europe.

Merging our strengths gave the EPP a stronger platform to address Europe's challenges, from economic reforms to social stability. This unification made us more resilient to internal conflicts, positioning the EPP as a robust and influential force, equipped to navigate the complexities of European governance. In my view, this merger was instrumental in establishing the EPP's capacity to act as a unified political force.

What lessons from the EUCD's integration of CEE parties continue to shape the EPP's approach to future EU enlargements?

I think the EUCD's structured approach to integrating CEE parties remains a guiding model for the EPP's enlargement strategy today. We learned that alignment with core values and gradual integration are essential for fostering cohesion. I believe that the phased model—starting with observer status and progressing to full membership—shows that patience is key to successful expansion. This approach has been invaluable as we consider future expansions, including into the Western Balkans.

By prioritising principled integration, we make sure any future growth aligns with our commitment to democracy, human rights and European unity. In my view, the EUCD's approach to integration continues to guide the EPP as we build on our mission of fostering unity and cooperation across an expanding Europe.

What key lessons for the future should the EPP draw from the process that led it to becoming Europe's leading political force?

In my opinion, member state support is indispensable. Even with a well-defined strategy, strong support from the member states is essential for ensuring the successful implementation of the EPP's initiatives. Core principles are critical too—the EPP must continue to uphold its foundational principles, with people-centred policies as our guiding principle.

I believe it is also crucial that we emphasise transparency and tangible actions that benefit individuals, human beings. Extremist forces seek to undermine Europe, but power alone is not what matters; what matters is how we wield it to achieve meaningful outcomes. Lastly, consistent dialogue between the EPP and its sister parties is essential, as cooperation is the cornerstone of our collective success.

The key conditions for success include a sound strategy, effective action planning and ongoing monitoring of implementation. Equally important is the willingness to embrace a common goal and the commitment to execute it.

Teona Lavrelashvili is a Research Associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from KU Leuven and has a decade of experience across EU institutions, academia and think tanks, including roles at the European Commission's Directorate General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, the European Parliament, KU Leuven and the European Policy Centre.

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Part V. Mission Accomplished – The EDU

The EDU – A Building Block for the EPP

Sauli Niinistö

The short-lived European Democratic Union (EDU) existed for just under 25 years, from the late 1970s until the early days of the twenty-first century. It was not a long life, but it was an action-packed one. In that time Western Europe became stronger, while the Soviet Union and its domination of Eastern Europe collapsed, as the Cold War ended and centre-right parties gained a firm foothold across Europe.

The phrase ‘mission accomplished’ is applied to this organisation in the title of the current part of the book. In their contributions to this volume, my distinguished EDU colleagues Andreas Khol and Alexis Wintoniak explain what this involved, looking back at the organisation’s genesis, actions and dissolution. It is absolutely true that the EDU did accomplish its mission. Europe underwent the transformation that had been envisaged when the EDU was established. The changes would probably have occurred even without the EDU, but not without the ideals of freedom and democracy on which the EDU’s activities were founded.

The EDU’s foreign policy message was, as indicated by Wintoniak, that with a Communist threat in the East and socialists in the ascendancy in the West, the European landscape needed to be addressed. Khol highlights eligible members’ intrinsic tendency to be more relaxed and apolitical in their attitude, ‘irrespective of the party’s name and whether Christianity was

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included in their programme or not . . . and irrespective of whether they were EU members or not’.

The EDU’s influence also went deeper than this, as is neatly captured by what happened in Finland. My own party, Kokoomus, was one of the founding members of the EDU, being involved from the very start. Membership meant much more than actions to achieve the EDU’s goals: it provided a new and valuable nexus with European thinking and political culture. A poignant illustration of the situation back then is Finland’s president Urho Kekkonen having to explain to the Kremlin why this Finnish party had joined the anti-Communist political movement.

The EDU also brought Kokoomus into close contact with like-minded European parties, making it possible to forge lasting personal connections and friendships. In hindsight, this rapprochement can be seen as representing the party’s first steps towards integration into the European family, as it meant that when Finland became an EU member state, we found it easier to settle into the already familiar ranks of the EPP.

I was elected chairperson of the EDU after Alois Mock stepped down in 1998. By then the EDU had already done its job and achieved its purpose, and it was clear that its activities would be brought to a close. The only question was how this would be done. The prevailing idea was to merge the EDU into the EPP, with an alternative being to launch a completely new political entity. This delicate process took about four years.

I will only set out a few of my key thoughts about this process here.

By the turn of the millennium, the number of EDU member parties had skyrocketed. Soon after the liberalisation of Eastern Europe, a process of political realignment began, with a centre-right philosophy taking hold. Members and observer members from the former Soviet republics also joined the EDU. The new political actors were building democracy from scratch, and they appreciated the support that cooperation with the EDU provided. I had a feeling of *déjà vu* from the days when my own party had joined the EDU, as the representatives of the new member parties too developed a bond with European democratic thinking, along with strong personal relationships. On the other hand, this ‘unification’ phase also saw concerns raised about what would happen to parties from countries that were nowhere near joining the EU. In my view, it was probably in this light that after the process of bringing the EPP and the EDU together was completed, the EPP also took under its wing the parties that would otherwise have been left out in the cold.

The end result was not the creation of a new political entity but the majority of the EDU merging with the EPP. The sense was the same as that described by Andreas Khol in the late 1970s, namely, that some Christian Democratic and conservative parties simply could not collaborate closely enough for the

first option to work: an impression that was due not only to political differences but also to different traditions and mindsets. However, while they could not belong to the same party in a classic sense, they could still work together within the same group in the European Parliament. In addition to the merger of the EDU and the EPP, negotiations were conducted to form a broad-based single parliamentary group, which was eventually set up after the 1999 European Parliament elections.

With the achievement of the EDU's key goals, its mission was accomplished. Although the EDU ceased to exist, it left behind a valuable legacy. The EDU acted like a sports training club, bringing together people and parties from completely different backgrounds and making it possible for them to understand each other's problems and to help one another. Today's EPP safeguards this legacy.

A lot happened in the couple of decades of the EDU's existence, including a fundamental change in the global order. Now, another couple of decades on, the order that emerged then is collapsing, and we find ourselves in a world in flux. At the turn of the millennium, the newly integrated Europe led by the EPP was a strong player. Today, we desperately need some of that strength.

Sauli Niinistö served as president of Finland from 2012 to 2024. He was chairman of Kokoomus from 1994 to 2001 and chairman of the EDU from 1998 to 2002. In the Finnish government, Niinistö served as minister of justice from 1995 to 1996, minister of finance from 1996 to 2003 and deputy prime minister from 1995 to 2001. He was speaker of the Parliament of Finland from 2007 to 2011 and has been honorary president of the EPP since 2002.

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Cooperation Between Christian Democrats, Conservatives and Other Like-Minded Parties: Through a Minefield to the EDU

Andreas Khol

The unification of the free parts of Europe was a major political goal after the end of the Second World War. One of the results of this terrible war was the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. Half of Europe became part of the Russian Soviet Communist empire, initially ruled by the dictator Joseph Stalin. One of the responses of the remaining free European countries was to search for European unification. The ensuing developments showed that the most successful instrument in this regard was the European Economic Community—which went on to become the European Community. One decisive step in this development was the integration of the UK, Denmark and Ireland into the European Economic Community in 1973. This was followed by rapid progress in further enlarging and deepening the Community. In this process, the direct election of the European Parliament in 1979 was an essential part. By 1973 the European parties had started to prepare for this important step. The process of establishing pan-European parties had begun. In 1976 the details of the forthcoming first direct election of the European Parliament were settled. In 1977 Spain and Portugal applied for membership. It became evident that European integration was advancing rapidly and that the European Community was the driving force. The European Parliament would play a decisive role in Europe's future.

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For the leaders of the Christian Democrats and like-minded non-socialist parties, the general political situation in Europe was alarming. Their parties had played a dominant role in post-war Europe and, in particular, in the construction of various instruments for European unification. When they were starting to prepare for the European elections, Europe was still divided because of the Cold War. The Soviet leader and dictator at that time was the rigorous Leonid Brezhnev. Soviet Communism had been expanding worldwide, particularly in Africa and Central America, and free Europe had come more and more under the sway of democratic socialism. Social Democrats governed in Germany, the UK, Sweden, Austria and other countries. Social Democrats, such as Brandt, Palme and Kreisky, influenced the *Zeitgeist*. The leaders of the CDU in Germany, the British Conservative Party, the Swedish Moderaterna, the Austrian ÖVP and other like-minded party leaders were in opposition.

International party cooperation was dominated by the rather successful Socialist International (SI), which integrated a wide range of non-Communist leftist parties: socialists, Social Democrats and 'democratic' Marxists. They did not shy away from cooperation with Communist parties. The concept of a 'democratic' Eurocommunism was devised. The liberals had their own small group. The Christian Democrats and like-minded non-socialist parties were split. The Christian Democrats had their European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD), which was strictly limited to parties which had enshrined Christian policies and values in their programmes. Leading up to these elections, they began preparations to establish their own political party, which later became the European People's Party (EPP). Not internationally linked in a formal organisation, the Scandinavian conservatives, the French Gaullists and the British Conservative Party (the Tories) were all excluded from the EPP. Supported by the German CDU and the Tories, the ÖVP regularly invited those parties and the Christian Democrats to interparty conferences at Klessheim Palace near Salzburg, the objective being to unite the centre-right and Christian Democrat parties. The Benelux and Italian Christian Democrats were strictly opposed to all this.¹

In 1976 the Christian Democrats established the EPP in preparation for the European Parliament elections. Its name was chosen on the basis of German proposals to signal that the party was also open to like-minded

¹ See F. Horner, *Konservative und christdemokratische Parteien in Europa* (Vienna: Herold, 1981), 80; A. Stirnemann, 'Die Internationalen der Politischen Mitte', *Jahrbuch für Politik* (1978), 272; and L. Tobisson, 'The Birth of EDU—From a Nordic Perspective', in A. Khol, L. Tobisson and A. Wintoniak (eds.), *Twenty Years: European Democrat Union* (Vienna, 1998), 12. The latter book includes all relevant facts and figures. In it can be found the Klessheim Declaration, the rules of the EDU, the names of the officers of the EDU, the working committees and working groups, a chronology of the EDU's member parties and a list of member parties in 1998 (all in English).

non-Christian Democrat parties. Nevertheless, on Italian and Dutch insistence, non-Christian Democrat parties were not admitted as members. The EPP was further limited to parties within the European Community: Christian Democrat parties from non-member countries, such as Switzerland and Austria, were only granted observer status. This meant, however, that such a narrowly composed EPP would not become sufficiently large to play a leading role in the forthcoming European Parliament.

Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher, Jacques Chirac and other party leaders from all over free Europe sought a way out of this apparent impasse.² In 1975, at interparty conferences in Munich and Klessheim, the concept of a comprehensive new organisation was born: the European Democrat Union (EDU). Kohl took the initiative and had a detailed concept developed by his international adviser, Ambassador Heinrich Böx. A working group was created with four members: the CDU, the Tories, Moderaterna and the ÖVP. Negotiations parallel to those leading to the EPP started and continued: the name and statutes of the new organisation were finally agreed in 1977. All these negotiations were rather difficult. Italian and Benelux Christian Democrats, as well as the chairman of the EPP, Leo Tindemans, objected strenuously. Kohl, supported by Franz Josef Strauss and Thatcher, insisted on the establishment of the EDU. He argued that this organisation should overcome both restrictions governing the EPP: (1) it should have as members all like-minded centre and centre-right parties, irrespective of their name and of whether their programmes contained explicit references to Christianity; and (2) the member parties should come from all European states, irrespective of whether they were members of the European Community. Kohl agreed with Thatcher that Josef Taus, the chairman of the ÖVP, would be a suitable chairman for this new organisation. Thus, in 1978 Taus was asked to become head of the new EDU and to manage the creation of an umbrella organisation for national parties, one that would be significant enough to exercise a leading influence in Europe and the European Community.³ A meeting of the CDU, CSU, ÖVP, Moderaterna and the Tories was convened on very short notice on 20 March

² Stirnemann, 'Die Internationalen der Politischen Mitte', 272; Tobisson, 'The Birth of EDU', 12.

³ Why were the ÖVP and Taus chosen? For all future EDU parties, it was essential that the ÖVP had expressly included in its programme the fact that it based its values on the Christian social doctrine but was also open to all others who followed the same values for other reasons. The CDU and CSU found it important that the ÖVP was a German-speaking party and was traditionally very close to them. For all other parties, it was essential to have a chair and executive secretary who had never been involved in the EUCD bureaucracy and ones that, coming from a big party in a small country, could act without hegemonic ideals. For the ÖVP this opportunity was attractive since it carried significant prestige internally, comparable to the prestige Bruno Kreisky enjoyed in the SI. The most important thing for the ÖVP was that the EDU could be used as an instrument to achieve full membership of the European Community.

1978 in Kirchberg, Tirol, to fix the details for a meeting in Klessheim on 23 and 24 April 1978. There, they hoped, the EDU would finally be born.⁴

Ten parties signed the constituent document, the Klessheim Declaration, thereby establishing the EDU as a ‘working association of Christian Democrat, Conservative, and other non-collectivist parties’. The parties came from Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK. Eight other parties chose observer status: they came from Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain and Switzerland (see Table 1). Thus, the

Table 1 EDU founding members

Full members			
Austrian People's Party	Österreichische Volkspartei	ÖVP	Austria
Conservative People's Party	Det Konservative Folkeparti	KF	Denmark
National Coalition Party	Kansallinen Kokoomus	Kok	Finland
Rally for the Republic	Rassemblement pour la République	RPR	France
Christian Democratic Union	Christlich Demokratische Union	CDU	Germany
Christian Social Union in Bavaria	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	CSU	Germany
Conservative Party	Høyre	H	Norway
Democratic Social Centre	Centro Democrático e Social	CDS	Portugal
Moderate Party	Moderata samlingspartiet	M	Sweden
Conservative Party		CP	UK
Observers			
Swedish People's Party of Finland	Svenska folkpartiet i Finland	SFP	Finland
Republican Party	Parti Républicain	PR	France
New Democracy	Néa Dimokratía	ND	Greece
South Tyrolean People's Party	Südtiroler Volkspartei	SVP	Italy
Trentino Tyrolean People's Party	Partito Popolare Trentino Tirolese	PPTT	Italy
Nationalist Party	Partit Nazzjonalista	PN	Malta
Union of the Democratic Centre	Unión de Centro Democrático	UCD	Spain
Christian Democratic People's Party	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei	CVP	Switzerland

⁴ At that time I was involved with the establishment of the new organisation. Taus asked me to do all the practical work. As director of the Political Academy of the ÖVP, I had the necessary skills, and I spoke French, English and some Italian. Moreover, I had never been involved in the EUCD network, which helped to ease any fears there might have been that I could be partial to the Christian Democrats. As a former member of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, I was experienced in the work of European organisations. I had established the Secretariat and served in the organisation until 1994, when I was elected parliamentary group leader of the ÖVP in the Austrian Parliament. I proposed Alexis Wintoniak as my successor.

EDU started with a small number of members and very big ambitions.⁵ No Christian Democrat party from Benelux or Italy took part. Indeed, they reacted extremely negatively towards the establishment of the new organisation.⁶

As of the Klessheim meeting in April 1978, the ÖVP was effectively responsible for the development of the newly created organisation. Taus, the newly elected chairman, was a career economist and prior to his political career had been a successful CEO at a number of large companies. He shaped the EDU accordingly. It had a small secretariat, decentralised bodies, and committees that were chaired by active political leaders and that reported to a steering committee chaired by him personally. Decisions taken at the annual Party Leaders' Conference were prepared by the steering committee, which met twice a year and was composed of the secretary generals of the member parties. The most important committee, European Structures, European Policy, was chaired by Lower Saxony Minister-President Ernst Albrecht (CDU) and then for almost 20 years by Bernhard Vogel, the CDU leader in the Rhineland-Palatinate and later in Thuringia, where he was also minister-president. Numerous other committees were established and then dissolved when they had reported to the leaders. Another permanent committee, chaired by Lars Tobisson, deputy political leader of Moderaterna, dealt with election techniques. More than 40 subjects were dealt with, and reports were submitted to the party leaders and published.⁷ These committees were extremely important and characteristic of the EDU's approach: they dealt with topical questions and had the effect that the speakers of the different member parties worked together and networked.

In July 1979 Taus resigned as ÖVP party leader and proposed that his successor, Alois Mock, should also lead the EDU. This was confirmed, and so Mock chaired the EDU from 1979 to 1998. He was a devoted European and led Austria into the European Community. He was also a devoted Christian Democrat, internationalist and former career diplomat, and fully supported the establishment of the EDU. He closely managed the organisation and presided over leaders' conferences and numerous meetings of the steering committee. He completed various fact-finding missions for the EDU and fostered cooperation among like-minded parties of the democratic centre all over the democratic world, from New Zealand to Iceland. He also oversaw the

⁵ See Horner, *Konservative und christdemokratische Parteien*, 84; and Stirnemann, 'Die Internationalen der Politischen Mitte', 93.

⁶ Horner, *Konservative und christdemokratische Parteien*, 79; and Stirnemann, 'Die Internationalen der Politischen Mitte', 293.

⁷ These are listed, in English, in Khol, Tobisson and Wintoniak (eds.), *Twenty Years*, 116.

establishment of the International Democrat Union (which still exists). He led the ÖVP into government in 1987 and continued as EDU leader while he was a member of the Austrian government.

The objectives of the new organisation and their realisation

The objectives of the new organisation—which some media branded immediately as the Black International with sinister goals—were as follows:

1. *To achieve a relative majority of EPP and EDU parties in the European Parliament and to form the biggest parliamentary group.* The objective was to develop and shape the European Community, later the EU, according to EDU principles, such as the eco-social-oriented market economy. This goal was constantly pursued from 1979 onwards. After the elections in 1979, the socialists still had the biggest group with 113 members; the EPP had just 107. This continued until after the elections in 1994. Together, however, the EPP, the Tories and the Gaullists were stronger than the left. A single parliamentary group formed of these EDU parties was not achieved, but they acted together regularly. Only as recently as the elections in 1999 did the EPP and the Conservatives establish a parliamentary group together, and the EPP has remained the biggest group ever since. The various enlargements of the European Community (and later, the EU) brought in new like-minded parties from the north and centre of Europe, and later from former Communist states, such as Poland, which strengthened the EPP in Parliament.
2. *To combat Communism and all forms of the extreme left and right.* This was a major goal, whose purpose was to support the anti-Communist opposition groups in Soviet-controlled Central and Eastern Europe, to assist in the foundation of like-minded political parties in those new democracies that emerged gradually after the end of the Cold War and after the period of *perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbachev, and to bring those countries into the EU. This also included the rejection of all forms of cooperation with Communist parties in the West and, of course, in the East. Eurocommunism as a bridge between democratic socialism and Marxism was branded as a hoax and political fraud. Many activities were undertaken to this end, particularly outside the European Parliament—for example, supporting democratic groups emerging in the Gorbachev era after the death of Leonid Brezhnev in 1982. EDU missions observed elections and referendums, organised support for new like-minded parties, carried out fact-finding

missions and organised contacts with new parties in the West. This was a rather important field of EDU activity, not matched by other international political organisations. The Liberal International (LI) was too small, and the SI followed the concept of convergence and was therefore inactive in supporting the groups opposed to Soviet Communism. In the long run, the EDU activities in this field led to the inclusion of new parties for the EPP Group in the European Parliament.⁸ The EDU also tried to secretly negotiate with Social Democratic leaders to agree on a common public statement from the SI, the LI and the EDU that their members would not enter into any coalition with parties of the extreme right or the extreme left.⁹ Brandt, then leader of the SI, was approached by the SPD's Jochen Vogel but did not warm to this idea. The EDU's activities were closely followed by its political competitors in the West and the East. In 1989 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union tried to establish contacts with the EDU. There were talks in Moscow and Vienna and a report was produced by Bernhard Vogel's European Committee. However, the goal of Valentin Falin, Head of the International Bureau of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to adopt a common declaration in support of the democratisation of the Soviet Union and to establish permanent contacts could not be reached.¹⁰

3. *To further enlarge and deepen the European Community, working towards the creation of a political union.* The EDU party leaders established a permanent committee to deal with all European questions. It was chaired for almost 20 years by Bernhard Vogel. This committee prepared numerous decisions for the EDU and was an important instrument in European policies. It coordinated EDU policies on Eurocommunism, the Brezhnev Doctrine, the enlargement of the EU to the south (Greece, Spain and Portugal) and the way to full membership for the neutrals, which was particularly important for those members. In this respect the personal support of EDU leaders such as Kohl, Chirac and the Dane Poul Schlüter in Brussels was essential. The EDU pursued the objective of a European union, taking a non-federalist approach, and further enlargement to include all the new democracies—an objective achieved in 2005.

⁸ See these detailed studies: A. Demblin, 'Die ÖVP in internationalen Organisationen – EDU, IDU', *Jahrbuch für Politik* (1984); and E. Schollum, 'Die Europäische Demokratische Union (EDU) und der Demokratisierungsprozeß in Ost-, Mittel und Südosteuropa', *Jahrbuch für Politik* (1991).

⁹ Bernhard Vogel led the first talks with Jochen Vogel, who was, conveniently, his SPD brother. See also A. Khol, 'EDU's Challenge to Lead Europe', in Khol, Tobisson and Wintoniak (eds.), *Twenty Years*, 58; and A. Khol and A. Wintoniak, 'Die Europäische Demokratische Union (EDU)', in H.-J. Veen (ed.), *Christlich-demokratische und konservative Parteien in Westeuropa* (vol. 5), *Studien zur Politik*, vol. 31 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 424.

¹⁰ See the section on 'the Falin temptation' in Khol, 'EDU's Challenge', 60.

4. *To intensify the international cooperation of like-minded parties both multilaterally and bilaterally, and to develop common domestic policies in various fields.* The EDU was established to overcome historical divisions between Christian Democrats and like-minded parties that made no direct reference to Christian values. In 1978 this was a heavily discussed, poisoned question. The Italian and Dutch Christian Democrat parties opposed any cooperation—the Italians in particular since they aimed to have a monopoly over leading Christian Democrat organisations in Europe and worldwide. The EDU's leaders insisted that names and historical traditions were important but insignificant for future developments. They supported the concept of the cooperation of like-minded parties. For this purpose, the pursuit of common principles in various fields of domestic policy was decisive. Working groups and committees were consequently established in various fields, including the eco-social market economy, education, family policies and environmental protection. Many parties qualified for EDU membership under these conditions. In 1998, after 20 years of work, the EDU had 44 members, of whom 11 were permanent observers.¹¹ Three interesting details should be noted here: (1) two Turkish parties worked actively within the EDU: the governing party—the Anavatan Partisi, led by Mesut Yılmaz—as a member, and a second party as a permanent observer; (2) both of Liechtenstein's main parties, one in government, the other in opposition, were members(!); and (3) the Christian Democratic parties of Italy and the Netherlands have both since lost virtually all their importance, both nationally and internationally.

A final observation

When the EDU was merged with the EPP in 1999,¹² it had achieved many of its initial objectives. Brexit destroyed some of these and had many rather negative consequences, both for the UK and the EU—it was a big setback. The basic EDU philosophy prevailed, nevertheless, and henceforth also shaped the EPP. In the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the EPP was decisively confirmed to be the biggest parliamentary group in the Parliament (the EPP won 188 seats, the Socialists and Democrats 136 seats). Its top candidate was Ursula von der Leyen, and she was duly confirmed as president of the European Commission. The EDU had definitely accomplished its mission.

¹¹ See the list in Khol, Tobisson and Wintoniak (eds.), *Twenty Years*, 125.

¹² Alexis Wintoniak describes this merger in his contribution to the present volume.

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The EDU: Laying the Foundations for a Centre–Right Lead in Europe

Alexis Wintoniak

For over 25 years the European People's Party (EPP) has been the leading political force in Europe. This is certainly due to the strength of its member parties but equally is because the EPP has continuously expanded its membership—both geographically and ideologically—while still maintaining its coherence and unity. One important landmark in this development was the integration of the European Democrat Union (EDU) into the EPP, which started in 1998 and was completed in 2002.

At its founding, the EPP comprised a tiny group of only 10 full members, compared to its 82 parties and partners from 43 countries today. In its first years the EPP restricted its membership to Christian Democratic parties from European Community member states. Christian Democratic parties from non–European Community countries could join the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD), but they could not obtain membership of the EPP, and nor could any centre or centre–right party without a Christian Democratic foundation. Within the EPP it was primarily the German CDU and CSU that sought to not only expand the membership but also to broaden the centre–right spectrum of their European cooperation.

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Establishing the EDU in the 1970s

In the 1970s interparty conferences of centre–right party leaders from Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the UK, and later also from Portugal and Spain, convened on a yearly basis. This European-level platform provided the British Conservatives and the French Gaullists with appropriate partners in Europe, which had become necessary because of the upcoming first direct elections to the European Parliament. Moreover, this arrangement laid the foundations for a structural majority on the European Community level.

Consequently, the EDU was founded in 1978 as an association of Christian Democratic, conservative and like-minded parties. At first there were 10 full members and 8 observers (see Table 1). The basis for this cooperation was laid down in the Klessheim Declaration, which was adopted at the first EDU Party Leaders' Conference on 24 April 1978, with a strong commitment to democracy, liberty, the rule of law and social solidarity. This declaration of principles entailed a clear pledge to stand up for human rights and personal

Table 1 EDU founding members

Full members			
Austrian People's Party	Österreichische Volkspartei	ÖVP	Austria
Conservative People's Party	Det Konservative Folkeparti	KF	Denmark
National Coalition Party	Kansallinen Kokoomus	Kok	Finland
Rally for the Republic	Rassemblement pour la République	RPR	France
Christian Democratic Union	Christlich Demokratische Union	CDU	Germany
Christian Social Union in Bavaria	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	CSU	Germany
Conservative Party	Høyre	H	Norway
Democratic Social Centre	Centro Democrático e Social	CDS	Portugal
Moderate Party	Moderata samlingspartiet	M	Sweden
Conservative Party			UK
Observers			
Swedish People's Party of Finland	Svenska folkpartiet i Finland	SFP	Finland
Republican Party	Parti Républicain	PR	France
New Democracy	Néa Dimokratía	ND	Greece
South Tyrolean People's Party	Südtiroler Volkspartei	SVP	Italy
Trentino Tyrolean People's Party	Partito Popolare Trentino Tirolese	PPTT	Italy
Nationalist Party	Partit Nazzjonalista	PN	Malta
Union of the Democratic Centre	Unión de Centro Democrático	UCD	Spain
Christian Democratic People's Party	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei	CVP	Switzerland

freedoms, to ensure an open society, to reject any form of totalitarianism and to believe in the socially oriented market economy. No doubt the formation of the EDU was meant to address the European political landscape, with the Communist threat in the East and a socialist predominance in the West.

As for European policy, the Klessheim Declaration referred to a commitment to closer cooperation in Europe, while maintaining that the right of each individual nation to preserve its identity and to safeguard its vital interests was to be recognised. Throughout the EDU's history, this emphasis on the sovereignty of states was also reflected in respect for the sovereignty of its members. Thus, the EDU followed a different model of party cooperation to the EPP. The EPP has always considered itself a party with its very own institutions, elected officers, personnel and so forth. It follows the principle of majority decision-making and has sufficient resources to maintain an independent party headquarters in Brussels. The EDU form of cooperation was strictly hierarchical: all the decision-making powers were derived from the party leaders, with the Party Leaders' Conference as the supreme body. Decisions were to be taken by unanimity of the representatives of the member parties, and the organisation was serviced by a small secretariat in Vienna with some part-time staff. The EPP's agenda has naturally focused on EU affairs and institutions, whereas that of the EDU was dominated by issues originating from political debate on the national level.

Most of the EDU's work was done in its working committees, which were established by the Party Leaders' Conferences and composed of the parties' respective members of parliament or nominated spokespeople. For many years working committees were set up on European affairs, security policy, economic and social policy, domestic affairs and campaign management.

The EDU's expansion in the 1980s and 1990s

After its foundation, the EDU's membership expanded primarily to the south, with Greece's *Néa Dimokratía*, Cyprus's DISY, Türkiye's Motherland Party and Spain's *Alianza Popular* joining the organisation. Others, such as *Forza Italia* and the Portuguese PSD, joined later, thereby further broadening the political base of the EDU.

As early as the 1980s, and even more so in the 1990s, the support of and cooperation with the centre–right parties of the developing democracies in Central and Eastern Europe were top priorities for the EDU and its member parties. The latter realised that following the revolution of 1989–90 the Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded parties had a special

responsibility to strengthen the young and fragile democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and to pave the way for the final aim: a Europe united in democracy. Therefore, much of the EDU's work in the 1990s was dedicated to this aim—first identifying partners, and then supporting them in establishing their parties and in building democratic institutions in their countries, supporting their election campaigns, strengthening their cooperation at the European level, including them in the EDU network, helping them to establish bilateral and party-to-party contacts, cooperating with them in the establishment of political platforms and programmes, assisting in the training of active and future politicians, and so forth. Most of this work was done by the individual EDU member parties; however, the EDU provided the platform to coordinate these initiatives and set the guidelines for joint action.

Soon these like-minded parties from most Central and Eastern European countries joined the EDU. After the Balkan wars of the mid-1990s, the EDU's democracy-building efforts also focused on south-eastern Europe, with the establishment of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative enabling regular cooperation between democratic forces in south-eastern Europe and the EDU member parties. In addition, the EDU founded a Pan-European Forum for cooperation with centre and centre-right forces in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other successor states of the Soviet Union (see Table 2 for the full list of members as of 17 October 2002).

Towards EPP/EDU convergence, 1998–2002

For many years, the tasks of the EDU were complementary to those of the EPP, and the EDU also served well as an anteroom for the EPP's new member parties. But with both the enlargement of the EU and the geographical and ideological opening up of the EPP, the division of labour between the EDU and the EPP became more and more superfluous. With the 1995 enlargement of the EU, conservative parties from Northern Europe joined the EPP, followed by further conservative, centre-right and like-minded, but not necessarily Christian Democratic, parties, such as Forza Italia and the French RPR. The EPP group in the European Parliament was joined by members of the British Conservative Party, and later those of additional conservative parties from Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, both an ideological rapprochement and the convergence of membership called for the timely integration of the two organisations.

Furthermore, during the 1990s the overall political environment had changed significantly. The collapse of the Soviet empire changed not only the

Table 2 Full list of EDU members as of 17 October 2002

Democratic Party of Albania	Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë	PDSH	Albania
Austrian People's Party	Österreichische Volkspartei	ÖVP	Austria
United Civic Party	Abjadanaja hramadzianskaja partyja	UCP	Belarus
Democratic Party	Demokrateska Partia	DP	Bulgaria
Union of Democratic Forces	Sayuz na demokraticnite sili	SDS	Bulgaria
Democratic Rally	Dimokratikós Sinagermós	DISY	Cyprus
Civic Democratic Party	Občanská demokratická strana	ODS	Czechia
Conservative People's Party	Det Konservative Folkeparti	KF	Denmark
Pro Patria Union	Isamaaliit	PPU	Estonia
National Coalition Party	Kansallinen Kokoomus	Kok	Finland
Rally for the Republic	Rassemblement pour la République	RPR	France
Democratic Party of Albanians	Partia Demokratike Shqiptare	PDSH	North Macedonia
Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity	Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija – Demokratska Partija Za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo	VMRO–DPMNE	North Macedonia
Christian Democratic Union	Christlich Demokratische Union	CDU	Germany
Christian Social Union in Bavaria	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	CSU	Germany
New Democracy	Néa Dimokratía	ND	Greece
Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party	Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Párt	Fidesz	Hungary
Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party	Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt	FKgP	Hungary
Hungarian Democratic Forum	Magyar Demokrata Fórum	MDF	Hungary
Independence Party	Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn	SF	Iceland
United Christian Democrats	Cristiani Democratici Uniti	CDU	Italy
Forward Italy	Forza Italia	FI	Italy
South Tyrolean People's Party	Südtiroler Volkspartei	SVP	Italy
Progressive Citizens' Party in Liechtenstein	Fortschrittliche Bürgerpartei in Liechtenstein	FBPL	Liechtenstein
Patriotic Union	Vaterländische Union	VU	Liechtenstein
Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives)	Tėvynės sąjunga (Lietuvos konservatoriai)	TS(LK)	Lithuania

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Christian Social People's Party	Chrëschtlech-Sozial Vollekspartei	CSV	Luxembourg
Nationalist Party	Partit Nazzjonalista	PN	Malta
Conservative Party	Høyre	H	Norway
Freedom Union	Unia Wolności	UW	Poland
Social Democratic Party	Partido Social Demócrata	PSD	Portugal
Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party	Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat	PNȚCD	Romania
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség	RMDSZ	Romania
Christian Democratic Movement	Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	KDH	Slovakia
Party of the Hungarian Coalition	Magyar Koalíció Pártja	MKP	Slovakia
Slovenian People's Party	Slovenska Ljudska Stranka	SLS	Slovenia
People's Party	Partido Popular	PP	Spain
Moderate Party	Moderata samlingspartiet	M	Sweden
Christian Democratic People's Party	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei	CVP	Switzerland
Motherland Party	Anavatan Partisi	ANAP	Türkiye
True Path Party	Doğru Yol Partisi	DYP	Türkiye
Conservative Party		CP	UK

political and economic world order but equally the ideological world order. The clear anti-Communist mission had vanished as one of the fundamental purposes of the EDU. Furthermore, compared to the time of the EDU's foundation, the political balance in Europe was no longer leaning towards the socialist or Social Democratic camps, but rather to the centre and centre-right. Thus, the anti-socialist mission of the EDU had also lost some of its vigour.

Under the title 'Towards the Majority', a new mission statement for the EDU was adopted by the eighteenth EDU Party Leaders' Conference in Salzburg, Austria, on 24–5 April 1998. Acknowledging the success achieved over the 20 years since its foundation, the party leaders called for a new effort to realise the principles of the Klessheim Declaration: to unite the Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded centrist parties and to merge the existing organisations into one new European party organisation, respecting the various identities and approaches of these European parties.

At this conference the party leaders also elected the leader of the Finnish Kokoomus, Sauli Niinistö, as the new EDU chairman, and he was entrusted

with conducting open consultations with national parties and the EPP in this regard. It soon turned out that the big leap of a formal merger, and consequently, the foundation of a new organisation, would not find the needed majorities within either the EPP or the EDU.

As a result, a gradual merger was attempted, by integrating the working structures step by step. However, not much progress was made until the 1999 European elections, as many parties wanted to preserve their positions on future alignments and their respective structures. Following the 1999 European elections, the UK Conservatives, the French RPR and Forza Italia decided to join the EPP group in the European Parliament, thereby creating the new EPP-ED Group. With more than 230 Members of the European Parliament, it was by far the most important political force in the Parliament. This development gave new impetus to the rapprochement of the EPP and the EDU, and it soon appeared that the integration of the EDU into the EPP would become more likely than a merger.

At their conference in Berlin on 16 September 1999, the EDU party leaders reiterated their commitment to forming one single organisation for the EDU and EPP member parties. It was agreed that their work programmes, decision-making bodies and infrastructure should converge. Consequently, the working committees of the EDU and the EPP became joint bodies, the decision-making bodies met back-to-back, and future summits would also be interlinked. Finally, it was decided by the party leaders that the secretariat of the EDU should be moved to Brussels, to operate under one roof with the EPP secretariat. This came into effect by April 2000.

The EDU Party Leaders' Conference and the EPP Congress in Berlin in January 2001 then decided on a joint working programme, setting up EPP/EDU working committees on European policy, foreign and security policy, economic and social policy, campaign management and enlargement, as well as the Pan-European Forum and the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. It turned out that this gradual merger, rather than the integration of the EDU structures into the EPP, worked well.

The final step to integrate the EDU into the EPP was taken at the EDU Party Leaders' Conference in Lisbon in October 2002. The leaders agreed that the EDU in the sense of the legal entity registered in Vienna was to be dissolved. However, they left open the possibility that the political platform provided by the EDU might continue as an annual Party Leaders' Conference and as the European component within the International Democrat Union. These provisions were not applied afterwards, and thus the EDU was fully integrated into the EPP.

Conclusions

For nearly 25 years, from 1978 to 2002, the EDU played an important role in shaping the centre/centre-right political spectrum in Europe, thereby contributing to the success of the EPP over the past 25 years, from the European elections in 1999 until 2024. With the ideological and geographical enlargement of the EPP, it was the right move to fully integrate the EDU into the EPP in 2002. More than 20 years later, it is fair to conclude that this process proved successful. Pragmatism, openness to new political developments and movements, and political leadership laid the foundations for the centre/centre-right lead in Europe—and these virtues will also be needed to maintain it in the future.

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Alexis Wintoniak served as executive secretary of the EDU from 1995 to 2002, and as deputy secretary general of the EPP from 2000 to 2002. From 2002 to 2006 he was chief of cabinet for Andreas Khol, the president of the Austrian National Council. From 2005 to 2008 he was director of European and international affairs at the Austrian Parliament, and since 2009 he has been its deputy secretary general.

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Part VI. On the Right Track? – The Enlargement of the EPP 30 Years Later

Yes, But ...

Jean-Claude Juncker

I still have fond memories of 8 July 1976, when Luxembourg was the backdrop for the establishment of the European People's Party (EPP). Aged 21 at the time, I was one of the youngest delegates at the congress, where I had the pleasure of helping to launch this European Christian Democratic party with Belgian, Dutch, French, German, Irish and Italian friends. This European 'umbrella' party—the successor to *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales*, a loose association of European Christian Democrats founded in 1947—became a political entity with a coherent programme and organisational structure at the first EPP Congress, held in Brussels in 1978. Like many of my companions who came together in the 1980s and 1990s following the foundation of the EPP, I was a confirmed Europhile and therefore an enthusiastic EPP supporter. Even so, back then I could never have imagined that some years later I would become a vice-president of the party (under the presidency of Wilfried Martens) and president of the European Union of Christian Democratic Workers, only relinquishing those roles when I was appointed prime minister of Luxembourg and then president of the European Commission, to spare the party and myself any potential conflicts of interest that might have arisen from the 1990s onwards.

In the three decades since 1995, the EPP has enjoyed spectacular growth. However, even in the party's infancy a debate was already raging about whether

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the EPP should only be made up of out-and-out Christian Democratic parties or whether conservative parties with similar inclinations should also be allowed to join. On one side were mainly the CDU and the CSU, which both wanted to open up the EPP to other ideologies. This reflects the fact that these parties (which together make up Germany's 'Union' alliance) view themselves as Christian-social, conservative and liberal, and so are quite broadly positioned. Ranged against them were the Christian Democrats from Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, who, fearing a shift or lurch to the right, were sceptical of the idea of the EPP letting in parties from another political family. There was a resurgence of this debate after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe that removed the Communists from power, and the issue remained a long-standing bone of contention for the EPP bodies. It was no idle discussion: EU enlargement was on the horizon, the party landscapes in Central and Eastern Europe were being reshaped, and many Communist parties were being dissolved and absorbed into newly emerging left-wing parties. The EPP was in danger of being marginalised in the European Parliament because it was not represented in all the old EU member states and not at all in the nascent democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was the most vocal advocate of opening up the EPP. He used to say that he had not spent half his life fighting for Europe and tearing down border fences only for the socialists to now take control—and he won many over to his way of thinking. Slowly but surely his view prevailed, and the Benelux parties' resistance gradually weakened.

As the EPP embarked on its wave of expansion, I noticed that it was opening its doors to more and more Central and Eastern European parties whose commitment to Christian Democratic convictions was open to question. Sometimes I got the impression that simply not being a socialist was enough qualification to be wholeheartedly welcomed into the EPP and accepted as a full member. This had also been the case some years earlier when the British Conservatives had become associate members of the EPP Group. Their involvement did nothing to strengthen the Christian-social essence of the EPP and—thankfully—they subsequently left under the leadership and at the instigation of David Cameron.

For all the missteps during the EPP's rapid expansion, some of which have been corrected, it remains the case that letting in those parties in Scandinavia and in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe that were not genuinely Christian Democratic was the right thing to do because it was a smart move politically, especially in terms of power politics. Fortunately, despite the EPP becoming distinctly more pro-business following the newcomers' arrival,

there has been no fundamental shift away from Christian Democratic principles. However, when it comes to migration, social policy and the development of European integration, caution is the name of the game. It would not be advisable to subordinate the EPP's policies—especially where fundamental principles are involved—to the ideas and objectives of the EPP parliamentary group alone. This risk remains today. So it is a 'yes' to opening up, but a 'no' to gradually selling out on our Christian–social heritage—this must be the way forward for the years ahead.

The EPP must continue to be the dominant force in the political centre ground, arguing for the continued expansion of the social market economy.

Jean-Claude Juncker was prime minister of Luxembourg from 1995 to 2013, president of the Eurogroup from 2005 to 2013 and president of the European Commission from 2014 to 2019. He served as minister for work and employment in the Luxembourg government from 1984 to 1999, minister for finance from 1989 to 2009 and minister for the treasury from 2009 to 2013. He became president of the CSV in 1990, a position he held until 1995. He is one of the chief architects and proponents of the euro and of the Maastricht Treaty.

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Remaining Loyal to Our Roots

Ria Oomen-Ruijten

Let me start by saying how proud I am of the European People's Party (EPP) and its member parties. So many people, both now and in the past, have given and continue to give their all to make the EPP a success, something for which I am truly grateful. It has not always been plain sailing, and I freely acknowledge that there are—and will remain—areas of concern.

The way to Number 1

What do we mean by being 'Number 1'? Being the biggest group in the European Parliament, having the most seats in the European Commission or having a majority in the European Council? And more importantly, why do we want to be in this position? Being large, being big, must be seen in this context, not as an end in itself but as the means through which a political movement is able to shape society according to its values and standards.

In the years from 1989 to 1999, we were on the right track, and the EPP became the leading voice in all the EU bodies mentioned above. But on our way from being big to biggest via bigger, we lost a large number of representatives in some member states. In some cases this loss was justified; in others, it was not. Was our expansion really worth this? Did we have the right balance between size and identity?

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The period from 1989 to 1999 was one of ups and downs. In sketching the expansion of the EPP, I must also outline what was going on and how things worked at that time.

The relationship between the party and the group

Looking back, it is clear that the way the party and the group operate today is a world away from how things worked in 1989–99. The first direct elections to the European Parliament were held in 1979, and it was really only then that a trend emerged for reshaping parliamentary groups along party-political lines.

At the beginning, the party and its operations were highly dependent on the group, in terms of both funding and personnel. This only changed with the creation of a European statute for European political parties¹ (hotly contested between the member states and the European Parliament), which in 2004 gave transnational European parties independent legal capacity and regulated party funding. This safeguarded the parties' independence and ensured the transparency and financial autonomy of their operations. It was at that time, too, that the financial position of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) was regulated and placed on a level footing across the member states, with some national exemptions being maintained, as was the case for the Netherlands with regard to taxes and pension benefits.

I mention the European statute, which was not adopted until later, because it might be difficult today to understand how inextricably linked the party and the group actually were in terms of their leadership and personnel in 1989–99. The reality then was that, rather than the party's governing body, it was the 'directives' issued by the group's presidency and/or the heads of government that provided the guiding framework for the delegations within the group. Indeed, in some cases these 'directives' played a decisive role in the work of these delegations. This applied, in particular, to the admission of members of non-Christian Democratic parties to the EPP Group, in the pursuit of being the biggest.

When I cast my mind back to the EPP Group in that decade, I realise it had a lot more on its plate than the matter of becoming 'big, bigger, biggest'.

¹ European Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) no. 2004/2003 on the regulations governing political parties at the European level and the rules regarding their funding, OJ L297 (4 November 2003), 1.

The daily life of the Group was pioneering in absolutely everything. The end of the 1980s was marked by changes brought about by the Single European Act (which came into force in 1987), which included giving the European Parliament more influence over legislation—mainly on economic issues—through the ‘cooperation procedure’. This represented a major advance. A consent procedure was also introduced in a number of other policy areas, though that only enabled the European Parliament to accept or reject a proposal, without amending it.

The Single European Act was soon followed by the Maastricht Treaty, which came into force on 1 November 1993, formally establishing the EU and changing the name of the European Economic Community to that of the European Community. The Treaty also extended the European Parliament’s powers, with initial steps being taken towards establishing European cooperation in foreign affairs and justice and home affairs. Another key aspect of the Maastricht Treaty was the establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union of the EU.

In the 1990s we at the European Parliament had our hands full, adapting procedures to enable the new powers the Parliament had been given to work. At the same time, a new intergovernmental conference was also being launched to prepare the EU for its enlargement to include Central and Eastern European countries, something that had not been achieved in the Maastricht Treaty. On the initiative of President Martens, the EPP presidency discussed, supported and tried to convince party leaders to adopt the needed treaty reforms.

A new agenda for the party

The fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification led to tensions within the Union, particularly with the UK, which was initially supported by France. The ambiguous position on German reunification Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers expressed in a speech² also did a lot of damage. In the end, French President François Mitterrand managed to win over the idea’s main opponent, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The political upheavals that followed the fall of the Wall in Central and Eastern Europe had a major impact on our political family. It was decided to open up the European Union of Christian Democrats to sister parties in expected future member states. Efforts were stepped up to recruit and accommodate new member parties. These new parties had a different agenda, given

² *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Lubbers Tegen Grenswijziging Binnen Europa’, 16 January 1990.

that, with a few exceptions, they were not Christian Democratic parties, but rather were enthusiastic adherents of the free market economy. Training programmes were set up for the new member parties and the Basic Programme, or Athens Programme, was adopted in 1992.

Expansion of the Group

In contrast to those future member states in Central and Eastern Europe, Spain did have Christian Democratic parties: the PDP nationally, the EAJ-PNV in the Basque Country and the UDC (or *Unió*) in Catalonia. In early 1989 the Spanish Partido Popular was founded to replace the former Alianza Popular, absorbing most of the cadres of the PDP. With the fresh impetus gained from the merger, the Partido Popular wanted to distance itself from the conservatives with whom it had previously formed an alliance in the European Parliament. This was achieved when the party was able to join the EPP Group after the 1989 elections with little fuss, by virtue of the rule that a party was eligible to join if its list included Christian Democrats.

The British Conservative Party, under Christopher Prout, then leader of the European Democratic Group, applied for admission to the EPP Group following the Partido Popular's withdrawal from their group. Prout and Conservative Party Chairman Chris Patten even offered to endorse the EPP programme. The EPP was severely divided about whether to let the Conservative Party in. The German delegation followed Chancellor Helmut Kohl and supported the membership of the party, pointing to previous cooperation. The Benelux countries, Italy and Ireland, wanting to preserve Christian Democracy in Europe, were against the idea. The opponents also had a problem with the position taken on the Maastricht Treaty by Margaret Thatcher's successor as prime minister, John Major, who had obtained several opt-outs for the UK, including on the Treaty's social chapter. Subsequently, an effort was made to resolve the problems by creating a joint parliamentary group between the EPP and the UK delegation along the lines of the alliance that exists between the CDU and the CSU in Germany, but, due to a lack of political will, this did not happen. Ultimately, it was decided to establish an associate membership status, with each MEP's admission being voted on separately. Working with the British Conservatives was immensely frustrating because whenever we tried to agree through compromise on a joint voting list for the entire group, the Conservative Party MEPs would then create their own separate voting lists. The joint group arrangement mentioned above was later attempted again, in 1999, when the Group's name was changed to

the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats—only to be definitively abandoned in 2009 when the British Conservatives left because no consensus could be found and the differences turned out to be too great.

There was real controversy in the Group over the admission of Silvio Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia. After many scandals, the Italian EPP member party Democrazia Cristiana had suffered defeat in both the national and the European elections. Attempts to prevent further losses or to secure for the party more of a say in the Italian parliament by introducing some kind of majority-based system did not come to fruition, and the largely left-leaning PPI was established as the direct successor to Democrazia Cristiana. Democrazia Cristiana's right *correnti* (currents) came together to form the CCD.

The admission of Forza Italia presented a particular headache for Wilfried Martens, president of both the EPP and the EPP Group in the European Parliament, mainly because of the reputation of the Italian party's leader, Berlusconi. Martens found himself in a difficult position, having to operate on multiple levels. I clearly remember him sending me to Rome on a mission to talk to the PPI leadership as a mediator to see whether a compromise on Forza Italia's membership could be reached. However, the demands made by the PPI were not met. After the decision to allow Forza Italia to join the Group, the leaders of the Benelux parties, Ireland's Fine Gael, the Basques, the Catalans and the PPI founded the Athens Group, named after the Basic Programme of Athens. Their goal was to preserve the Christian Democratic ideology, but in reality the group never really took off. Some excellent French colleagues, led by François Bayrou, and later also former CVP president Johan Van Hecke had problems with the loss of the Christian Democratic character as the guiding principle of the group. Their move to the Liberal group was, however, not really understood, either by me or by the rest of the group.

Around 1995 the EPP Group's numbers swelled due to the arrival of the Swedish Moderaterna and Kristdemokraterna, the Danish Konservative Folkeparti and Kristendemokraterne, and the Finnish Kokoomus. With the exception of the Swedish Kristdemokraterna, these parties were of the 'free marketeer' mould. The actions of Moderaterna, the fact that it had been a long-standing member of the European Democrat Union and, of course, the delegation's manageable size led to its smooth integration. The expansion to include Portugal's PSD in 1996 also went very well, it being a sound and credible partner, although some of the party's eight MEPs were extremely unhappy about leaving the Liberal Group.

Reflections on 'big, bigger, biggest'

In elections in the Netherlands and elsewhere, we are being punished at the ballot box when we fail to put people at the heart of policy—and the same thing has happened in the past. This clearly demonstrates that we need to maintain a social policy which positions the sharing of responsibility between people and organisations as its starting point. We need to support the social market economy, the 'Rhenish social model', the values of Christian Democracy, and the principles of working together and building a society of people and organisations.

Having the most seats in the European Parliament helps, as it means that there is a higher likelihood that the president of the European Commission will come from our Group. However, this does not automatically mean that the EPP's agenda will be implemented, because commitments have to be made to other major groups in order to secure this position.

The composition of the European Commission is based on the national election results in the member states, which means that the EPP members of the European Commission do not have the key influence that we would like them to have.

A majority-based strategy in the European Parliament is complicated to achieve. Given our size, it will always be necessary to work with the Socialists, Liberals or Greens. In the case of the Liberals, this is problematic—and it has always been so—because of the substantial internal divisions in their group between classical liberals, green and left-leaning liberals, and conservative liberals.

MEPs are elected on a national basis and, as a parliamentary group, we should use the resources at our disposal and take every opportunity to get the citizens in the member states involved in the work of their MEPs. Sharing information about the work of the European Parliament and arranging visits to it are still among the main tools to achieve this, alongside, of course, the full utilisation of the new forms of media.

We need to get the EPP Group to work at the European level, taking joint responsibility for shaping policy and for staffing, rather than leaving this to individual delegations. The top priority and focus must be setting up a structure for candidate countries that provides parties, and especially their younger members, with in-depth, intensive training about our principles. There is a basic lack of knowledge of the rule of law and how to establish it. A major emphasis should be on the enlargement into the Western Balkans, with the Group—in cooperation with the party and the foundations, in particular the

Robert Schuman Institute, Luxembourg's Robert Schuman Foundation for Cooperation among Christian Democrats in Europe, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Hanns Seidel Foundation—redoubling its efforts in this area.

Lessons learned

It is safe to say that along our path to becoming big, bigger and biggest, we have had our ups and downs. From being the main voice in the majority of the governing bodies of the EU after 1999 to having spells of less influence, it has been anything but smooth sailing for our political family.

Our direct influence in the main governing bodies of the EU has withered slightly, but our ideas and values are now spread more than ever across the Union. Elections in member states show that living by and putting into practice one's own party's political values and standards is the best and most rewarded instrument for gaining electoral support.

So fight for and stick to your values: that is the best and most important way to obtain and maintain influence to serve the well-being of society.

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The Power of Leadership: Wilfried Martens and the EPP's Political Strategy (Interview With Marc Van Peel)

Teona Lavrelashvili 

Marc Van Peel served as chairman of the CVP from 1996 to 1999. The party was rebranded as CD&V in 2001. Prior to holding this position, Van Peel was a member of the Chamber of Representatives (1987–95) for the Antwerp electoral district. His contributions to Belgium's political and social landscape extended beyond party politics, as he played an active role in the General Christian Trade Union Confederation, Belgium's largest trade union. Additionally, he served as deputy secretary of [Beweging.net](#), a network of social organisations.

On 3 December 2024, I met Marc Van Peel virtually to discuss his interactions with Wilfried Martens, his reflections on Christian Democracy and the evolution of the European People's Party (EPP). What followed was a rich and reflective conversation, offering insights into both the strategic decisions made by Wilfried Martens that shaped the EPP's success and the enduring relevance of Christian Democratic values in addressing contemporary challenges.

You worked and interacted with Wilfried Martens during your tenure as president of the CVP. How would you describe his role within the EPP?

My interactions with Wilfried Martens began during my time as a Member of Parliament, when he was already serving as prime minister. While I admired his leadership, we did not engage extensively until I became party chairman, at which point he was leading the EPP. Our discussions were centred on

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European policies and the EPP's role in the European Parliament, leaving national matters in the hands of Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene.

Martens's greatest strength was his ability to unite. He was a visionary leader who successfully brought together Christian Democratic, centrist and centre-right parties to form a cohesive alliance under the EPP banner. His leadership showcased not only remarkable political acumen but also a profound understanding of coalition-building as a cornerstone of European politics. Through his efforts, Martens established the foundation for the EPP to become the dominant political force in the European Parliament.

What role did Martens's leadership play in establishing the EPP as the number one political force in Europe?

Martens played a pivotal role in transforming the EPP into the most influential political group in the European Parliament. He understood that achieving influence in European politics required strength in numbers—without a majority, even the most visionary policies would fail to be implemented. To address this, Martens worked tirelessly to consolidate diverse political forces, ensuring that the EPP became a large and cohesive group capable of shaping European policy effectively.

Martens had a strategic vision: he recognised that the EPP's success depended on expanding its influence by including various political traditions—Christian Democratic, centrist and centre-right parties. While this unity was challenging to achieve, it provided the EPP with the strength and legitimacy to act decisively in European politics.

I am convinced that it was Martens's leadership that ensured the EPP not only emerged as the leading political force in Europe but also upheld its core values, shaping the trajectory of the EU.

Including diverse parties in the EPP must have been challenging. How do you recall, for example, the process of including Forza Italia?

The inclusion of Forza Italia was one of the more contentious decisions during Martens's leadership. Initially, Martens and I shared the belief that Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia did not align with the core values of the EPP. Berlusconi's leadership leaned heavily towards the right, and his policies often clashed with the principles of Christian Democracy, which prioritise social justice and solidarity.

However, a few months after our conversation, Forza Italia was admitted to the EPP. I was surprised and, frankly, disappointed. It felt like a betrayal of the discussions we had had. My opposition was also influenced by my background in the trade union movement, which had instilled in me a commitment to social justice and a cautious approach to political alliances. At the time, I believed that Martens was compromising the EPP's values for short-term gains.

In hindsight, though, I must admit that Martens had a broader strategic vision. He understood that including Forza Italia would strengthen the EPP's

influence in the European Parliament and beyond. While his decision was controversial, it ultimately contributed to the EPP's long-term success.

What lessons can be learned from Martens's leadership style and decisions for the EPP to remain the number one political force?

Martens's leadership showed the value of strategic thinking and a long-term vision. He was unafraid to make difficult decisions, even at the risk of alienating close allies, because he prioritised the EPP's broader objectives over immediate gratification. For example, his inclusion of Forza Italia, despite being controversial, and other parties with more liberal and conservative leanings, bolstered the EPP's influence and cemented its status as Europe's leading political force.

One notable characteristic of Martens's leadership was his pragmatism. He understood that coalition-building and compromise were essential for achieving lasting political success within Europe's complex and diverse political landscape. However, one apparent challenge he faced was in communication. Many of his decisions were made without fully articulating his rationale to colleagues, which left some feeling disconnected from his broader strategic vision. This challenge was further compounded by the limited visibility of European politics at the time and the relatively low profile of the European Parliament. Combined with Martens's frequent travels, these factors reduced opportunities for clear and consistent communication.

Despite these limitations, Martens's legacy is one of unity and resilience. He demonstrated that effective leadership requires a careful balance between pragmatism and principles—a lesson that remains highly relevant in today's fragmented political environment.

How do you define Christian Democracy, and how does it remain relevant in contemporary politics?

My understanding of Christian Democracy was shaped during my time teaching at the Social High School in Leuven, where I explored various political ideologies, including Marxism and liberalism. It was through this period of reflection and teaching that I became convinced that Christian Democracy represents the most intelligent and humane approach to governance. It balances moral principles with practical solutions, emphasising individual dignity, social justice and solidarity.

I am convinced that Christian Democracy remains highly relevant in today's European political landscape. Contemporary challenges such as climate change, migration and populism require centrist parties to strike a delicate balance between strength and compassion. For instance, on migration, the EPP must advocate for secure borders while ensuring the humane treatment of individuals. Similarly, tackling climate change demands policies rooted in scientific advancements, while remaining sensitive to public concerns and securing democratic support.

How do you see the future evolution of the EPP in light of Martens's legacy?

The EPP must remain committed to its centrist and Christian Democratic roots. These values are not merely ideological—they are practical tools for addressing Europe's most pressing challenges. Strengthening centrist cooperation requires building alliances with like-minded parties while maintaining a clear identity.

The EPP must avoid veering too far to the left or becoming overly centrist to the point of losing its unique character. Instead, it should embrace its role as a unifying force that balances moral principles with practical governance. By doing so, the EPP can ensure its continued relevance and influence in European politics.

Today's challenges, in particular, demand a moral compass, and Christian Democratic values provide that guidance. By staying true to its roots, the EPP can continue to address contemporary issues with both pragmatism and principles.

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Part VII. The Enlarged EPP in Practice

The EPP on Its Path to Becoming the Largest Group and the Increase of Competences for the European Parliament

Hans-Gert Pöttering

After the first direct European elections in 1979, it seemed inevitable for many years that the Socialists would remain the largest group in the European Parliament. This was politically unacceptable to the European People's Party (EPP), and personally, it annoyed me. Yet this was the reality in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994.

It was certainly ambitious for the EPP (that is, the Christian Democrats) to aim to become the largest group, but it was not impossible. There were two ways to make this a reality: by securing better results for our member parties in the European elections and by expanding our base in the European Parliament through inviting other groups (or parts of them) to join our ranks.

The British Conservatives and Partido Popular from Spain

One strategic question was whether the British Conservatives should, could or would join the EPP. Even before the 1989 European elections, Spain's Partido Popular had decided to leave the European Democratic Group, where they had been aligned with the British Conservatives, and join the EPP

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Group. After the 1989 elections, the British Conservatives requested membership of our Group. The chairman of the EPP Group at that time was Egon Klepsch (1979–82 and 1984–92). However, due to resistance from our colleagues in the Benelux countries in particular, the request was not immediately accepted. The matter needed time. In 1992 Klepsch was elected president of the European Parliament, and Leo Tindemans succeeded him as Group chairman. On 7 April 1992, the Group decided in a very controversial vote (72 in favour, 36 against) that the British Conservatives could join. Wilfried Martens, chairman of the party, strongly supported this decision. My own contribution in the late 1980s and early 1990s (having been a member since 1979) was to organise monthly meetings with British colleagues as the ‘person responsible for relations with the British Conservatives’ within the CDU/CSU delegation. I maintained close and intense relations with our British colleagues and friends, most of whom were ‘good Europeans’.

After the 1999 elections, we extended the Group’s name to the EPP–ED, with ED standing for ‘European Democrats’, mainly to include the British Conservatives and the ODS from Czechia. We thereby succeeded in allowing our British colleagues to maintain a distinct identity while preserving the unity of our Group.

Before the 2004 election, the Conservative Party in London, under the leadership of Michael Howard, demanded additional concessions—particularly on institutional matters—to which we were able to agree. The resulting understanding was the basis for our British colleagues’ continued membership until at least the 2009 election and was part of a formal agreement.

When David Cameron became leader of the British Conservatives in 2005, he predicted to me—then the leader of the EPP–ED Group—during a breakfast at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in London on 26 January 2006, that the Conservatives would leave our Group. I reminded him that they had no right to do so, as we had reached an agreement with his predecessor, Michael Howard, that the British would remain in our Group until at least 2009.¹

Ultimately, Cameron had to accept this. Yet, after the 2009 European elections the British Conservatives left our Group. Cameron was also opposed to the Treaty of Lisbon. Even after the UK had ratified the Treaty in 2008, he continued to advocate for a referendum to reject the Treaty if he became prime minister before all member states had ratified it. Fortunately, Cameron was unable to realise these ideas. The Treaty came into force on 1 December

¹ See the whole story, ‘Negotiations and Dispute with the British Conservatives’, in H.-G. Pöttering, *United for the Better: My European Way* (London: John Harper Publishing, 2016), 238–46.

2009, and he became prime minister on 11 May 2010. This development was an unfortunate step on Britain's path to Brexit.

On 28 November 2022, I was invited as one of two speakers to a 'Service of Thanksgiving for the Life and Work of The Lord Plumb DL', former president of the European Parliament (1987–9), at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey. In my speech, I noted that Brexit had shaken Henry Plumb and added, 'May the time come in the future when Henry Plumb will have a successor as president of the European Parliament coming from the United Kingdom.'

Forza Italia and the French RPR

Past, present and future are connected. After the 1994 elections, I was elected vice-chairman of our group, with Wilfried Martens serving as chairman. We shared a strong commitment to European ideals, as Martens aptly notes in his memoirs. As I pen these lines, Antonio Tajani serves as the chairman of Forza Italia and Italy's foreign minister. Over time, he became one of my closest colleagues and friends within the EPP. Together with many others, notably Wilfried Martens and Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor and chairman of the CDU, we prepared the way for Forza Italia's membership of the EPP Group. I chronicled this development in my memoir, *United for the Better*, from which I draw much of the following account.

Forza Italia first registered in the European Parliament in 1994 as part of the Forza Europa Group. The party then moved, in 1995, to form the Union for Europe Group along with France's RPR, Greece's Political Spring, Portugal's CDS-PP and Ireland's Fianna Fáil. Well before the disbanding of this group in 1999, I was asked by the EPP Group's presidency to initiate friendly discussions with Forza Italia through its parliamentary spokesman, Claudio Azzolini, to assess the possibility of the Italian party joining our Group. For several months, beginning in mid-1997, Azzolini, Tajani and I would often meet over lunch at a local restaurant in Strasbourg when Parliament was in session. These conversations allowed us to share opinions on many topics.

Then, at a plenary session of the European Parliament towards the end of 1997, Wilfried Martens and I, who were sitting next to each other, were shaken by something we found out quite by chance, after spotting it in a paper: Forza Italia, the French RPR and other parties were currently forming a new European

party, which press releases announced was due to be launched in Dublin in May 1998.²

The following spring I arranged to meet with Kohl about the possibility of Forza Italia joining the EPP and its Group. When we spoke, he was clear that he was very much in favour of this prospect, and tasked me with reaching out to Silvio Berlusconi to communicate the CDU's stance on the matter. Forza Italia was assembling for a party congress in Milan shortly before Easter in 1998, and I was going on holiday in Zermatt, Switzerland for the Easter break that year; this was my opportunity to connect with the leader about his party and its future. Wilfried Martens, too, had approved the plan for me to talk to Berlusconi and find out where he stood, although without officially speaking on behalf of the EPP at the congress. 'At the congress, it was ominously noticeable that RPR leader Philippe Séguin was constantly hovering around Berlusconi. During lunch break, Berlusconi bid his European and international guests welcome, and I seized the opportunity to pass on Kohl's invitation to join us. Berlusconi's response was: "Just give us a call and we'll come running."'³

And so the process began to allow Forza Italia in—although it was not to be without obstacles. Much intense debate had to take place to bring all the members of the EPP Group to agreement about the Italian party's membership. 'In early May 1998 another memorable meeting with Berlusconi took place: Wilfried Martens, my Spanish colleague Gerardo Galeote, the EPP Group's Portuguese Secretary General, Mário David and I were picked up at Milan airport and flown by helicopter to his villa, where he lost no time in agreeing to join.'⁴

Soon after, via a secret ballot on 9 June 1998, our parliamentary Group voted to approve the membership of each of Forza Italia's Members of the European Parliament. We knew these 20 new members would enrich the Group and bolster our standing.

In this way, we were able to prevent the creation of a new group and party—something that would have been very dangerous for the EPP, not only ahead of the 1999 elections, but also in light of the impending enlargement with the addition of 10 new member states in 2004. As a result of Forza Italia's decision to join the EPP Group, the French RPR also joined after the 1999 elections.

² See H.-G. Pöttering, *United for the Better*, 169.

³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The latter's list was headed by Nicolas Sarkozy, who would later become president of the French Republic.

The European elections of June 1999 were an overwhelming success for the EPP. For the first time, we emerged as the largest group, winning 233 of the 626 seats, while the Socialists secured 180, the Liberals 50 and the Greens 48. On 13 July 1999 I was elected chairman of our Group. What a responsibility!

Being the largest group is, of course, important. However, the 'power' gained must be harnessed for substantive political progress, particularly in institutional matters. I was determined to increase the influence of the EPP and the European Parliament, as I also recount in my autobiography. Once the European Parliament was constituted, we turned first to the contentious task of electing the members of the European Commission. At the Berlin European Council at the end of March 1999, Romano Prodi, Italian prime minister from 1996–8 and from 2006–8, was nominated for president of the Commission by the heads of state and government. I was against this because of Prodi's political distance from our party family. While his career trajectory had started with his decades-long membership of Italy's *Democrazia Cristiana*, after its breakup in 1994 he had cofounded *The Olive Tree*, a centre-left coalition. My resistance to the idea of Prodi as president came from my long-held belief in the principle that the political leanings of the Commission president should align with the results of the European elections. Whichever party won the majority in those elections, whether the EPP, the Social Democrats or another group, should be entitled to choose the Commission president to inform the Commission's priorities and guide the general direction of its policies.

However, in 1999 it was not (yet) possible to translate these principles into reality, and having only just been elected leader of my parliamentary group, I did not yet feel strong enough to challenge Prodi's proposed appointment. Furthermore, I did not want the election of the president and members of the Commission to drag on for months, because the European Union had some daunting challenges to face.⁵

Opposition to a Prodi presidency was prevalent in our group, particularly among the CDU/CSU faction. For them and their members in the EPP-ED Group, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's nomination of not one but two commissioners from the Social Democrats and the Greens was infuriating.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

Since it was in Prodi's interest to secure Parliament's approval, he was ready to make concessions. Our five key points were as follows:

1. We required the president and members of the Commission to appear in the European Parliament whenever their presence was needed and Parliament requested it.
2. In cases in which Parliament called for a commissioner to step down, we stipulated that specific consequences must follow within the Commission. While the removal from office of any particular member was not in Parliament's official prerogative, it could apply pressure in a roundabout fashion by, for example, voting out the Commission as a whole.
3. The Commission must consent to submitting particular draft legislation upon request from the European Parliament. In many countries, this 'right of initiative'—the right to propose laws in the form of directives and regulations—is held by national parliaments as well as governments, in some form. Securing the new Commission's agreement to submit Parliament's draft legislation when asked was of utmost importance, particularly because the European Parliament did not—nor does it now—have such a right of initiative.
4. We demanded assurance on the reform of the Commission itself and of the Intergovernmental Conference. The former involved the Commission's commitment to engage in regular discussions about its reform.
5. As for the Intergovernmental Conference, we likewise secured the agreement of both Parliament and the Commission to initiate a full institutional reform.

Prodi accepted these demands in a formal agreement with the European Parliament. On this basis, Prodi and his Commission were elected on 15 September 1999, with 392 votes in favour, 72 against and 41 abstentions. In this way, the EPP and the European Parliament established a new constitutional reality within the EU.

I felt this was a great triumph, including for me personally. At the same time, based on the whole experience, I vowed to myself that if I still bore the political responsibility when the 2004 elections came around, there would be no repeat of this episode. I was absolutely determined to prevent a candidate whose nomination took no account of the outcome of the election being put forward for the Commission presidency. What proved to be beyond our reach in 1999, we successfully managed to implement in 2004.⁶

⁶Ibid., 186.

In the 2004 European elections, the EPP–ED Group secured 268 out of 732 seats, with the Socialists winning 200, the Liberals 88 and so on. After a difficult process, we successfully had José Manuel Barroso, the Portuguese prime minister and member of the EPP, elected as president of the European Commission.

This achievement marked another significant victory for both the EPP and the European Parliament. The results of the European elections had been taken into account by the European Council. The concept of a European *Spitzenkandidat*, later developed and mainly proposed by Klaus Welle—then secretary general of the European Parliament and former secretary general of the EPP Group, as well as head of my cabinet—was not yet circulating in political discourse. However, this principle aligns with the notion that the outcome of the European elections must influence the formation of the European Commission.

With regard to the comprehensive institutional reforms agreed upon with the Prodi Commission (the last of the above key points), this marked the beginning of a new kind of constitutional thinking and decision-making that would crystallise in the future. Although the member states held the sole right to amend or create new treaties, the European Parliament was the mastermind and initiator of fundamental reforms, and we, as the EPP, were and are at the heart of it. Since the Treaty of Nice (December 2000) did not represent a great step forward, the European Parliament proposed and initiated a convention to prepare a European constitution. Unfortunately, the constitution was rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands (May/June 2005). We in the EPP and the European Parliament, however, insisted that the substance of the constitutional treaty should become a reality. The Berlin Declaration (25 March 2007), signed by the president of the European Council, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Commission President José Manuel Durão Barroso, and me as president of the European Parliament, led to the Treaty of Lisbon, signed on 13 December 2007, which came into force on 1 December 2009. A key part of the Lisbon Treaty is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Citizens of the European Union, signed on 12 December 2007 in Strasbourg by the presidents of the European institutions: José Sócrates (European Council), José Manuel Barroso (European Commission) and me (European Parliament). But that is another chapter.⁷

It is important to emphasise that all these steps towards a stronger EU and a more powerful European Parliament, enhancing democracy within the EU, were to a great extent due to the growing importance of the EPP as the largest

⁷ Ibid., 259–85, 309–36.

group in the European Parliament. Having been part of these achievements—first as chairman of the EPP–ED Group (1999–2007) and then as president of the European Parliament (2007–9)—remains for me a great privilege, for which I will be very grateful all my life.

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Hans-Gert Pöttering served as chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation from 2010 to 2017. Until his retirement from the European Parliament in 2014, he was the only MEP who had continuously served since the first European elections in 1979. From 1999 to 2007 he served as the chairman of the EPP–ED Group, and from 2007 to 2009 as president of the European Parliament.

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Wilfried Martens and Our Ambitions for the EPP

A. López-Istúriz White

This is the first time since leaving my position as secretary general of the EPP three years ago that I have written about those times and the ambitions which I believe we fulfilled in accordance with our founding fathers' principles and values. This allowed us to build what since 1999 has been the largest political force in Brussels.

When I was elected secretary general at the Estoril Congress in 2002, I had just spent four years as personal assistant to Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar. During this time I had been part of the team that helped pave the way for Aznar's strong leadership, both in the EPP and later in the European Council. Hence, I was coming from 'the other side of the fence' and had very critical, preconceived ideas about Brussels and the EPP.

When I came to live in Brussels, I soon learned that the city's forests and institutions are full of foxes. But I did not know at that time that I was going to work in the EPP for the 'European fox' himself, Wilfried Martens. He had been prime minister of Belgium for 12 years, a country where the rate of survival for prime ministers is one year. This says a lot about Wilfried's character. 'Luctor et emergo', his favourite quote, defines him: struggle and rise—resilience, leadership through respect and patience, but in the end, leadership.

At the time that I became secretary general, the EPP was a poor, humble relative of the rich and powerful EPP Group in the European Parliament.

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Contrary to national political realities, the most powerful players in Brussels were the political groups, which received financial and human resources from the European Parliament. Martens and I, alongside many esteemed colleagues within the EPP family, actively opposed this arrangement, striving to establish an alternative model. The idea was that, much as in national politics, the party would serve as the central hub for debate and decision-making within the EPP. Regrettably, as I write these lines, we have now reverted to the former system, where the political group and its unelected civil servants have regained power in the party.

Soon Martens and I started our daily work. Initially, our personal relationship was strained, as we came from very different political cultures and had very different personalities. However, over the course of 10 years working together, our mutual respect gradually deepened, and our common political ambitions for the EPP began to align.

An independent party

The first ambition was to make the party financially and politically independent from the EPP Group. Through extensive lobbying and much effort persuading the European Commission, our mission was ultimately accomplished, culminating in the introduction of a new financing package for European political parties and foundations. European Commission Vice President Loyola de Palacio played an essential role in achieving this objective. Unfortunately, our goal of creating a pan-European party system faced a significant challenge, as only the EPP was ready for this new structure. It stood alone as the only party to have achieved some degree of independence from its parliamentary group, owing to the strategic relocation of its headquarters outside the European Parliament.

For the other political parties, it was a nightmare to leave the warm and comfortable confines of the European Parliament. By analysing their record over the past 15 years, a record that is poor in comparison with that of the EPP and its influence in political events in Brussels, one could even argue that they have never recovered from the situation, precisely because they never escaped from the dominance of their political groups.

A party of parties

Second, we sought to reinforce the role of the EPP as a ‘party of parties’, creating a strengthened network inside our political family at all levels. We approached this task along two main paths.

The first path was an internal one, which involved maintaining strict discipline regarding the attendance of prime ministers at EPP summits. Both Helmut Kohl and Wilfried Martens were key in implementing a system that engendered a sense of commitment among party leaders and prime ministers and encouraged their direct participation at EPP events. We went even further and streamlined the EPP ministerial meetings so that ministers of specific fields—agriculture, defence, justice, the economy and so forth—could meet and coordinate their positions before Council meetings. It was at one of the gatherings of defence ministers that I first encountered the then German minister of defence, Ursula von der Leyen. Her pro-European stance has never wavered—shaped by her upbringing in Brussels, where her father held a prominent position in the European Commission. But who knows? Perhaps it was in these meetings that the spark was ignited that would later culminate in her election as president of the European Commission.

The second path involved reinforcing the EPP’s reach outside the borders of the EU, with an expansive, ambitious agenda in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and even North Africa and the Middle East. The EPP needs to maintain very close relations with the parties in these regions because doing so contributes to stabilising the EU’s neighbourhood. Our aim was to bring together politicians from Georgia, Moldova, Bosnia, Morocco, Lebanon and beyond, fostering the exchange of experiences and enabling them to carry our political culture back to their home countries. Unfortunately, it is my understanding that this very important work the EPP was doing outside the EU has not been continued, and I hope this will change.

A party culture

Third, we sought to reinforce an EPP ‘culture’, to transform nationally minded members, who came from very different domestic realities, into a close-knit group united by an overarching set of ideas. The aim was to have everyone acting together to defend and maintain the principles and values of the EPP, which some of us knew had been the basis for the creation of the EU. We needed everybody to know and internalise this body of principles, as they

were not consolidated in the political culture of many of our party members. For this, the enlargement strategy started by my predecessor, Klaus Welle together with the efforts of Wilfried Martens, was instrumental in opening the EPP to parties that were not essentially Christian Democratic but more on the conservative–liberal side of things. Thanks to this, my own party in Spain, Partido Popular, moved from the European Democratic Group to the EPP. This ambitious strategy proved right when the EPP became the largest political force in the European Parliament, starting in 1999 and continuing to the present.

It is important to remember that during the Cold War the political left did not have any sympathy for the European project, which was seen as a tool to counter the ‘socialist paradise’ that they were preaching and which supposedly existed on the other side of the Iron Curtain. No surprise there: the great architects of the EU as we know it today were almost entirely from the Christian Democrat family. They were accused of being US Central Intelligence Agency agents by the same left that, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the unveiling of the horrors of the Soviet system, discreetly changed its narrative by choosing more attractive anthems for its political survival—climate change and radical feminism, among others—while completely ignoring the disaster of the socialist system during the Cold War.

The *Spitzenkandidat*

Finally, we concentrated our efforts on an idea that had floated in our think tanks for quite some time. This would later be known as the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. The core idea was to bring the nomination of the European Commission president closer to the voters and, by doing this, to give the Commission more space to manoeuvre in its disputes with national governments. It took Martens and me—along with the then president of the EPP Group Hans-Gert Pöttering and other EU enthusiasts—considerable time and patience to convince our national leaders of the necessity of such a step. But soon the EPP summits became the place to be. They were recognised by all the EPP heads of state and government as the centre for coordinating strategies, which, once agreed, would be loyally followed by all the EPP leaders. It was only Angela Merkel, and especially her diplomatic advisors, who tried to downplay the initiative. They did this because they knew it meant that the civil servants and diplomats (unelected people who love to play politics but bear no responsibility for the consequences) would no longer have a say in the election of the Commission president, as they had done in the past in the obscure

and conspiratorial corridors of the European Council. The rest is history. We succeeded in having Jean-Claude Juncker take over the Commission under the EPP flag and did so with ample political space to work with. I have to concede that the Socialist group led by Martin Schulz was very cooperative and understood the game. Schulz's very good relationship with EPP President Joseph Daul was key to the success of the operation. A small confession: when Daul assumed the EPP presidency, I mistakenly believed he would adhere to the line taken by Merkel's advisors. However, this turned out not to be the case.

Although he had been president of the EPP Group for some years, Daul immediately understood and followed Martens's ambitious agenda for the party. Now I can say that I was very proud to be his secretary general. Juncker was nominated as our *Spitzenkandidat* at our Dublin Congress in 2014.

Preserve the legacy

The Dublin Congress was, in my humble opinion, the brightest moment in the EPP's history. At that time our political family included 17 heads of state and government. In addition, after the European elections we consolidated our total dominance of the European institutions. By 2017 we had secured a leadership trio of Antonio Tajani as president of the European Parliament, Donald Tusk as president of the European Council and Juncker as president of the Commission. This reflected the huge political power that the EPP was able to amass by building strong party structures that were independent of the EPP parliamentary group. These structures made it possible to be more cohesive and to project even further the power we had achieved in our member states. It was the high-tide mark of the EPP's power. The Dublin Congress was the pinnacle of a phase that regrettably came to an end as the result of internal fighting over the future direction of our political strategy, with the party torn between more centrist and more conservative perspectives. This situation was compounded by the leadership vacuum left by Merkel's exit from the political scene.

In any case, I am very proud to have played a role in the construction of the party structures that were essential for the further consolidation of the powerful role of the EPP in Europe. It is the work we did in the past, which was so visible in the mid-2010s, which today allows us to keep leading the European project by means of the presidency of both the Commission and the European Parliament. Unfortunately, the political landscape in Europe has changed substantially in the past years. It is paramount that we learn the lessons of the

past and understand what has brought us to this position of predominance in European politics and what will be necessary to maintain that strength. I am convinced that more attention should be paid to preserving the legacy of Martens and all those who supported the construction of the EPP as the strongest ‘party of parties’ in Europe.

Antonio López-Istúriz White is the secretary treasurer of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, executive secretary of the Centrist Democrat International and an MEP. He served as secretary general of the EPP from 2002 to 2022. From 1999 to 2002, he worked as personal assistant to former prime minister of Spain, José María Aznar.

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Putting the Person at the Centre: How to Successfully Preside Over an Enlarged EPP (Interview With Joseph Daul)

Sara Pini

Joseph Daul served as chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament in 2007–14 and as president of the EPP in 2013–19. He was first elected to the European Parliament in 1999, having run for the French Gaullist party RPR (the predecessor of today's Les Républicains), headed by Nicolas Sarkozy. That the party had put him on its electoral list was no doubt because of his valuable contribution in tackling the 'mad cow' crisis in France. He was only 20 when he had taken over his family's farm, and he had been active in the agricultural trade union movement from a young age. By the time the crisis struck, Daul was chairing several farmers' organisations in France as well as the 'beef group' of the European umbrella organisation Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations. It was therefore no wonder that, after his election, he became vice-chair and then chair of the European Parliament's powerful Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. But his political career had started long before at the local level, when he served as a town councillor and then as mayor of Pfettisheim, his small hometown in Alsace, the French region bordering Germany. It was an experience that permanently shaped his way of doing politics.

I met him on 1 October 2024 to discuss what the enlargement of the EPP had meant in practice for the functioning of both the party and the group, how he viewed his role as the head of both and what the EPP should do to

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remain the leading political force in Europe. What followed was an earnest and interesting conversation. It was much like all the discussions we had had in the years when I had the privilege to work for him at the party headquarters, and often after he retired. Once again he revealed the brilliant political mind he usually hides behind his matter-of-fact manners, as well as what it truly means to 'put the person at the centre'.¹

You were first elected to the European Parliament in 1999, the pivotal year when the EPP became 'Number 1'. You were among those Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who joined the EPP Group from non-Christian Democratic parties: your own party, of course, as well as Forza Italia, Partido Popular and many others over the years. Some had feared that this 'merger' would not work, that people coming from such different political families would not fit together. How did it go in practice?

When I arrived in the European Parliament, I applied the lesson I had learned from a young age and had put in practice in all my previous positions: listen, ponder, act—in this order. I also had my previous experience in trade unions, which taught me to listen to others and find solutions together.

As an Alsatian I had a deep respect for the legacy of Charles de Gaulle, the man who freed Alsace. But at the same time I knew what true Christian Democracy was: we were brought up on the teachings of Pierre Pfimlin, Marcel Rudloff and other great Christian Democratic thinkers and politicians. Moreover, my father was involved in the Alsatian Christian Democratic movement, which was modelled after the German CDU, bringing together the Catholic social tradition with Protestant, liberal and conservative ideas. I knew how to speak to the Christian Democrats in the EPP Group because I understood them, and this allowed me to overcome their diffidence towards the newcomers. The other members of the RPR found this more difficult—as did those of the UDF.

Sure, when it came to matters related to *laïcité*, the French delegation did not always go along with the Group, but there was no clash with the other delegations, especially not on matters linked to the European project itself. There were actually more problems among the various parties of the French delegation² than between us and the other delegations. However, Margie Sudre, the head of the RPR delegation, was very open-minded and knew how to manage the delegation perfectly.

¹ This expression can be found in several of the contributions to this book, the centrality of the human person being one of the core principles of the EPP.

² Besides the RPR and the UDF, the French delegation in the EPP Group included members from the smaller parties Démocratie Libérale and Génération Ecologie.

Speaking of the other French parties in the Group, François Bayrou's UDF had been a member of the EPP from the start, but he ended up leaving it in 2004 to join the the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Why did Bayrou take this decision? Was it a consequence of the expansion of the EPP to non-Christian Democratic parties?

Bayrou has never been a Christian Democrat. I think he left the EPP because he never felt at ease in a majority. He preferred to remain in the opposition so that he could criticise the work of others.

During your time as an MEP, the enlargement of the EPP continued, in particular to parties from Central and Eastern Europe. How did MEPs from these countries differ from those from Western Europe? And what brought them together?

When MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe joined us, the difference was more obvious than with the previous 'new entries' from Western Europe. What mattered most to them were values, in particular the traditional Christian values that they had fought so hard to regain following the decades-long repression of religion during the Soviet era. This is what explains, among other things, why the place of religion in politics is so different in Poland and in Spain. These two traditionally Catholic countries have very different relationships with the Catholic Church: while in Poland the Church had worked clandestinely and—especially under Pope John Paul II—had been instrumental in the fall of Communism, in Spain it had been an ally of the regime. To understand why people think and behave differently, you have first to understand their history, where they are coming from.

At the same time, there had been a process of mutual learning from the start. The newcomers had deep respect for those who were already there. They were open to listening and learning since they were discovering a whole new world. We must not forget that we had been working on the European project for over 40 years before these countries joined, and then we asked them to adopt more than 4 decades of norms, regulations and practices almost at once. All things considered, it did not go too badly. What certainly helped them in this were the ties that Wilfried Martens had established over the years with like-minded parties from behind the Iron Curtain. These were formed on his famous 'pilgrimages for democracy', even before the fall of the Wall. Moreover, these parties also benefited from the support they received from the EPP as soon as their countries freed themselves from the Soviet yoke. The EPP has always been the strongest advocate for the reunification of the European continent and has functioned—and still does—as an 'antechamber' to EU membership, accompanying and supporting these parties in their path towards democracy and their future within the Union.

What about the British Conservatives? Their party was never a member of the EPP, but in 1992 their MEPs joined the EPP Group. Indeed, from 1999 to 2009 the Group was even renamed the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats to accommodate their presence while allowing them to keep a separate identity. Did it work?

The British saw everything through the lens of their Westminster system. They insisted on applying the same methods in the European Parliament and refused to learn from others. They tried to pass only legislation that corresponded to their interests or their way of seeing the world, which had been shaped by centuries of dominance through their empire. They had no interest in the kind of Europe we were building.

Even within the EPP there was a 'British exemption', and it was with the British delegation that I had the hardest time when I chaired the Group. With the support of the Nordic conservatives, they defended a vision of the world that was completely different from that of the Benelux parties, and it was not easy to find common ground. On social issues in particular, they did not vote like the other delegations and prepared their own separate voting lists.³

Another failed experience was the one with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz. You witnessed the entire parabola at first hand: from when they became members of the EPP (after seriously considering joining the Liberals instead) to when they left—just before being kicked out. What changed? Orbán or the EPP?

When Orbán joined our political family in 2000, he was a Christian and a convinced anti-Communist. He had started his political career fighting the regime, in the name of freedom and democracy. Over the years, however, election after election, he changed. He became much more radical and more interested in—I would say even addicted to—personal power. I witnessed all that and did my best to make him go back to what he used to be. For this I was accused of being too kind and accommodating. But despite these attacks I always tried to keep him in the family and maintain a dialogue with him. After all, as I often said, every family has its *enfant terrible*. And nothing good came from his departure: not for him, who lost any influence and credibility he had in EU politics; and not for the EU as a whole, which has had to deal with an even more radicalised and uncooperative leader. Power, when unfettered, will go straight to your head!

³ In the European Parliament, a 'voting list' refers to the official position of the political group on a resolution (or amendments thereto) being voted on by Members in the plenary session or in a committee meeting. Unless exempted, all members of a political group are expected to follow the voting list of their group. In Anglo-Saxon circles the use of a voting list corresponds to a 'whipped' vote—Ed.

Orbán accused us of having betrayed our original values, of having moved too much to the left. But in reality it was he who betrayed these values, he who had a distorted vision of what it meant to be a Christian Democrat. Now there is a new centre-right party in Hungary, which scored pretty well in the latest European elections—especially considering it is only a few years old—and whose MEPs have joined the EPP Group. Their surprising success shows that Hungarians are starting to question the dominance of Fidesz and that more and more of them do not agree with Orbán anymore. I am convinced that history will prove us right.

In 2007, after five years at the head of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, you were elected chair of the EPP-ED Group, succeeding Hans-Gert Pöttering, who became president of the European Parliament. What do you remember of those days?

It was Klaus Welle who suggested I should run for Group chair because he saw I had a talent for bringing people together. To be honest, I had not considered this possibility, but I thought ‘why not?’ After all, in a democracy anyone can run for office.

The atmosphere among the candidates—the Austrian Othmar Karas, the Swede Gunnar Hökmark, the Italian Antonio Tajani and me—was really great. There were no personal attacks. We had all agreed that each of us should just defend his candidacy and programme.

There were three rounds and after each, the candidate with the fewest votes was eliminated. The last round was between Hökmark and me, and much to the discontent of the British, I won. It came as a surprise. I did not expect to win against three heavyweights of European politics, but again, that’s democracy!

What is the recipe for successfully managing a parliamentary group?

In any organisation the secret of a good presidency is to listen; to lead the discussion; and then, after analysing everything, to take decisions and move forward—because people expect a president to decide too in the end. Whether as leader of agricultural organisations, mayor, group chair or party president, this is the recipe I always applied, and it never failed to bear fruit. Of course, managing a commune of 900 people, such as Pfettisheim, is not the same as having to deal with heads of state and government, but the principle is the same.

Another asset is to be discreet. I was always criticised for not being a good communicator, but I can tell you that this trait of my character served me well, especially at a high level: one word too many in a press conference and people are going to blow it out of proportion.

Also, my door was always open. I met with all the MEPs who wanted to speak with me, although it often had to be early in the morning or late in the evening since my schedule was always packed. This had an advantage, however. When you suggest meeting someone at 6.30 a.m., they often realise that what they had to tell you was not that important after all . . .

Of course, as chairman of the Group, I also had to find majorities across political divides, and for this I had to build ties with the other groups. I was fortunate to have a friend like Martin Schulz as my counterpart in the Socialist Group. He was not always easy to deal with: I hung up a lunar calendar in my office so that I could avoid scheduling meetings with Martin when he was in a foul mood. But he was kind and open-minded, and one could always come to an agreement with him.

However, chairing the Group was very different from chairing the Committee on Agriculture, where we had worked on technical, usually consensus issues, on which there was a large convergence of interests and opinions, even with the Socialists and the Liberals. As Group chair I had to be much more careful about taking the various sensitivities into account and trying to understand why a certain issue was posing problems in one country and not in another. For this reason, I travelled a lot to the various regions and countries of Europe. To really understand a situation, you have to meet people on their home ground and see their problems with your own eyes. It's one thing is to read a technical dossier about the infamous trade dispute known as the 'banana war', with its dry figures on tariffs and production; but it is something completely different to go to the Canary Islands or Martinique and meet people working in the banana sector. It is only by being there that you can see the link between a specific economic sector and people's daily lives, especially the lives of the more indigent—see the reality behind the numbers and grasp then why people are asking for this or for that.

It seems to be a constant in your political career that you do not really apply for a position but are asked to take it over. Isn't this what happened when you succeeded Wilfried Martens as president of the EPP?

Wilfried was sick and one evening he called me to tell me that he had health issues, that he had spoken with his vice-presidents and that they agreed I had to take over as president. I thought it was just to manage the party's day-to-day business until he got better, but he revealed to me that his illness was much more advanced than I had thought and that he knew he did not have much time left to live. I did not sleep the whole night. I thought it over and over. In the end I decided I would try and see what it meant in terms of workload. I quickly realised I could not be both the chair of the Group and president of the party. They are two very different jobs, with different dossiers and

different responsibilities, and I would not have been able to do both properly. So I decided not to run in the 2014 European elections but to fully dedicate myself to the party.⁴

In what ways is the role of party president different from that of Group chair?

In the party there are also members from non-EU countries, and these need the EPP—and its president—much more than the parties represented in the European Parliament do. The best example is Moldova, where the EPP and I myself invested a lot of time and effort in giving support and encouragement, and providing a framework within which our member parties could work together to help Maia Sandu become prime minister and then president. And what about Georgia and Belarus, where our friends were persecuted and arrested and even risked their lives? Without the visibility the EPP granted them, they would have stood no chance. As for the parties from the Western Balkans, the EPP gave them the opportunity to work together, exchange experiences and learn from each other, as well as an incentive—with mixed results, I have to admit—to respect party ethics and internal democracy.

Another important part of the job is to lead summit meetings. An EPP summit is an occasion for the heads of state and government—who are otherwise too busy at home—to take the time to speak to each other frankly, present their country's position and explain their political situation. This helps them find common positions ahead of European Council meetings. When there is an issue that particularly affects one or more countries—whether it is on the agenda of the Council meeting or not—we sit around the table, listen to everyone and try to find solutions. I remember numerous meetings at which the issue of Schengen membership for Bulgaria and Romania was discussed. The leaders of these countries had a very different stance from that of the Austrian representative. It took way too long, but thanks to the support of President von der Leyen but also thanks to these meetings, the two countries did become full members of the Schengen Area.

Then there are the campaigns for the European elections, in which the EPP plays a major role—unlike the Group, which cannot be involved. While the European Parliament elections remain mainly a matter for the national member parties, the EPP offers them a platform on which to coordinate and exchange best practices.

⁴After Martens's death, Daul was confirmed president of the EPP by the Political Assembly in November 2013 and by the EPP congress in Dublin in March 2014; he was then re-elected at the EPP congress in Madrid in 2015.

Finally, when it comes to the election of the president of the European Commission, party and Group work together as this requires finding majorities both in the European Council, which proposes a candidate, and in the European Parliament, which elects the Commission president. And once the new Commission is in place, the EPP president invites the members who belong to our political family to informal meetings—often with the party and Group leadership—to discuss and coordinate on the various legislative dossiers.

To sum up, based on your experience, what would be your main advice to future EPP presidents and Group chairs?

First of all, not to try to do both, as these are full-time jobs. Secondly, to listen to people and regularly visit member parties, especially those in non-EU countries because they need it the most.

Finally, what should the EPP do to remain ‘number 1’?

The main priority is to integrate and involve young people. This does not necessarily mean immediately turning them into political activists, but the EPP must engage with them. It needs to be there with them in youth associations and on social media, talking with young people about their future, what they want and what they think. It is important to be present in universities, but this is not enough for a true *people’s* party: we have to reach out to young people from all walks of life.

We should encourage everyone who wants to be involved in politics to be active at a local level first of all, whether at their workplace or in their city council, but not to become professional politicians from the start. They should have a ‘normal’, possibly even low-paid job, so that our future leaders will have a grasp of what real life is and understand their citizens’ needs and aspirations.

A good example of what a people’s party should be is the German CDU. They let party members choose the order of the candidates on the electoral lists, which shows respect for the members. Moreover, every three or four months each party section organises a debate, such as the Dollenberger Dialogue in Baden-Württemberg. This is often held in a restaurant or some other informal setting. It brings together people of all ages, education levels and social backgrounds around a concrete topic that interests them. One that I recently participated in was about how artificial intelligence can help develop new antibiotics. At the end the participants speak about wider political issues and choose the topic for the next meeting. Once again, putting the person at the centre is the right recipe.

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Reassessing the Effectiveness of the European People's Party

Karl Magnus Johansson 

Political parties at the European level, referred to as ‘Europarties’, shape and are reshaped by the ongoing European integration. Having first been constitutionally recognised in the Maastricht Treaty, the Europarties then worked together to write and then rewrite the rules that govern them and to secure their funding. This has helped to strengthen their organisational structures and overall capacity. However, there are marked variations in influence among the Europarties and, in some cases, over time, as the example of the European People's Party (EPP) shows.

The aim of this chapter is to assess the effectiveness of the EPP, taking into account existing research as well as the complex and intertwined relationship between a Europarty and its national member parties. In assessing the role of the EPP, particularly in terms of treaty reform in the EU, which is more conventionally examined through the lens of intergovernmentalism, I also want to say something general about Europarty influence and its limits. Only looking at influence may overstate the Europarties' successes. Taking the limits of this influence into account alludes to the other side of the story—that Europarties are ineffective. Some think they are. Others think they are underappreciated. For me, in any case, they are worthy of serious study.

My study of Europarties has combined primary data from various sources, including archives and interviews but also direct observation, with case-study

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analysis. I first started to study this topic in 1992, when the EPP finally gave the British and Danish conservatives the green light to join the EPP Group in the European Parliament (EP). This hard-won (and fragile) alliance revealed opportunities, motives and constraints, which were examined in my Ph.D. thesis.¹ What emerged from this analysis was that, in the expansion strategy for the EPP itself and amid the restructuring of the EU, concerns about power trumped those about ideological identity and direction.² I then came to approach the Europarties, including the EPP, less as dependent variables and more as independent variables—that is, by studying them as agents of integration and highlighting their attempts to mobilise and influence.³ All the while, I was closely watching out for the possible impact of the EPP, particularly on treaty reform.

The chapter proceeds in the following way. In the next section I elaborate on the conditions that the Europarties have to fulfil in order to be influential. The subsequent section presents the results of my research into the influence of Europarties/the EPP on treaty negotiation outcomes. I conclude the chapter by sharing some lessons for the future.

The conditions Europarties need to fulfil to be influential

To a varying extent across time and cases, Europarties have proven to be effective structures for representation and decision-making in the EU—but only under certain conditions. So, what are the conditions under which Europarties can be expected to make a difference? The short answer is that the effectiveness of Europarties, in general terms, largely depends on their European Council presence and relative numerical strength, cohesion, and ability to mobilise their networks of political parties and party/government leaders for

¹ K. M. Johansson, *Transnational Party Alliances: Analysing the Hard-Won Alliance Between Conservatives and Christian Democrats in the European Parliament*, Ph.D. thesis (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997).

² See also, K. M. Johansson, 'European People's Party', in K. M. Johansson and P. A. Zervakis (eds.), *European Political Parties Between Cooperation and Integration* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002).

³ E.g. K. M. Johansson, 'Another Road to Maastricht: The Christian Democrat Coalition and the Quest for European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40/5 (2002); K. M. Johansson, 'Party Elites in Multilevel Europe: The Christian Democrats and the Single European Act', *Party Politics* 8/4 (2002); K. M. Johansson, 'The European People's Party and the Amsterdam Treaty', *Journal of European Integration History* 21/2 (2015); K. M. Johansson, 'Europarty Influence and Its Limits: The Case of the European People's Party and the Amsterdam Treaty', *Journal of European Integration* 38/1 (2016); K. M. Johansson, 'Constitutionalising the Union: The Role of the EPP Group', in L. Bardi et al. (eds.), *The European Ambition: The Group of the European People's Party and European Integration* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020).

the party cause.⁴ Therefore, they must work within the domestic constraints on national parties and leaders.

At any given time a particular party family may have a strategic advantage through its numerical superiority in the European Council. Whether that advantage can be translated into influence is another matter. Incumbency or numerical strength alone are not sufficient conditions for influencing political outcomes in the European Council along party-political lines, as much depends on the political preferences of the heads of government that belong to the Europarty in question. Participation is not everything, as internal fissures and limits on the ambition and capacity to coordinate positions may reduce Europarty influence. There must be effective mobilisation. In other words, the intrinsic qualities of the individual Europarty can be of great relevance to its potential influence.

Most of the existing research has focused on Europarties in the context of treaty negotiations. Here the evidence is somewhat mixed, but points in the direction of Europarties and their EP groups wielding, in favourable circumstances, even decisive influence in the Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs) and the European Council summits. Research also suggests that the format or institutional framework of the constitutional process matters, with the 'convention' model more likely to facilitate Europarty influence (see below).⁵

Thus, while the right conditions can be created, the core conditions which Europarties need to be present in order to have influence are based on structural factors. In sum, the conditions under which Europarties may wield

⁴For more on this, see Johansson, 'Europarty Influence and Its Limits'; K. M. Johansson, 'The Role of Europarties in EU Treaty Reform: Theory and Practice', *Acta Politica* 52/3 (2017); K. M. Johansson and T. Raunio, 'Political Parties in the European Union', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); K. M. Johansson and T. Raunio, *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); J. Tallberg and K. M. Johansson, 'Party Politics in the European Council', *Journal of European Public Policy* 15/8 (2008); S. Van Hecke, 'Christian Democratic Parties and Europeanisation', in S. Van Hecke and E. Gerard (eds.), *Christian Democratic Parties in Europe Since the End of the Cold War* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004); S. Van Hecke, 'Do Transnational Party Federations Matter? (. . . and Why Should We Care?)', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 6/3 (2010); S. Van Hecke et al., *Reconnecting European Political Parties With European Union Citizens* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2018). Tallberg and Johansson suggest a third factor that shapes the influence of party politics in the European Council: the salience of an issue on the left-right dimension. However, this factor, besides its bias generally against issues relating to other ideological dimensions or agenda items, is less relevant in the context of treaty negotiations, where the issues on the agenda of the European Council and decision-making reflect the left-right dimension less than otherwise in EU policymaking. Instead, Johansson and Raunio (2024) add venue choice (format) as a factor specifically hypothesised to shape influence in treaty reform. It is also worth noting that the other two factors, the relative numerical strength of the Europarties and their cohesion and mobilisation, both reflect ideology to a certain extent.

⁵Johansson and Raunio, *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration*.

influence are demanding. Next, I explore these conditions empirically through illustrative evidence.

The significance and limitations of the EPP

There is certainly evidence that party-political mobilisation through the Europarties has been decisive for decision-making in the European Council and on EU treaties. In particular, the EPP played a pivotal role in the processes preceding the adoption of the Single European Act⁶ and the Treaty on European Union, or Maastricht Treaty.⁷ On both occasions, the Christian Democrats shaped the treaty negotiations through collective action. The significance of the EPP pre-summit meetings became apparent during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations.

The EPP profited from its relative majority in the European Council up until the mid-1990s. It mobilised its network and was a cohesive family of mainly Christian Democrats that was able to shape politics and policies. The Christian Democrat heads of government met regularly and agreed on fundamental points. Yet, there is also evidence of the limits to Europarty effectiveness and influence, as shown in the case of the EPP and the Treaty of Amsterdam.⁸

The content of the Single European Act, which was negotiated in 1985 and took effect in 1987, was largely the result of the EPP leaders' leverage, and their determination to push through reforms to shift European integration in a more supranational direction. In 1985, of the original 6 member states, Christian Democrats were still in the leading positions in 5, and out of a total of 10 governments, EPP member parties were represented in 6. The Christian Democrat leaders knew each other well. At the time, the EPP Conference (of party leaders and heads of government) brought together some 30 high-level politicians, including leaders of national governments, political parties and parliamentary groups, as well as the presidencies of the EPP and of the EPP Group, along with commissioners and leading Members of the European Parliament.

In the making of the Maastricht Treaty or the Treaty on European Union, the meetings of Christian Democrat leaders shaped both the agenda and the

⁶ Johansson, 'Party Elites in Multilevel Europe'.

⁷ Johansson, 'Another Road to Maastricht'.

⁸ Johansson, 'The European People's Party and the Amsterdam Treaty'; Johansson, 'Europarty Influence and Its Limits'.

outcome of the negotiations. Previous studies display a clear link between the Maastricht Treaty outcome and the demands and positions of the EPP.⁹ Many of the EPP's requirements made their way into the new treaty. A comparative analysis shows that most of the EPP's demands were satisfactorily met and that there was no progress at all on only one point, namely on the *avis conforme*—the need for the assent of the EP for new actions (Article 235) and revisions of the treaties (Article 236). Wilfried Martens, EPP president and prime minister of Belgium, had drawn up most of the important demands in agreement with Ruud Lubbers, the Dutch prime minister, who would chair the Maastricht European Council. In an interview, Lubbers said that at that time the EPP 'did a lot as Christian Democrats together', were 'a strong family' and were 'still a team'.¹⁰ Also in an interview, Martens noted that positions were 'strongly inspired by the EPP programme', even though some of the EPP prime ministers were in coalition governments and therefore there were no 'purely EPP attitudes'.¹¹ In 1991, 6 out of 12 prime ministers in the European Council belonged to the EPP family.

At the time of the 1996–7 IGC, the EPP was operating in more constrained circumstances. The party was no longer in the ascendancy in the European Council, it was suffering from internal divisions (not least over employment policy) and, most importantly, there was a less favourable domestic political context in Germany. For a long time, the numbers had been in the EPP's favour. During the second half of the 1990s, however, they were against the party. At the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997, out of 15 heads of government only 6 were from the EPP and of these only 3 were traditional Christian Democrats. A new balance of power had emerged in the European Council. EPP government leaders were still an important part of it, but they were numerically weakened. The small number of Christian Democrats made it even more important to coordinate the policies of the EPP and the positions taken by 'its' heads of governments in the IGC. To that end, there was a series of meetings at the highest level, the EPP Summit, but despite finding consensus on several of the demands within the EPP, those present failed to agree on a more substantial institutional reform. To Wilfried Martens, the

⁹ D. Hanley, 'At the Heart of the Decision-Making Process? The European People's Party in the European Union', in P. Delwit, E. Külahci and C. Van de Walle (eds.), *The Europarties: Organisation and Influence* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2004), 250; S. Hix and C. Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 189; T. Jansen and S. Van Hecke, *At Europe's Service: The Origins and Evolution of the European People's Party* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 157–9; Johansson, 'Another Road to Maastricht', 887.

¹⁰ Interview conducted by the author, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, 15 June 2000.

¹¹ Interview conducted by the author, Brussels, 30 March 2000. See also W. Martens, *Europe: I Struggle, I Overcome* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 104–8.

EPP president, the Amsterdam outcome was a disappointment, especially as key demands in the institutional fields were abandoned, although there was some 'degree of success', such as the expansion of co-decision and the strengthening of the EP's control over the Commission.¹² In my interview with Martens, he said it was not a big result on institutional reform because Kohl 'was not willing' to agree to a 'decision' or 'solution' in this field due to problems in Germany.¹³ This was 'very different' from the 1980s and from Maastricht, when the six EPP heads of government had been 'very closely' coordinated. Maastricht had reflected the strong 'political will' to reform the Union; that will 'no longer existed' due to the focus and efforts of governments having shifted to the single currency and the Stability (and Growth) Pact, which was Kohl's main priority.

In summary, the situation at the 1996–7 IGC exposed the limitations of the EPP's influence. It was clear that the party had failed to influence the outcome more significantly, and this was because, first, it lacked the relative majority from which it had profited before and, second, there were internal divisions in the party. By comparison, the EPP's influence had been much in evidence in the two earlier treaty reforms. Taken together, these instances illustrate how the extent to which Europarties can 'make a difference' depends not only on the capacity for mobilisation and on incumbency, but also on cohesion.

Lessons learned

This chapter began with the observation that Europarties shape and are reshaped by European integration. The existing studies of Europarties, and this chapter too, have shown both their significance and limitations. The EPP demonstrated its effectiveness in the treaty reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s, while the reform that occurred in the second half of the 1990s is a powerful reminder of the constraints on Europarties to deliver on their ambitions. I conclude this chapter by sharing two overlapping lessons or takeaways from this analysis.

First, one clear lesson is that numerical strength is certainly important, but what really matters is the ability to translate ambitions into joint action. This requires a shared commitment through institutional presence and peer pressure. It also points to the need for organisational capacity.

¹² Ibid., 137–8.

¹³ Interview conducted by the author, Brussels, 30 March 2000.

Second, cohesion is essential to enable Europarties to exercise their agency effectively. The expansion of the EPP to parties from origins other than Christian Democracy has increased the party's ideological divisions, adding dissenting voices within. This development is hampering the party's ability to find a coherent voice, not least over the future of the EU itself. (So far, the EPP has said relatively little about treaty reform.) Somehow, and without undermining trust, deeper schisms must be confronted to be able to continue to shape agendas and decisions.

All of this highlights not only the EPP's influence, but also its internal divisions. In crucial ways, through collective action the EPP has been able to alter the EU's constitutional and institutional foundations forever. Put another way: despite having to meet demanding conditions, the influence of the Europarties can be profound.

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Part VIII. Conclusion

What's Next?

Klaus Welle

A vision accomplished

It is more than 30 years ago now that I, as a very young secretary general, embraced the task to make the European People's Party (EPP) the strongest political force in Europe in direct elections, pushed by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and working in close partnership with President Wilfried Martens. The adopted strategy of creating a unified space for Christian Democrats, conservatives and liberals through a process of 'mergers and acquisitions' based on a common programme has been spectacularly successful. All the European Parliament elections since have seen the EPP winning. What seemed nearly impossible then, nowadays, equally wrongly, appears to be a political law of nature.

Even the 2024 European election results present hitherto unheard of opportunities. About half of the European commissioners as well as half of the heads of state and government in the European Council are representatives of the EPP; likewise the geographical centre space in the European Parliament is also now occupied by the EPP, with majorities to the right or to the left not possible without the party.

The programme of the European Commission, as agreed for this legislature with the Parliament, clearly mirrors EPP positions, with competitiveness as

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the top priority, followed by security through defence, border protection and migration management. That agenda will now be rolled out until 2029.

Populism

But at the same time the share of seats held by the EPP has shrunk considerably over the decades. A new populist right has grown consistently since 2009, which presents not only increased political competition, but an overall threat to the political system as we know it.

Populism is the revolt of the lower middle class, with the unemployed, workers, those on lower incomes and the lower educated being overrepresented in its electorate. These voters are living from pay cheque to pay cheque without a financial buffer to react to the unforeseen, such as the spiking prices for energy or food following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. They can ill afford to buy social services on the market and are therefore more dependent on traditional arrangements for social support, such as the family.

Culturally, they hold more traditional views which are still in line with the needs of the industrial age rather than with those of the service economy of the culturally creative. Immigration represents for them additional pressure on wages and more competition for housing and state social services.

The populist electorate is voting for parties that in the aggregate support, on the European level, broadly centre-right economic policies favouring the market over the state and a reduction of regulation, in contrast to the policies of traditional Social Democratic parties. They are, though, decisively distinct from the EPP in all issues of culture, with the EPP being attached to the culturally liberal centre ground and populist parties being located in the illiberal space of politics.

Populist parties are deeply divided among themselves over how to relate to authoritarian regimes outside the EU and illiberal democracy within. Some try to overcome the political order as established after 1945 with its parliamentary democracy, pluralism, the rule of law, checks and balances, and general readiness to integrate Europe: these are the 'destructive right'. Some defend more traditional values for personal life, but accept and support the established order: the 'constructive right'.

But culture wars are not only fought on the populist right, but also on the left. On the left we see a continued effort to push an aggressive agenda to hollow out traditional concepts such as nation, border, history, gender or the family in a continuity of deconstructionist philosophy. This ongoing cultural revolution on the left fans the cultural counter-revolution on the right.

This legislature might present our last chance to contain and roll back the populist wave that has swept over Europe with increasing vigour ever since the financial crisis started in 2008. The new challenge for the EPP is not only to stay in the lead, but to stabilise and strengthen the democratic political system and parliamentary democracy.

What needs to be done politically?

Populism is driven by the experience that the system no longer delivers for the economically weaker third of society. Geographically, the digital revolution has largely happened elsewhere. Access to housing has become more problematic. Real wages over the past quarter of a century have barely moved for the less well-off. Without investment, increased productivity and inclusive growth, that will not change. The EU will have to implement the Draghi agenda.

At the same time, we do know that there is only one country that has successfully reduced the populist right: Denmark. Establishing a broad political consensus around a rigorous migration policy across the political spectrum can destroy the political business model of the populist right. Weariness about uncontrolled migration seems to be at the core of the populist revolt. Migration has to be understood not only as a cultural issue, but as a social challenge as well that endangers access to housing, proper education and social services for the less well-off.

The 2024–9 legislature will be a very long moment of truth. There are majorities for a more competitive Europe and they have to be made use of. There is a chance to better manage migration and it needs to be taken.

The EPP is a broad people's party. We will have to stay open minded, including towards the new space to our right. The 'destructive right' has to be fought against; the 'constructive right' could be a partner to cooperate with; and those that are ready to transform into a classical people's party, as the Spanish Alianza Popular once did, that are ready to sign up to our programme, can be welcomed into our family.

The stability of the political system depends on the readiness of previously more radical parties to moderate their views and move towards the centre. That is true both on the right and on the left.

The EU is built on the readiness to compromise. A continental democracy cannot be run with 51% against 49%, but has to reach out across the aisle. We need the ability to listen and understand and address new problems without ideology.

In Europe there is still time to avoid the fate of the US under Donald Trump.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Athens Basic Programme

Prologue

The New European Society

Europe is undergoing a period of considerable change. Its States and populations are having to adjust to new circumstances. European society is seeking a new identity. The end of ideological, political and military confrontation between East and West has created new openings as well as new opportunities for agreement and cooperation.

For us Christian Democrats, members of the European People's Party, this time of upheaval offers us a unique and unprecedented task. Our prime mission is to seize those opportunities offered and use them to the full. Periods of profound change also generate imponderable issues, dangers and potential for conflict.

Furthermore, our democracies are experiencing a profound crisis of values challenging the political system right down to its foundations. We Christian Democrats are aware of these dangers, temptations and the loss of direction resulting from this crisis. We cannot provide perfect solutions to overcome them but we act on the basis of fundamental values and principles which point us in the right direction.

Against Ideological Temptations

Regardless of the disappearance of Marxism-Leninism as a foundation for society in Central and East Europe, the end of ideologies is not really in sight. Rather, competition between ideologies is occurring at other levels.

At first sight, liberal ideology has many advantages. The market economy has allowed the development of living standards other systems have not yet been able to achieve. Neoliberalism, however, ignores the social dimensions of the free market economy by unilaterally stressing the individual efforts of each man and woman; which can only work against the weakest members of society. Once again, this leads to conflict and confrontation, affecting solidarity which must also be a valid part of the international context.

Ecology provides a positive contribution, striving to call upon the "best" in every man and woman to advance the quality of life. Within this ideology, however, lies the temptation to giving absolute values to nature and the earth, opposed to all technological and economic progress, resulting in the limitation of freedom and self-fulfilment of mankind, which consequently does not contribute to respect for Creation.

The most dangerous response to the fall of communism is a misplaced nationalist ideology. The feeling of patriotism and of belonging to a specific community is inherent to the existence of any human being and thus entirely legitimate. Nationalism can no longer be acceptable, however, when it becomes absolute and denies other values and responsibilities such as loyalty to the democratic state and the rights of minorities.

At first sight, socialism would seem to be the natural heir to communism. It is nonetheless also handicapped; either it uses the old model of class struggle and class opposition, a model which no longer satisfies its citizens' aspirations, or - as is the case in social democracy - it gives up the class fight but remains suspicious of civil society and intermediary bodies and gives too much priority to the activity of the State, thus all too often invading the social fabric.

We Christian Democrats see the weaknesses in these ideologies which are bound to mislead us in the end. We also reject a purely pragmatic approach to problems in society. We wish to impart a valid response to those aspiring to a more human society. Our society cannot be restricted to satisfying material needs alone. The needs of human beings in their totality and their fulfilment in the framework of a completely new society are crucial for the realization of their wellbeing.

Overcoming New Threats

European society sees itself confronted by multiple contradictory developments jeopardizing its internal cohesion.

Never before have demographic developments reached the scale of the challenge that will exist over the coming decades. Major migratory movements in the world result from overpopulation in certain regions and the attraction of developed, stable countries.

The gap between rich and poor cannot remain one of the world's greatest tragedies for much longer. European society faces the additional problem of ageing which has profound implications in terms of the organisation of society and of the need for practical expressions of solidarity and concern for others.

Economic globalization is leading to growing interdependence. But rules are still lacking for these complex and reciprocal relations which must be organized in a coherent manner. We must be watchful of the draining of natural resources through misuse and the danger of ecological catastrophes.

Scientific knowledge is a potential source of well-being and of fair distribution of prosperity. Technological innovations will help improve the quality of tomorrow's society. Nevertheless, technological and scientific developments must not be allowed to misguide man or cause him to lose his respect for nature and its limitations.

The meaningless flow of information, especially when deformed by the media, may result in the total disappearance of responsibility and the invasion of irrationality into politics. It can create a climate of instability and confusion as well as leading to apathy and the impression that there are quick and easy solutions to all problems.

The basic elements for consensus achieved in European society are being threatened by a rising wave of racism and nationalism as well as a rebirth of criminality and aggressiveness.

We Christian Democrats do not claim to have ready-made, convincing solutions to all these evolutions. Without losing sight of the threats which exist, we intend to act on the basis of the signs of hope that are appearing in our society today.

An end to the East-West conflict has opened up opportunities for lasting world peace and savings on defence expenditure so that more money can be dedicated to developing populations.

A consensus for solutions to many of the world's problems can henceforth be more easily found through international organizations, as well as the

creation of a juridical world order. We Christian Democrats rejoice in the irresistible rise of parliamentary democracy. The model for western consensus linking social market economy to democracy has achieved appreciable success.

The explicit acceptance which this combination of political and economic freedom is obtaining throughout the world is very encouraging and acts as a decisive stimulus for us to remain faithful to this model.

Understanding the Signs of the Times

Perceptions of the values of European citizens differ and often appear contradictory: a withdrawal into the private sphere; the growth of materialism, individualism and cynicism, together with the collapse of universal ideals; at the same time a commitment towards specific issues in society (single-issue politics) but also an aspiration to lead one's life on the basis of values such as responsibility, loyalty and a concern for security.

We Christian Democrats, members of the European People's Party, wish to make a positive contribution to these changes in the spiritual climate and seize these opportunities. Many citizens, whether adhering to a religion or Church or not, are willing to collaborate, to be committed and to demonstrate solidarity. Christian Democracy, on the basis of its political tradition, seeks to appeal to what is "best", to the "constructive" aspect which exists in each human individual, and to give contemporary expression to the ideals of social Christian personalism.

Chapter I

Foundations and Reference Values

Our Concept of Man

101. We Christian Democrats, members of the EPP, affirm the inalienable dignity of every human being. We regard man as the subject and not the object of history.
102. On the basis of Judaeo-Christian values, we regard every man and every woman as a person, i.e. as a unique human being who is irreplaceable, totally irreducible, free by nature and open to transcendence.
103. Each human being within society depends on others. Because they are free, responsible and interdependent, people must take part in the con-

struction of society. For many of us, what lies behind this commitment is the belief that we are called on to contribute to God's work of creation and freedom.

104. Freedom is inherent in the essential nature of man. It means that every individual has the right and the duty to be fully responsible for himself and his acts and to share responsibility vis-à-vis his neighbour and creation.
105. Everything leads us to affirm that truth is transcendent and as such is not entirely accessible to man. Our concept of freedom leads us to affirm that man is by his nature fallible. Consequently, we acknowledge that it is impossible for anyone to conceive of far less construct - a perfect society, free of all pain or conflict. We reject any form of totalitarianism based on such an aspiration.
106. In accordance with our concept of man, we affirm that all men and all women have the same dignity and are by their nature equal.

Fundamental Values

107. We affirm that every woman and every man is responsible for constantly improving the society in which they live on the basis of reference values and regulating principles defined in common. It is by applying these that they will be able to prevent, manage and settle peacefully the differences between men and the problems and challenges facing mankind.
108. Christian Democratic thought and political action are based on fundamental, interdependent, equally important and universally applicable values: freedom and responsibility, fundamental equality, justice and solidarity.

Freedom and Responsibility

109. We believe that genuine freedom means autonomy and responsibility, not irresponsible independence. It renders every person responsible for their actions according to their conscience and also before their community and the future generations.
110. According to this conception, everyone shares responsibility vis-à-vis the created world. Future generations must also be able to live in harmony with a natural environment in which each human being is an essential link in the chain. Groups, communities, peoples, nations and

states are therefore answerable for their actions to each living and future human being.

111. True justice and solidarity cannot exist unless prior to this the existence of freedom is accepted by everyone as an essential condition.
112. That is why we Christian Democrats want to enable everyone to enjoy in their daily existence the inalienable rights recognized as belonging to every man and woman and their communities. This involves both the guarantee of the right to develop and use their gifts, talents and abilities to the full, and on the other hand the obligation to offer these in service to the community and to seek at all times to apply the values of justice and solidarity in relationships with others.
113. This freedom, that is at once the condition and the consequence of the constant endeavour to apply the values of justice and solidarity, also applies to the existing authorities, both in their internal organization and in their relationship to private individuals. This also has certain implications for our Christian Democratic concept of the political system.
114. The authorities derive their legitimacy from the requirement to establish the appropriate conditions for the personal development of each and everyone on a community basis. Any authority, whether public or private and at whatever level it operates, must therefore under all circumstances protect the general interest and the common good.
115. The general interest and the common good must not be confused with the sum of individual interests. However, they must always be compatible with a proper respect for the ensemble of individual, civil and political, economic and social, cultural and collective rights of each person.
116. The right of peoples to self-determination and the free exercise of their legitimate rights cannot be invoked to deny any one person the exercise and enjoyment of his or her rights. This right of peoples is nevertheless a high form of justice given that it is the affirmation and recognition of a sense of identity and the wish to live together in freely chosen politico social structures.

Fundamental Equality

117. All human beings are equal because they are endowed with the same dignity. In relationships with others, each person's freedom is therefore limited by a respect for others' freedom deriving from the recognition of that fundamental equality.

118. Notwithstanding their differences in terms of gifts, talents and abilities, each person must be able to achieve personal development in freedom and equality at his or her own level, whatever his or her origin, sex, age, race, nationality, religion, conviction, social status or state of health.
119. The same rights must be recognized and the same duties imposed according to each person's capabilities.

Justice

120. The concept of justice means that the necessary conditions for individuals and also their communities - depending on their nature and objectives - to exercise their freedom must be guaranteed at all times. It is the characteristic of justice to attribute to each individual his due, and actively to seek out greater equality of opportunity and a life in society which is based on harmonious relations.
121. One dimension of justice is respect for the law. Laws are constantly evolving in tune with the dynamics of civilization and technical progress, but they must always have been freely accepted by men and their communities.
122. Laws must evolve on the basis of universal respect for man's fundamental and inalienable rights, as defined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. These declarations enshrining individual rights (first generation) and social rights (second generation) should be supplemented by a declaration on a third generation of fundamental rights, such as the right to information, to an unpolluted environment, to privacy and to genetic identity. All such rights must be enjoyed by both individuals and communities.
123. Justice cannot be arbitrary or confused with the dictatorship of the majority. It requires respect for the minority, to whom no majority can deny the free exercise of its rights. Justice cannot, moreover, be incompatible with fundamental rights and freedoms, which must also be taken equally into consideration in the application of law.

Solidarity

124. Justice, the fundamental equality of all men and the inalienable dignity of each individual are indissolubly linked to a spirit of solidarity. It con-

stitutes an essential component in the establishment and deepening of more humane relations between men and between their different communities as well as within them.

125. Solidarity means an awareness of the interdependence and interrelatedness of individuals and their communities. It also means practical action, sharing, effective aid, and rights and duties in relation to individuals and their communities which form part of a whole and in the final analysis fuse into the universal. Consequently, anything that happens to one person has repercussions for others.
126. For Christian Democrats, solidarity means above all protecting those who are weakest in our own society and in the world.
127. In affirming the unity of mankind in time and space, we see solidarity as not only horizontal, between living beings of all generations and all places. It is also vertical, extending to a consideration of the legitimate interests of future generations and including respect for the created world.

The Implementation of Values

128. Our concept of the person rejects both selfish individualism and collectivism as a reducing factor. Each person belongs to a community and must subordinate his or her individual interests to the legitimate authority of the community by accepting the constraints necessary for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of its other members.
129. The person is also the end of every community since the source of legitimacy of any power lies precisely in its attempts to ensure the personal development of all those subordinate to it.
130. Convinced of the inalienable dignity of man and the freedom and equality of all, we reject extremes and advocate dialogue. We reject exclusion and advocate tolerance and sharing. We want to see all people enjoying autonomy while respecting other peoples and communities and the personal convictions of each of their nationals.
131. In short, the Christian Democratic concept of man and of society focuses on the integral development of every individual in a way that satisfies his material, cultural and spiritual needs, whilst at the same time respecting the freedom of others.
132. Finally, we reject any attempt to systematize thinking within a closed or dogmatic mould.

Respect for the Created World

133. We oppose the unthinking and unjust exploitation of the earth, without respect for the self-regenerating potential of nature. Our concept of man calls for management of the earth with a view to satisfying the needs of all and improving the living conditions and quality of life of everyone, while also ensuring lasting development compatible with the protection of the legitimate interests of future generations.
134. Respect for the created world means that responsible management of the biosphere and forms of life which make up mankind's common heritage is both necessary and essential to the harmonious development of every living and future human being.
135. The developments under way in all spheres of society must not impede the potential or deplete the resources of future generations. This concept of sustainable development is bound up with that of responsible growth and must be incorporated into every policy, at whatever level of power.
136. Sustainable development means *inter alia* reconciling the requirements of the economy with those of the environment and taking account of the protection of the environment and nature when taking any economic, social or political decisions. We must act in a way that ensures that all potential is safeguarded for future generations.

Our Vision of Society

137. Our values must be applied not only in the political sphere but also in the economic, social and cultural spheres.
138. Economic development, based on the contributions of each and every person, cannot foster well-being or peace unless its fruits are equally distributed, with the aim of improving the living conditions of each person and his or her personal development. It is for this reason that we must support and develop systems of collective solidarity.
139. It is necessary to remain vigilant with regard to the danger of economic power being misused as an instrument of domination or injustice. It is therefore important to safeguard competition between market forces.
140. Finally, it is vital to try to ensure social justice and solidarity based on partnership and participation at all levels - private, national and international.
141. On the basis of these values, the Christian Democratic vision of society is based on the principle of subsidiarity.

142. The principle of subsidiarity means that power must be exercised at the level which corresponds to the requirements of solidarity, effectiveness and the participation of citizens, in other words where it is both most effective and closest to the individual. Tasks that can be performed at a lower level must not be transferred to a higher level. However, the principle of subsidiarity also means that the higher level must help the lower level in the performance of its tasks.
143. This principle is based on the premise that society can be constructed in freedom. The public authorities must therefore respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, recognize the relative autonomy of social groups and not take the place of private initiative unless the latter is weak or nonexistent.
144. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the European People's Party advocates the creation and strengthening of intra- and international conventions and bodies where they are more capable of providing a joint response to problems.
145. In this same spirit, the European People's Party encourages the activities of nongovernmental organizations and the creation of associations of every form and latitude.
146. The general application of the principle of subsidiarity allows for the permanent recognition of the particularities and specific characteristics of each person and each community whilst affirming that they form part of the universal community of mankind.
147. It encourages awareness of the need for a genuine international partnership seeking the common management of the planet and its common heritage, on the basis of respect for the irreducible differences that exist between individuals, communities, groups, peoples, nations and states.
148. The increasingly cooperative nature of this management has become all the more vital in view of the fact that the techniques that man has put in his service over the past two centuries in order to dominate nature for his profit are now putting nature - and consequently also the survival of mankind - at risk.
149. This exponential development of technical resources has also led to a general awareness of the need for a genuine international partnership aimed at the common management of the planet.
150. At the same time, this exponential development necessitates an in-depth review of the concepts of unlimited economic growth and a purely material quality of life with a view to achieving an enduring development that responds to the needs of today without endangering the liv-

ing conditions of future generations or the satisfaction of their basic needs.

151. Respect for the principle of responsibility and autonomy henceforth requires man to exercise his powers with self-restraint at every level.

Our Concept of the Political System

152. We consider that democracy is a vital condition for the development of individuals.
153. Our commitment to the development of individuals implies developing and strengthening everywhere the constitutional state in order to prevent the relationships of violence which are still found all too frequently not only between individuals but also between communities.
154. We consider that there is no alternative to democracy but that it must nevertheless be adapted to different cultural and socio-economic situations on the basis of the respect for a universal framework defined by human rights and fundamental freedoms.
155. The participation of each person in public life and in decisions that concern him or her represents an essential element of democracy.
156. Our expressed resolve to counterbalance the principle of subsidiarity with the recognition of diversity and international partnership with the participation of each person in public life, reflects a search for harmony in the framework of a constitutional state in which the common laws vital to all life in society may be defined and applied on a basis of respect for the inalienable rights and freedom of all.
157. Applying the principles of subsidiarity, international partnership, participation by all in public life (especially through free elections held at regular intervals, based on secret ballots and universal suffrage) and the constitutional state enables each person to achieve personal development based on respect for others and progress to be made towards the resolution of conflicts.
158. The limits imposed by the principle of subsidiarity also contribute to a specific separation of powers by preventing their concentration.
159. Every authority is in effect at the service of the individual. No state can therefore use the pretext of respect for its sovereignty in order to violate the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons or communities.
160. If it does, the international community of states must take protective measures, on the basis of treaties, conventions, agreements and other

texts, and even by codifying a graduated obligation to intervene, subject to strict international, democratic control.

161. The *raison d'être* of the sovereignty of states is to enable them to work freely and as best they can to ensure the well-being and development of their people and to defend and reinstate international juridical order. This also means, however, that states must share their sovereignty in supranational and international organizations where they cannot take effective action individually.
162. The European People's Party wants to help build a world that is based on freedom and solidarity, in which every man and every woman is viewed as a human being in all his or her fullness and complexity.

An Appeal to Values

163. As Christian Democrats we stress the need to distinguish between the roles of the Church and the State in society, between religion and politics. However, we reaffirm the link that exists between, on the one hand, Christian values based on the Gospel and Christian cultural heritage and, on the other hand, the democratic ideals of freedom, fundamental equality between men, social justice and solidarity.
164. These principles and values lie at the heart of the European People's Party's political thinking and action. We derive our strength and our motivation from a constant reference to our values.
165. As a Christian Democratic but non-confessional party, the European People's Party is essentially a political party of values.
166. If it rejects, forgets, neglects or dilutes its values, the European People's Party will be no more than an instrument of power, without soul or future, while also forfeiting the universal and original nature of its message, which is based on a global apprehension of the irreducible complexity of every human being and of life in society.

Chapter II

From the European Community to the European Union

201. Only the union of Europe can secure its future: a future of freedom and security, progress and solidarity. In line with the commitment to Europe

which the Christian Democrats have shown since the very beginning, the EPP calls for a gradual - but resolute - transformation of the European Community into a genuine political union on a federal model, following the doctrinal lines defined by the congresses of Luxembourg in 1988 and Dublin in 1990.

For a Federal Europe

202. A federal Europe is now more than ever a necessary and realistic political objective. It is necessary because the radical changes occurring on the European continent must take place within a structured, democratic and peaceful framework. Only a federal organization of Europe can match the aspirations and interests of Europeans who want to share a common destiny. It is realistic because history is speeding up and people are ready for an acceleration of the process of union based on delegating and sharing national sovereignty.
203. The EPP considers that only a federal construction of the European Union can: - on the hand, guarantee unity within diversity and hence respect the national identities and cultural and regional diversities that characterize Europe and result from its history; - on the other hand, ensure a common approach to the solution of common problems.
204. In the modern world there are few crucial questions that are confined to a purely national context. If the Member States want to carry out effectively the national tasks for which they are responsible, it will become increasingly urgent for them to find European solutions. That is why the Community patrimony must be preserved and developed.
205. The European Union must be founded on a relationship of federation and not subordination between it and its Member States. This federal concept will take account of local, regional, national and European levels. The European Federation will be a community of decentralized nations, not a unitary super-state.
206. The distribution of powers between the Union and the Member States and the regions must be organized on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, which means that any action by the Union will be subsidiary to action by the states and regions. The Union must therefore be granted only those powers of which it can make the best use. In other words, the Union will have competence in the areas where it can act more effectively than the Member States could individually, because the scale or effects of the actions involved go beyond national frontiers.

207. The principle of subsidiarity must henceforth be expressly applied to the activities of all the Community institutions. The national, regional and local authorities will retain their specific role and function in this context. Obviously, specifically national, regional and local powers, and the diversity which results from them, must be respected.
208. But although the states and the regions must retain sufficient and adequate autonomy, it is equally important that the Union is not subordinate either to the states or to the regions in areas where it must act in the general interest.
209. As in any federal-type system, it will be necessary to distinguish clearly between the exclusive powers of the Member States, concurrent or shared powers and the exclusive powers of the European Union, it being understood that the distribution of exclusive powers and concurrent powers may change.
210. Both exclusive and concurrent powers must be carefully defined and the Union will have only those powers which are expressly allocated to it, all other areas remaining within the power of the states or regions.
211. The Constitution of the Union will have to establish effective mechanisms and procedures for allocating areas of competence not foreseen when it entered into force. These new areas will be necessary in order to ensure that the Union remains capable of adapting to new economic, social and technological challenges and to the needs of European development and the international political situation.
212. The Union must be given all the means necessary for the achievement of its objectives and the implementation of its policies. It will therefore be given a federal-type budget with sufficient resources managed on a 'progressive' basis, taking into account the relative prosperity of each Member State.
213. In this connection, the EPP is in favour of a direct relationship between the European Community and the taxpayer, thereby also giving the European Parliament direct responsibility vis-à-vis the taxpayer. However, the financing of the European Community must take into account the financial situation of both the Member States and the Community. The attribution of fiscal powers to the Community, as provided for in the Draft Treaty on European Union adopted by the European Parliament in 1984, must not lead to an increase in the overall tax burden.
214. The EPP's institutional programme draws on the advances - and the gaps - in the Maastricht Treaty of 7 February 1992, which sanctioned the transition from the European Economic Community (EEC) to the European Community (EC) and to the European Union.

215. The Maastricht Treaty is an important step towards European Union. Its potential must be fully exploited and its shortcomings rectified.
216. Pending the future transformation of the Community into a genuine European Union, the Maastricht Treaty of 7 February 1992 has ratified a complex structure incorporating different institutional models.
217. The structure adopted by the Maastricht Treaty comprises three different "pillars".
 - 1 The first, of a federal type, is the actual Community legislative heritage (EEC, ECSC, Euratom), reinforced by Economic and Monetary Union and certain new powers.
 - 2 A second pillar, that of judicial and home affairs cooperation, is essentially intergovernmental, although some 'bridges' have been developed linking it with the Community structure. However, the Court of Justice has been expressly excluded and there is no real parliamentary control even though it is a field directly involving the rights of citizens.
 - 3 The third pillar - common foreign and security (and, in time, defence policy) remain essentially intergovernmental. But the proposed 'bridges' and other interim ad hoc procedures intended to ensure the cohesion of external policy activities may be used to promote the process of 'communitarization' by osmosis. The development of joint action in the sphere of foreign policy will require an extension of majority voting.
218. The EPP will remain watchful that intergovernmental action does not eventually take over from Community action. In particular it will ensure that the review of the Maastricht Treaty, which it hopes to see happen before 1996, will lead towards greater communitarization and restore the unitary nature of the draft treaty adopted by the European Parliament.
219. The EPP strongly reaffirms the federative vision of the Christian Democratic pioneers of Europe. It stresses that the federal goal of European integration must be explicitly included in the Treaty on European Union.

For an Effective Europe

220. The future of Community integration will depend on the Community's (or the Union's) actual ability to anticipate and resolve the specific problems of concern to its citizens.

221. The climate of uncertainty about the new European order following the collapse of the Communist regimes makes it more important than ever to strengthen the only existing stronghold, namely the Community, in its decision-making capacity and capacity for action both within and outside.
222. The Single European Act of 1986 marked a major although limited step forward in the decision-making process by providing for qualified majority voting on a dozen or so matters connected with the 1992 objective.

This resulted, among others, in the measures relating to freedom of capital movements, control of mergers, recognition of degrees and the opening of public contracts.
223. But the most important measures remained blocked:
 - 1 the objective of the free movement of persons;
 - 2 other objectives requiring Council unanimity, such as the total abolition of fiscal frontiers, were postponed;
 - 3 in some fields, such as energy, telecommunications, transport, postal services and payment systems, the internal market will still not be completed on 1st January 1993.
224. It is clear, however, that in order to attain the already established objective of the internal market - the central axis of the Single Act - the qualified majority vote has to apply to sectors formerly requiring unanimity (taxation, free movement of persons, etc). This is even more true of the new objectives which the Twelve set themselves in the Maastricht Treaty.
225. The progress of the Community towards a genuine European Union therefore implies above all an institutional system that is able to assume its responsibilities effectively.
226. First, that means meeting the new commitments entered into in the Maastricht Treaty, such as:
 - 1 increased protection for the rights of European citizens, common policies in fields such as immigration, right of asylum and help for refugees and effective combating of crossborder crime and terrorism at European level;
 - 2 formulating a common foreign and security policy, eventually to include a common defence policy;
 - 3 completing a single market on the basis of common policies and guaranteeing economic and social cohesion, growth based on respect for the environment and a high level of employment;

- 4 the creation of an Economic and Monetary Union on the basis of a single currency and an autonomous central bank, together with respect for the procedures and timetables set out to that end;
 - 5 the obligation to tackle the new Community activities decided upon in the field of social policy, energy, civil protection and tourism;
 - 6 the extension of the scale of Community powers in the fields of consumer protection, public health, research and development, industry, trans-European networks (transport, telecommunications, energy) and the European dimension of culture and education.
 - 7 lastly, respect for the principle of solidarity between the Member States.
227. Secondly, the Community must remain capable of achieving the objectives it has set itself even in the event of the accession of new Member States. Strengthening the Community institutions is in effect a necessary - though not sufficient - condition for the success of its future enlargement.
228. A debate and general decision on the institutional changes required by Community enlargement should precede rather than follow accession negotiations.
229. Decision-making - or rather co-decision-making - procedures must be substantially improved, inter alia by holding meetings of the Council of Ministers in public when they involve legislation and ensuring that they are subject to democratic control by the national parliaments.
230. The Council procedure of unanimous voting must gradually be restricted. First of all, the field of application of the qualified majority vote must be extended to areas of prime interest to the Community, such as important aspects of social and environmental policy.
231. The Commission is the Community's engine. From now onwards, its composition and powers will be more closely adapted to the needs of efficient management, taking account of the principle of subsidiarity and, above all, future enlargement. The EPP is therefore in favour of the emergence of a genuine European executive power, independent of the Council, which will hold legislative power together with the European Parliament and become a Chamber of States.
232. The distribution of powers must ensure that excessive technicalities do not impede the functioning of the Community (or the Union). The latter must deal only with clearly-defined, essential issues. The Member States and their components (regions, Länder, etc.) must ensure that Community laws and decisions are applied fairly.

233. The Court of Justice, which interprets and ensures observance of Community law, will have to be given the right to impose sanctions on Member States that do not respect its decrees.
234. The Community should be able to take executive measures directly in the event of refusal to act or even a passive attitude by the national authorities within a reasonable period of time.

For a Democratic Europe

235. Further efforts must be made to give the European Community genuine and fundamental democratic legitimacy. The commitment to democratic ideals that is shared by all the Member States - and required of all applicants for accession - must form an integral part of the Community system in general and its decision-making process in particular.
236. It is the European Parliament, elected by universal suffrage, which primarily ensures that Europe is built on a basis of democratic legitimacy. It must therefore have the final say on constitutional and legislative matters.
 - The requirement of the European Parliament's assent must be extended to new actions by the Community (Article 235 of the Treaty of Rome) and to the revision of the Treaties (Article N of the Maastricht Treaty).
 - The co-decision procedure must be simplified and apply to all laws of a general scope and throughout the legislative procedure; the Council may not decide unilaterally in the event that it does not obtain Parliament's agreement.
237. The increase in Parliament's powers must not, however, be at the expense of the Commission. Having been given greater democratic legitimacy (appointment by Parliament), the Commission must now continue to exercise its right of initiative at every stage of the Parliament-Council legislative process.
238. The national parliaments must be more closely associated with the common endeavour through the creation in all the Member State parliaments of a committee on European affairs, debates on European issues in each parliamentary session and good cooperation with the European Parliament.

For a Social Market Economy that Respects the Environment

239. As a result of their market economy structures and social guarantees, the Community Member States have achieved a better balance in industrial relations than other economic and social systems, as can be seen from the concrete achievements of social justice, social progress and social guarantees for individuals. We Christian Democrats wish to uphold the principle of the market economy and strengthen the social balance in Europe.
240. Our national economies, based on market economy structures, must be successful while at the same time taking into account the social dimension and the environment.
241. Europe will have no meaning unless it is both an economic and a social Europe. At present there is an imbalance in this respect. The social deficit therefore needs to be made up and internal cohesion strengthened as the single market is completed and Economic and Monetary Union takes shape.
242. Since the establishment of the ECSC in 1951 and the EEC in 1957, the “de facto solidarity” relating to vital economic interests has laid the foundations of an “ever closer union among the peoples of Europe”. The present stage of Economic and Monetary Union is based on the convergence of the economies of the Twelve and the definition of a single monetary policy. The inflation rates, deficits, tax policies, etc. of the Member States must converge closely enough to enable them to unite naturally and end up by adopting a single currency. The dates and constraints must be fixed firmly and respected in order to mark out the route.
243. However, the economy is not an end in itself: it is a means at the service of a concept of society based on the individual human being, that is to say on freedoms and necessary solidarity. To build Europe is therefore more than a mere economic project.
244. In any case the Community’s field of action has been gradually extended to cover matters that are not strictly economic. The EPP has advocated and supported that process.
245. The EPP’s European policy is based on a coherent conception of society, every aspect of which must form part of a balanced progression towards European Union. This choice of society is based on the Christian- Democratic principles of freedom, fundamental equality, justice and solidarity (including attempts to overcome regional inequalities), social dialogue, respect for cultural differences, a social market economy, protection of the environment and openness towards the world.

246. The EPP points out that to reduce the European ideal to economic imperatives would in the end merely multiply the constraints on solidarity. That is why Christian Democrats are in favour of a social market economy that respects the environment.
247. In line with this concept of social solidarity - which is specifically Christian-Democratic - Economic and Monetary Union must obey the rules of public interest and social justice.
248. We must guarantee that the single market is completed on an economically and socially balanced basis and that the social and environmental dimensions of Economic and Monetary Union develop harmoniously. We must also guarantee that the process of unification is based on solidarity - defined as economic and social cohesion - between the Member States and regions of Europe and on the principle of subsidiarity.
249. The objective of the social market economy must be to strengthen economic, monetary and social cooperation even further and ensure that the citizens of Europe enjoy equal opportunities, greater prosperity, better environmental protection and social progress.
250. With respect to the environment, we Christian Democrats undertake to preserve and restore the foundations of life in Europe and the world. We expressly pledge to preserve the earth for both ourselves and our children.
251. The EPP considers that environmental protection is one of the greatest challenges of the 1990s along with the preservation and development of the European social system. We can no longer allow the growing costs resulting from the impoverishment and destruction of the environment to be borne by everyone - i.e. by the state - while those responsible for pollution continue to derive profit from their socially detrimental actions.
 - 1 We want to incorporate the protection and restoration of the environment into the market economy system, unlike those who speak of an insoluble conflict between the interests of the economy and those of the environment.
 - 2 We regard the challenge of protecting the environment as a fascinating task, unlike those who are pessimistic and hostile to progress.
 - 3 We want to use the dynamism of qualitative growth to help protect the environment, unlike those who are aggressively hostile to growth and in fact reject our free society system.

We trust in solutions which go hand in hand with the market economy and with man's intelligence and desire to learn, unlike those who are content with spectacular pseudo-solutions or who call for increased public sector activity, more bureaucratic planning or more direct state intervention.

252. The EPP considers that the basic elements of European social policy are as follows:

1. the improvement of living and working conditions through the provision of an appropriate income and measures to provide jobs for all those willing to work, the creation of new jobs and measures to combat unemployment, recognition of the right to cooperation and responsibility in the economy;
2. the promotion and development of vocational training and further training and retraining measures with a view to reintegrating all those who have been excluded from the employment market and to ensuring that workers can meet the new challenges of the modern job market;
3. equal opportunities and equal rights for men and women: every policy in this sphere must aim to combat all forms of direct and indirect discrimination are all too frequently found in various sectors of activity. This principle can only be put into practice in a socio- economic context which makes it possible to reconcile family life with working life;
4. effective protection against racial discrimination;
5. the free movement and free provision of services of workers and citizens;
6. reintegration into social life of the handicapped and of victims of extreme poverty;
7. the possibility of giving legal force to European collective agreements;
8. the reduction of the disparities in social security cover in the various Community Member States;
9. the reorganization of working time to enable men and women to reconcile family commitments with working and social life;
10. the promotion of a society favourable to children and families;
11. the integration and participation of the elderly in a society based on the principle of solidarity;
12. development of rural areas.

253. The future constitution of the Union must also encompass areas of social policy which, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, cannot be dealt with by the Member States alone. The implementation and extension of the Social Charter, which has been more or less blocked by the unanimity rule, must be guaranteed. It is also necessary to promote dialogue between the social partners and work towards the emergence of collective agreements alongside or in place of conventional regulations.

For a Europe Open towards the Other Europe

254. The Community needs to be able to take stronger and more united external action in order finally to secure - or acquire - credibility on the international political scene.
255. Having served as a model of reconciliation and prosperity for the entire European continent for forty years, the Community must naturally be involved in the forefront of the democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The future enlargement of the Community to include some members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) will, moreover, help the Community in the accomplishment of this task.
256. The disappearance of the "pax sovietica" reflected the beginning of a promising process but one that was also lengthy, difficult and dangerous for the people of that part of our continent.
257. The political readjustments in Central and Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union will lead to the establishment of a new European security system. It will have to be constructed in such a way as not to exclude any nation and to respect every nation, with a view to promoting international peace and security and condemning the use of force (or the threat of the use of force) by any one country against another.
258. The transition from planned economies to open market economies throughout the world is a difficult one. In effect, it calls for a radical transformation not only of economic techniques and management procedures but also of ways of life and attitudes.
259. The European Community must therefore continue and redouble its efforts to ensure that these Central and Eastern European countries have the human and material resources they need to carry out the necessary transition - peacefully and at the lowest possible social and cultural cost - they have undertaken.
260. Another major objective of the European Community must be to encourage the establishment in Central and Eastern Europe of constitutional states that respect the individual, economic, social, cultural and collective rights of their nationals. These states will be fully integrated into the community of free democracies in Europe and the world, on the basis of strict equality between partners.
261. The European Community will also have to encourage the various Central, Eastern and south-eastern European countries to step up their trade with the West and among themselves, on the basis of regional agreements that are, where possible, multilateral.

262. At the same time as the EC states pursue economic and political integration, all the European nations together must equip themselves with the structures and resources needed to create deeper, enduring and mutually profitable pan-European cooperation on all international questions (especially those covered by the Helsinki Final Act).
263. The Community must remain open towards any other European states that may wish to share the common destiny of our twelve countries, provided that they share the values of Europe and genuinely practise multiparty parliamentary democracy and provided also that they have a social market economy compatible with ours and that their accession to the Community will not be a threat to this. Moreover, countries wishing to join the Community must accept the Maastricht Treaty and be prepared to take part in all the plans laid down therein (the internal market, Economic and Monetary Union, common foreign and security policy and cooperation in justice and home affairs).
264. The countries of the “other Europe” belong to Europe. So they must certainly “find their way back into Europe” by gradually becoming integrated into the European Community. The Community, for its part, will have to prepare itself for this, which means above all consolidating the Community, further developing the European Economic Area (EEA) and gradually consolidating the cooperation and association agreements with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
265. Any future enlargement of the Community presupposes the following:
- the gradual realization of the political and economic conditions necessary for those states that so wish to become members;
 - the creation of a network of relations designed to speed up the process of cooperation and integration in a new European order.
266. To that end, the Council of Europe and the CSCE will extend and adapt their activities, and the European Treaties and the cooperation and association agreements will also be extended and adapted in order to meet the requirements of a creative, generous and cooperative policy.

For a Security and Defence Policy in Europe

267. The end of the East-West confrontation considerably reduced the risks of large-scale armed conflict in Europe. However, the survival in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of the former Soviet Union and in neighbouring states of forces and institutions opposed to

change constitutes an enduring risk to European security. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet empire has led to a resurgence of national and ethnic conflicts, as in the former Yugoslavia, which may also explode elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Lastly, European security requires effective political control over the arsenals of nuclear and chemical weapons that are still scattered around the CIS.

268. At the same time, Europe remains vulnerable to the repercussions of what is happening in the Middle East and North Africa. The population growth in these regions, together with the growing attraction of fundamentalism (and the intrinsic problems this generates), could give rise to major instability in the region which would directly affect Europe.
269. Under these conditions, Western security structures such as NATO and the WEU have an important role to play in the system of European stability. Appropriate ways must be found to link up the Central and Eastern European states with the Western security systems in the medium term.
270. The aim of the WEU, which forms an integral part of the European unification process, is to define, in cooperation with NATO, a common defence policy that will lead as soon as possible and by 1998 at the latest to "common defence" in the framework of the European Union when the WEU Treaty is renewed after fifty years.
271. The creation of European structures within the WEU and their institutionalized cooperation with those of NATO must begin immediately. The missions of the European armed forces must be defined and provision made for the following tasks: common defence of the allies, the guarantee of independence and territorial integrity of the European Community, maintenance and restoration of peace, crisis prevention and management and/or limitation of armed conflicts, and humanitarian measures.
272. In this context, the formation of a Franco-German armed force open to all the countries of the Union, as decided at La Rochelle on 22 May 1992, will help create a stronger European identity in the framework of Atlantic solidarity. This armed force is expected to be incorporated in due course into the WEU collective defence system when the WEU becomes an integral part of the European Union.
273. The EPP attaches great importance to the continuation of the CSCE process. It would like to see its institutions and its role develop within an expanded network of relations with Europe as a whole.

For a Europe Open towards the World

274. Although the world situation (crises, conflicts, etc.) directly affects Europe, Europe itself does not always play the full part it should in world politics.
275. The European Community, the largest commercial power, will contribute to the development and regulation of international trade in goods and services on a basis of reciprocity, while at the same time ensuring that its legitimate interests are defended.
276. While continuing to seek full integration and develop their cooperation with the other nations of Europe in the areas described above, the EC states will try to maintain special ties between the two sides of the Atlantic.
277. The Member States of the European Community will attach particular importance to maintaining close ties with North America and moving towards a type of cooperation based on equal partnership. These ties are justified by their shared secular values, which have led to the development of parliamentary democracy and the universal establishment of human rights. Moreover, this kind of transatlantic understanding serves to help in the definition of a new peaceful world order based on greater respect for the rights of each and every individual.
278. In its relations with the rest of the world, the European Community will encourage and promote the conclusion of regional agreements and security, economic, social and cultural cooperation agreements, wherever such agreements prove necessary to the maintenance or search for peace, the promotion of disarmament and justice and the economic development and improved well-being of the various peoples, on the basis of respect for their fundamental rights, even in regions where the European Community is not directly involved, such as Central Asia and the Far East, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and Latin America.
279. While respecting the sovereignty of each nation, the European Community will promote human rights throughout the world. It will also give help to all those developing countries that are fighting to promote the cause of justice, defence of freedom and greater solidarity.
280. Conscious that peace is only founded on justice and that the new name for peace is development, the European Community will step up and improve its measures to promote and support economic and social progress in the Third World, particularly among those countries with which it has already concluded important cooperation agreements. Its development aid policy will extend and coordinate the Member States' financial and technological commitments.

281. The European Community must defend and promote in the United Nations the right and duty to intervene on a humanitarian basis wherever it finds that peace or human rights are being violated constantly, massively and brutally. The EPP will work to ensure that the United Nations is not only recognized as having legal powers but that it is also entitled to the logistical (including financial) support needed for the prevention of conflicts and wars, the effective application of sanctions, a permanent intervention mechanism and legal proceedings against individuals responsible for massive, prolonged human rights violations. The Community must act as a genuine regional organization for the settlement of disputes, as provided for in the United Nations Charter.
282. Lastly, the European Community will devote itself to setting up where they do not exist, and strengthening where they do, the institutions that prepare, coordinate, reinforce and regulate international and supranational cooperation, with a view to creating a universally recognized legal system. This new world system must be given real powers to deal with private or public contraventions. But it must always be based on respect for human rights, which constitute the universal point of reference and governing principle of all political, economic, social and cultural action.

For a People's Europe

283. Given that the starting point of European political integration is our common image of man, the Constitution of the Union will have to supplement the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty relating to citizenship. The Constitution will have to define clearly the rights and duties of citizens, men and women, and ensure greater legal protection for fundamental rights and civil rights by enabling individual cases to be referred to the Court of Justice.
284. The Community (or the Union) requires the active participation of European citizens. Europe is not - and cannot be - the affair of governments alone. It is the citizens themselves who must think and make Europe.
285. In this context, the EPP particularly welcomes the recognition - incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty at its request - of the irreplaceable role played by the European parties: 'Political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union.'

286. The EPP seeks the intensive participation of the citizens of Europe and the creation and development of democratic structures. It firmly supports the commitment of many citizens to democratization and participation in political responsibilities. The direct election of the European Parliament forms an important basis in that context. Thanks to the creation of European citizenship, every citizen of the European Union will be able to vote in local and European elections in his place of residence regardless of his nationality.
287. The EPP undertakes to work constantly to provide European citizens with information about the unification process. It also undertakes to defend their interests through its group in the European Parliament.
288. Just as political parties are vital to the achievement of European unification and the political and social development of a common Europe, so unions, associations and other institutions such as churches must be seen as very important to the achievement of this aim. We encourage any initiatives within and outside the EPP that are aimed at European integration and are committed to the rapprochement of the peoples of Europe.
289. To guarantee the acceptance and long-term success of the European Union, the EPP calls on the younger generation to play a large part in the process of integration. It therefore undertakes to make every effort to promote youth exchanges and the mobility of young people. It also encourages young people to take part in youth organizations and support the work carried out at European level by non-governmental youth organizations.
290. Beside the political parties and institutions bearing public responsibility, the media also have an important and vital role to play in forming public opinion. Their task of informing, educating and entertaining is linked to respect for the fundamental values of our free society. They therefore have a duty and responsibility towards the public.
291. The principle of democracy accords with the pluralism of our societies. It must be upheld on the basis of common values and principles. At the same time we must ensure the protection of minorities and divergent opinions.
292. Europe must be free from racism and xenophobia. Faced with the resurgence of such sentiments and the acts of violence which accompany them, all political, social, economic and cultural groups must be aware of the serious challenge they represent to our society and must fight hard to overcome this form of intolerance.

293. Europe will not become more democratic until its citizens have a part in the decision-making process. That requires transparent decisions. The European Union has a duty to its citizens to provide comprehensible information and make it easier for them to read Community law, particularly by speeding up the process of its codification. Internal security and measures to combat crime.
294. One of the main tasks of the authorities is to combat crime vigorously. When people no longer feel safe, they have less confidence in the authorities. Crime prevention policy must be intensified in order to deal with violent attacks and offences, crimes against the environment, fraud and organized crime.
295. The EPP hopes that the European Union will be in the forefront of this activity, aware of the need to protect the foundations of our culture and our freedom for future generations. It therefore calls for the Union institutions to pursue a resolute policy in this respect. These institutions must be given appropriate powers of inspection and sanction, and there must be systematic cooperation between Member States' police forces and administrations.
- External frontier controls must be improved and carried out within a democratically-controlled legal framework.
 - The system of tax and banking regulations within the territory of the Union must be such as to prevent criminals from evading their tax obligations or other financial control instruments.
 - The policy on legal proceedings and police investigations must be very closely coordinated and a special organization to fight crime must be set up within the Union ('Europol'). It will thereby be possible to combat international criminal organizations, particularly those involved in drug trafficking, more effectively.
296. A common immigration and asylum policy is a precondition for the success of such measures.

Ethics and Technology

297. New technological developments represent new challenges to man in his attitude to the created world. Two of the main problems of our times are the way in which Europeans use technology and what rules the authori-

ties should lay down in this field. Technological progress has brought great benefits, but as things stand, the relationship between ethics and technology needs to be reviewed, as regards:

- for instance, the protection of privacy and the attitude towards the possibilities and limits of innovation;
- whether to invest in research in Europe and the world on the basis of consumer supply and demand or other social or public interest requirements.

298. On the question of the ethical problems raised by technological progress, the EPP's position is based on the following considerations:

- A code of ethics must be drawn up in the field of genetic manipulation, the use of embryos for genetic engineering research and animal experimentation.
- Any trading in manipulated human material must be prohibited.
- The health care system must ensure that every individual receives the necessary care and treatment.

The Cultural Dimension

299. The EPP affirms that protection of the freedom of religion, social initiative and ideological pluralism must form the basis of European cultural policy. This policy must take a positive approach to the variety of intellectual and spiritual traditions that, taken together, and harmoniously linked by various exchanges of ideas and mutual initiatives, make up European culture. The European Union must treat the different intellectual and spiritual forces (churches, charitable organizations, etc.) as genuine interlocutors. While respecting the competence of the Member States and/or the regions in cultural matters, European cultural policy must encourage:

- 1 cultural and artistic events on a European scale;
- 2 awareness of European popular traditions;
- 3 initiatives reflecting the sense of European cultural identity which binds together the various cultures;
- 4 the European dimension of education and research and the promotion of the great traditional values of European culture;

- 5 freedom of information and freedom of opinion as a crucial foundation for a free society which advocates pluralism and the dependence of the media and the maintenance of a noncommercial sector.

Epilogue

As Christian Democrats, members of the European People's Party, we want to make our contribution to building a Europe and a world in which the old hatreds and new resentments dividing people make way for cooperation and efforts to work together.

We ask every man and every woman - be they Christians or not, be they believers or not - to join us in order to build together, for our children and for ourselves, a better world based on greater justice, greater solidarity and greater democracy.

From the very start of the process of European integration after the Second World War, the Christian Democrat founding fathers of the European Communities focused on the fundamental human and social dimension of their vision of the future of the peoples of Europe. Forty years later, we can see that their vision has borne fruit on an impressive scale: European unification and the European Community have been salient factors in the history of the second half of this century.

European integration is based on principles which are an essential part of Christian Democratic thinking and are now widely accepted: subsidiarity as a guiding principle in social and political organization, the decentralization of powers, a social market economy, a respect for spiritual and ethical values, an opening up to the rest of the world and a respect for the created world.

We call on all citizens of Europe to work for the development of those principles within the European Union. We Christian Democrats, members of the European People's Party, wish to continue the task of building the European Union on the basis of those principles and objectives.

Annex II: Does the European Parliament have be Socialist-dominated?

Must the European Parliament be dominated by the Socialists?

*Speech delivered by Klaus Welle, Secretary-General European People's Party on
Februar 13 1997 in the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Brussels*

Does the European Parliament have to be Socialist-dominated? - short summary -

Since 1979 the Socialists have always been the strongest parliamentary group in the European Parliament. But in only two out of the four direct elections so far have they secured a majority of votes. They owe most of their seats to the fact that there is no uniform voting system in the EU.

The whole increase in their number of seats (from 27.6% in 1979 to 34.2 in 1994) can be attributed to the British Labour Party, which grew from 17 seats in 1979 to 62 in 1994. The first-past-the-post electoral system gives Labour, with 42% of the vote, almost 72% of the seats. Meanwhile, in the other 14 EU Member States, the EPP is well ahead of the Socialists, with 163 mandates against 152. The basic problem today is a British problem.

The trend has turned strongly in favour of the EPP. While between 1979 and 1989 the party's share of seats shrank by 2.7% from 26.1% to 23.4%, and the Socialists' share grew 7.2% (from 27.6% to 34.8%), the development since 1989 has been the opposite: the EPP's share, 23.4%, grew to today's 29.1%, an increase of 5.7%. The Socialists even lost slightly.

This sea-change in the EPP's fortunes has come about through opening the EPP to parties of other traditions which only joined after January 1, 1989. Over 90% of these had no previous connection either with the EUCD or CDI.

Today's EPP has a 29.1% share of the seats in the EP. Almost 50% of the German and Spanish deputies sit in the EPP Group, though only 15% of the Italians and French. If the EPP Group is to grow, this is the area in which it needs to do so. This is a matter of cooperation with the Gaullists and Forza Europa.

As far as enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe is concerned, here the analysis holds good too, but independently of our strategy. If we limit ourselves to traditionally Christian Democratic EUCD parties, we will not achieve more than 10% cent of the seats. If, however, we open out - on the basis of our programme - to those who are already sitting in the EPP Group in the Council of Europe and/ or cooperate with the EDU, we could win up to 40% of the seats.

If the Socialists were to limit themselves to the new Social Democratic parties, they too would not achieve much more than 10%. Taking in the ex-Communists would also yield, potentially, around 40%. The integration of these parties into the Socialist party family is, however, much further down the track than the integration of Central and Eastern European parties into the EPP.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Democrats are building Europe and the Socialists are ruling it. This or similar fears are widespread. It is of course the case that Jacques Santer, a committed Christian Democrat and former president of the EPP has been at the head of the Commission since 1994. And Helmut Kohl, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Jean-Claude Juncker, Jose-Maria Aznar, Romano Prodi, and John Bruton are once more at the head of six of the 15 EU governments; Christian Democrats are also represented in a further three governing coalitions. But in the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT in particular, the situation seems to be hopeless.

The Socialist group has emerged as the dominant group from every one of the four direct elections to the EP since 1979. Worse: the gap between the EPP and the ESP is now considerably larger than in the first direct elections in 1979.

	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>12/96</u>
EPP seats:	107	110	121	157	182
share in EP	26,1%	25,3%	23,4%	27,7%	29,1%
ESP seats:	112	130	180	198	214
share in EP	27,6%	30,0%	34,8%	34,9%	34,2%

So does strengthening of the EP, for instance through an extension of majority voting, automatically imply strengthening the Socialists? Are the Christian Democrats fated to remain junior partners?

Votes show a more balanced picture

What is especially interesting is that the Socialist Group has indeed won more seats in every election, but only won a majority of votes in two out of four of those elections. The EPP won more votes both in 1979 and in 1984. Apart from that, there is a big margin between the proportion of votes and the proportion of seats.

Votes for EPP and ESP parties in European direct elections

	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1994</u>
EPP	32,8	31,0	34,5	37,2
ESP	29,5	30,2	40,7	40,3
Diff. in				
million:	3,3	0,8	-6,2	-3,1
Diff as %				
of vote:	11,2	2,6	-15,2	-7,7
Diff as % of				
seats:	-4,5	-15,4	-32,8	-20,7

These figures show that European citizens by no means automatically prefer Socialists. It seems clear that the Socialist advantage in terms of seats to a large extent derives from the fact that the European Union has neither uniform constituencies nor a single voting system.

Pronounced swings resulting from the British majority voting system

The unpredictable effects of the British majority voting system play a decisive role. As a result of the British system, an election result of Labour 3 to Conservative 2 has produced 62 Socialist Group MEPs, and a mere 18 for the EPP Group. In a purely proportional system, Labour would have had no more than half the seats.

	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1994</u>
<u>Conservatives</u>				
<u>Proportion of</u>				
<u>votes</u>	50,6	40,76	34,1	26,85
<u>Seats</u>	60	45	32	18
<u>Labour</u>				
<u>Proportion of</u>				
<u>votes</u>	33,0	36,54	40,1	42,67
<u>Seats</u>	17	32	45	62

A particularly interesting aspect of the British voting system in regard to majorities in the EP is that a minute percentage change can produce a substantial, and utterly disproportionate change in terms of how seats are distributed.

If, in the 1999 European elections - mid-term between national elections - the Conservative Party manages to recover by only a few percentage points from its historic low (of barely 27% in 1994), that could easily make a difference of 20 seats in favour of the EPP. This is not to dismiss the importance of present realities, but rather to demonstrate how labile and dynamic the situation remains.

The EPP: leading in a Europe of 14

The relevance of the British elections becomes clear when viewed in the following light: the increase in Socialist seats in the EP rose from 27.6% in 1979 to 34.2% purely as a result of the increased number of British Labour Party deputies - an increase from 17 to 62. Without the distorted British result, the EPP would be well ahead of the Socialists.

Distribution of seats in a Europe of 14 (without GB) at the end of 1996

A	B	DK	D	GR	F	FI	IRL	I	L	NL	P	S	SP	EU14
<u>EPP seats:</u>														
7	7	3	47	9	13	4	4	13	2	10	9	5	30	163
<u>ESP seats:</u>														
6	6	3	40	10	15	4	1	18	2	8	10	7	22	152

This table shows very clearly, not only that the EPP can not only keep pace with the Socialists in 14 out of 15 EU states, but is even ahead of the ESP by 11 seats.

The capacity of the EPP to command a majority in the EP is largely dependent on strong representation in Great Britain.

The tide has turned

In order to analyse the development of who holds the majority in the EP, it is also worth distinguishing between two different periods: 1979-1989, and 1989-96.

The decade of 1979-1989 the Socialists fought for and achieved their position as the major group in the EP. While the Socialists increased their share of the seats by 7.2% - from 27.6% (112) to 34.8% (180), the EPP's share went down from 26.1% (107) to 23.4% (121). The gap between the EPP Group and the Socialist Group grew by 10 percentage points: the Socialists ended up with almost 50% more seats than the EPP.

The development since 1989 is different. While the Socialists are stagnating at maximum 35%, the EPP Group has added another 5.8% and since 1992 has hovered around an average of 29%.

From 1989 to the present there appears to be a new dynamic in the EPP. This has not only stopped the Group's collapse in importance during the previous decade and/or stabilised the EPP at a low level; it has even led to substantial growth for the Group.

Growing strength thanks to opening out to parties from other traditions

This conclusion is astonishing given the problems which Christian Democracy had to face, and still has to face: the collapse of the Italian Democrazia Cristiana, which - along with the Benelux parties and the CDU/CSU - was one of the three fundamentals of Christian Democracy in Europe. Moreover, the EU is in process of expanding into countries which have either no Christian Democratic parties, or only very weak ones. And in the background are constant secularisation and looser and looser adherence to churches in every EU member state.

Growth after 1989 is the fruit of opening the party, and the parliamentary group, to groupings from other political traditions which are ready to make politics on the basis of a common programme. Eighteen British and three Danish conservatives, along with eight French UDF and Portuguese PSD deputies - formerly members of the Liberal Group - made such growth possible. Taking into both the Group and the party the Swedish Moderaterna and Finnish Kokoomus - neither of them traditional Christian Democrats - ensures EU enlargement to Scandinavia did not result in any raids on the EPP's improving position.

What this means is that, if the EPP is in a better situation today than it was, the reason is that it has succeeded in winning over like-minded parties from other traditions to work together on the basis of a common programme, and in that way to be present in every Member State - and not because the EPP's veteran member parties have substantially increased their popularity. Almost 50% of the Group's members (88 of 182) are from parties which only decided in the last seven years - since 1989 - to join the EPP party or Group. Over 90% of this group (all apart from the OeVP in Austria) had no previous connection with cd, belonging neither to the CDI nor to the EUCD.

Potential goals - an analysis of strengths and weaknesses

It is of decisive importance, as far as the issue of building a future majority in the EP is concerned, which new partners can potentially still be won to our cause. A significant indicator may be the extent to which individual national potential has been exhausted.

The first point to grasp is that the EPP has substantial membership from all 15 Member States in the EU. The evident gaps in four EU countries have been closed: by the Partido Popular in Spain joining in 1989, by the Danish and British conservatives in 1991, and the Portuguese people's party PSD/PPD in November 1996. Bringing in Finnish Kokoomus and Sweden's Moderaterna at the right time ensured no new gaps were created.

The EPP Group now has altogether 29.1% of the seats. An interesting picture emerges if the following scenarios are considered: 10% swings up or down as above or below average, and swings of more than 10% as very much above or below average.

Representation in all smaller and medium-sized EU countries, with the exception of Denmark, hardly varies from the average. The number of German and Spanish mandates, by contrast, is much above average, with almost 50% of the seats accorded to these countries; while Italy and France are far below the average, with c. 15%.

At the same time, the Italian and French delegations in the EPP Group also have by far the most party-political splits. The French delegation is made up of three parties, and also has one direct UDF member. The Italian delegation is made up of five parties, plus one independent. The proposal by the 41-strong Forza Europa/ Gaullist Group to cooperate closely with the EPP Group, and to institutionalise such cooperation, indicates movement in these two countries, both of them of key importance to the EPP.

The EPP's potential targets: Italy and France

Democrazia Cristiana did not collapse merely because of its many years in office, and the Italian system of party finance: its idea of *cd* was also at the root of its failure. DC was seen as a collectivity of Catholics almost independent of a political programme or locus. The DC was not a programme party, and in conception was closer, if anything, to the Zentrum Party [in Germany before the Second World War] than to the CDU. It was held together by common opposition to the Italian Communist Party.

The current re-arrangement of the party system should therefore not be seen in terms of decline but rather - and above all - as a difficult modernisation process.

The voters of the political middle-ground are now spread among numerous parties and groupings, all of which see themselves as belonging to the centre: the successor parties of the DC, the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI), Christiani Democratici uniti (CDu) and Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD), the Patto Segni/ Lista Dini, the South Tirolese Volkspartei, and Forza Italia.

It will be one of the EPP's tasks to help overcome the disintegration of the party landscape, and to help establish a new people's party of the centre on the basis of a modern programme. In that sense the situation in Italy resembles that of Spain before the Partido Popular was founded. The opportunities are there. Here lies the key to a strong Italian delegation in the ep.

The French Gaullists were invited, even before the 1994 European elections, to joining the EPP Group in the EP. It is worth noting the very pro-European orientation of the new French President and government, both of which have taken positions substantially closer to the EPP. The Gaullist delegation in the EP seeks closer cooperation with the EPP Group.

Potential goals - analysis of the ESP's strengths and weaknesses

The ESP is, like the EPP, represented in all EU countries. Like the EPP it wins more than 30% of the seats in seven countries, in five countries between 20 and 30%, and in three countries less than 20%.

Great Britain is well above average, with 71.3% of the seats, while Ireland is in single digits. Apart from Fine Gael, the other big people's party Fianna Fail is a member of the "Union pour l'Europe (UPE)".

What is also astonishing is the equally weak Socialist position in France and Italy.

While it is scarcely conceivable that more than 70% of the British mandates can be retained in the long term, there is potential for improvement in France. The *Tapie* list *Energie Radicale*, which in 1994 was able to win over many voters disappointed by the Socialists, faces a more-than-uncertain future. The Socialists have the wind behind them, not only in the presidential elections, but also in every current opinion poll.

The position in Italy, while still weak, does however reflect the situation after taking in the post-Communist PDS, Italy's old Communist Party.

On the way to a bi-polar European system of parties

The EP has, since the first direct elections in 1979, progressively evolved towards a bipolar system. Every direct election has seen the growth of support for the EPP and the ESP .

	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1994</u>
<u>EPP + ESP</u>	53,7	55,3	58,2	62,6

After the first direct election, the EPP and the Socialists secured a good half of the seats, and at the end of 1996 hold 63.3%, not quite two-thirds. Those figures conceal a series of decisions to integrate. No other group has even 10% of the seats. Apart from the EPP and the esp, only the Liberal Group, only the Communist Group, and the coalition group of European Democrats have endured throughout the period from 1979.

The European Democrat Group made up, in 1979, 1984, and 1989, from British and Danish conservatives was fused with the EPP Group in 1991. The change of the UDF-France (1994) and PSD-Portugal (1996) from the Liberals to the EPP Group has made a considerable contribution to the reduction of the Liberals' share of the seats by about a third - from 9.9% in 1979 to a current 6.7%.

The former Italian Communist Party's joining the ESP as the PDS has substantially reduced the Communist Group and left it in 1994 with 4.9% : less than half the 10.8% it had in 1979.

Their enormous influence in the EP, but also the possibility of enhanced cooperation, especially with heads of government of major EU countries in the EPP and esp, has enormous attractions for like-minded parties, and has led to substantial growth in the EPP and ESP and the development of a bipolar structure in the EP. This trend is continuous and may well continue.

Effects of EU Enlargement to the East

Negotiations about EU enlargement will begin six months after the conclusion of the IGC - in early 1998, as things look at the moment. Ten countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania) have applied for membership. The first countries should join in the next EP legislature, between 1999 and 2004.

The current system would give these 10 countries 234 seats, namely 40% of the current number of EP deputies. Of those, 50% (123) would go to the four states with

the biggest chance of joining in the first round: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia. Of these four states, Poland would have 64, more than half, Strategy over the next few years towards these four states, especially Poland, is therefore crucial.

The EPP's chances in Central and Eastern Europe

It is hard at the moment to predict how many deputies from Central and Eastern Europe can be expected. The first new members will only arrive in a few years' time. Beyond that, the party systems in a number of countries are not yet fixed (Poland, Estonia, Latvia). But it is possible to explain how things would look today. How many deputies could the EPP count on today if deputies arrived in the EP on the basis of the parties' current strengths in national parliaments?

It can be assumed a priori that deputies from EUCD member parties would join the EPP Group. When the EU expanded northwards all deputies from veteran EDU member parties also joined the EPP Group, and their parties are now full members of the EPP. Beyond that, those who are already members of the EPP Group in the Council of Europe are highly likely to join the EPP Group in Parliament.

If the EPP limited itself to EUCD member parties it would not achieve more than 10%. If EPP Group members in the Council of Europe and the EDU are included then there is a potential of up to 40%. The party also has excellent possibilities in Central and Eastern Europe. How far these can be realised depends on the extent to which potential partners are willing to subscribe to the EPP programme, and it also depends on the openness of the EPP itself.

The ESP's chances in Central and Eastern Europe

Public opinion, and above all media opinion, regards the Socialists as the strong force in Central and Eastern Europe. One of the main contributory factors has been the collapse of a whole series of moderate parties after 1992, particularly in Poland and Hungary. But, at the end of 1996, the reform process is already in its third phase. In Lithuania and Romania the reform Communists have been toppled, and in Bulgaria the parties of the political centre won a clear victory in the presidential elections. The 1997 Polish and Hungarian elections will demonstrate whether or not this trend is a permanent one.

If the ESP depended only on the newly-founded Social Democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe, it would not attain more than 10% of the seats. Taking in the former Communist parties would give it, potentially, around 40%. The fact that such integration has already taken place in Poland and Hungary suggests that a decision has already been reached to go down this road.

THE CHALLENGE

The central task: development of a common identity

Developing an effective common counter-balance to the Socialist in Europe, and the construction of a majority political group in the European Parliament, is only possible by taking in parties from other political traditions, but similar programmes. If this process is to be successful it demands the development of a common political identity.

This challenge is entirely on all fours with the construction of the CDU from the traditional Christian-Social, Liberal-libertarian, and conservative elements after the Second World War. This successful avoided the repetition of the splits in the party landscape during the Weimar Republic.

It should not be forgotten that the elections results of the Zentrum Party melted away continuously over 60 years, from 27% in 1874 to 11% in 1933. The once fertile soil which had nurtured a Catholic confessional party had disappeared.

The real bases for Christian Democratic programmes are integrative concepts like personalism (freedom and responsibility), the social market economy, subsidiarity, and European integration on federal lines (region, nation, Europe). Ideas are combined which others present as insoluble contradictions. The everyday political task remains to find the right balance according to whatever are the valid challenges to be faced. This is the foundation-stone on which new parties can be integrated.

Over more than two centuries, Christian Democracy in Europe has achieved a whole series of significant results in terms of integration.

It built the bridge between church laity and the workers' movement in the second half of the 19th century. Christian Democracy, in many countries, is substantially responsible for ensuring, in many countries, that workers could develop a genuine reform programme within the system, and did not become radicalised.

The reconciliation between the church and democracy and liberalism under the rule of law.

The integration of Catholics, Protestants, and also Orthodox believers in a common national political movement. Today all this seems entirely uncontroversial, but it was not always so. Only at the beginning of the '70s, for instance, did the three Christian Democratic parties in the Netherlands, Catholics and Protestants, come together in one party.

Liberalism, which denies responsibility towards the community, is rejected. So is Socialism, which seeks to take over all responsibilities from the individual. But liberal and social impulses and ideas are welcome.

* * *

* *

Annex III: St. Augustin Resolution

St. Augustin resolution, 22.01.98

1. **The EPP is committed to shape a democratic Europe according to its principles and programmes. For that we need a majority in the European Parliament.**
2. **There must be no serious partycoalition to the right of the EPP. This depends for a great deal on the EPP's capacity to integrate new member parties.**
3. **This means that the EPP remains open to people's parties from the centre-right.**
4. **The crucial strategic question is whether we are successful in bringing in particular all the centre-right parties in France into the EPP. That will require a substantive discussion with the RPR.**
5. **We are in favour that Forza Europa becomes part of our Group in the European Parliament.**
6. **We would like to see a development in Europe which brings pro-European Christian Democratic and conservative parties together in the EPP. The same applies to the global partystructure which must assemble the Christian Democratic and conservative parties in a reorganized Worldunion.**

President Martens concludes:

1. This text is strictly internal and not for publication although we agree upon the content;
2. Key element remains the RPR, therefore the President wants to speak with Chirac, Hague and the EPP government leaders;
3. We must be very careful with our italian colleagues and with John Bruton.

7. *Planning 1998*

The Secretary General comments the updated planning for 1998, which is accepted by the Presidency

- The Council meeting in Warsaw had to be cancelled because there was only a joint meeting Council-Group possible.
- In March or April an EPP Councilmeeting could be held either in Prague or Warsaw. On the proposal of De Sousa the EPP-Council will be held on Monday

16 March in Prague, including also CEE-party leaders from applicant countries.

- On 10/11 September we could hold a Europe-Asia-Forum in Brussels.
- Presidency: 18/19 April and 18/19 September: Cadenabbia, 4/6 December: Madeira

5. *European Elections*

1. *Working group "Action Program"*: see note of the Secretary General in annexe. The first meeting has been very successful with a good presence. The timeschedule has been fixed.
2. *Working group "Campaign"*: the Secretary General will have a meeting with Othmar Karas (SG of ÖVP) who presides this working group.
3. *Cooperation of EPP member parties in elections*: M. Rebelo De Sousa would like to see some guidelines elaborated for member parties in elections.

The President closed the meeting at 18.00

Klaus WELLE
Guy KORTHOUDT

Annex IV: Athens Group's Declaration

24.JUN.1998 18:05

MARTENS 32 2 28497693

NO.7802 P.3/4

"ATHENA" group

Brussels

23/06/98

Declaration

The recent entry of 20 MEP's of Forza Italia in the EPP group caused a lot of worry amongst the EPP member parties. Several member parties strongly opposed this new enlargement of the EPP group. On June 23, 1998 these parties established the "Athena" group, within the EPP, in order to protect and to promote the basic programme of the EPP, which was accepted in Athens in 1992, particularly the continuation of the European federal integration and the development of the social and ecological market economy. It is our purpose to unite those EPP member parties that share the same concern.

The Athena group attaches great importance to the basic principles of the EPP, as well as to its authenticity. Every European political party wants to become the largest, but the best way to do so is by winning the elections, rather than by bringing in increasingly more new parties who do not share our fundamental identity and principles. There are limits to the natural extension possibilities of the EPP in the light of those principles. If those limits are passed, the EPP will be bigger but it will lose its identity. The Athena group wants the limits to the extension possibilities to be defined clearly. We do not want a Left-Right division in European Parliament. It clashes with our political nature and with our political position. We do not wish to be part of such an artificial division. Therefore we are against the integration of the EDU in the EPP.

To convince the European citizens to vote for the EPP parties, we need to have strong programmes with a great persuasiveness. We must never abandon our convictions or become a grey collection of non-socialist parties, without a positive identity. The EPP must therefore remain a people's party, a centrist movement relying on authentic Christian and personalist values, as laid down in our Athens basic manifesto and a party with a strong European federal conviction.

John BRUTON, president of the Athena group (Fine Gael)
 Hans HELGERS (Christen-Democratisch Appel)
 Erna HENNICOT-SCHOEPGES (Christlich Sozial Volkspartei)
 Marc VAN PEEL (Christelijke Volkspartij)
 Xabier ARZALLUZ (Partido Nacionalista Vasco)
 Franco MARINI (Partito Popolare Italiano)
 Philippe MAYSTADT (Parti Social Chrétien)
 Josep DURAN i LLEIDA (Unió Democràtica de Catalunya)

Index

A

Adenauer, K., 7, 53, 62, 96
Albrecht, E., 115
ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and
 Democrats for Europe), 9, 167
Alianza Popular, 39–46, 123, 140
Anavatan Partisi, 118, 126
Antall, J., 94, 101
Arvonen, J., 9
Athens document, *see* Athens
 Programme
Athens Group, 7, 141
Athens Programme, 2, 22, 25,
 27, 28, 140
 See also Basic Programme
Aznar, J.M., 6, 9, 35, 39–46, 60,
 61, 65, 159
Azzolini, C., 7, 153

B

Barroso, J.M.D., 4, 6, 10, 62, 157
Basic Programme, 7, 15–29, 140, 141
 See also Athens Programme
Bautista, D., 87
Bayrou, F., 141, 167

Berlusconi, S., 7, 35, 36, 51, 59, 61,
 62, 141, 146, 154
Bertrand, M., 75–77
Bianco, G., 7
Bildt, C., 3, 9, 52
Böx, H., 113
British Conservative Party, 36, 112,
 124, 140
 See also British Conservatives
 and Tories
British Conservatives, 3, 5, 8, 9, 49–55,
 87, 134, 140, 141, 151–153, 168
 See also British Conservative Party
 and Tories
British Young Conservatives, 74, 75
Brodbeck, S., 76, 77
Bruton, J., 28, 29
Burke, E., 17, 21, 40
Busek, E., 93
Buttiglione, R., 7

C

Cameron, D., 54, 55, 134, 152
Čarnogurský, J., 66
Casini, P.F., 7

Castagnetti, P., 7
 CCD (Centro Cristiano Democratico),
 6, 7, 141
 CDA (Christen Democratisch Appèl),
 17–20, 22, 87, 99
 CD&V (Christen-Democratisch &
 Vlaams), 33, 36, 61, 145
 CDJA (Christen-Democratische
 Jongeren Appèl), 87
 CDS-PP (Centro Democrático e
 Social–Partido Popular), 153
 CDU (Christlich Demokratische
 Union), 114, 122, 125
 CDU (Cristiani Democratici
 Uniti), 125
 Centrist Democrat International, 94
 Chirac, J., 8, 51, 59, 94, 113, 117
 Christian Democratic Union of Central
 Europe, 93
 CSU (Christlich-Soziale Union), 7, 9,
 80, 113, 114, 121, 122, 125,
 134, 140
 CVP (Christelijke Volkspartij), 114,
 122, 126
 CVP-Jongeren, 77

D

Daul, J., 8, 62, 163, 165–172
 David, M., 154
 De Gasperi, A., 53, 62, 96
 Dehaene, J.-L., 9, 65, 146
 de Jager, J.K., 82
 Delors, J., 15, 50, 96
 Democrazia Cristiana, 1, 2, 5–7, 35,
 60, 61, 75, 141, 155
 DEMYC (Democrat Youth
 Community of Europe), 2–4, 10,
 73–76, 80, 81, 86, 87
 DISY (Dimokratikos Synagermos),
 123, 125

E

EAJ-PNV (Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-
 Partido Nacionalista Vasco), 140
 ECG (European Conservative
 Group), 49, 51
 ECR (European Conservatives and
 Reformists), 55
 EDG (European Democratic Group),
 49, 51, 140, 151, 162
 EDS (European Democrat Students),
 4, 86, 88
 EDU (European Democrat Union),
 1–4, 8, 9, 17, 73, 74, 94, 95,
 107–109, 111–118,
 121–128, 141
 Elles, J., 54
 EPP–ED Group, 52, 127,
 152, 155, 157,
 158, 169
 EPP Group, 4, 7–10, 28, 33, 36,
 37, 50–55, 61, 62, 102, 117,
 124, 127, 134, 140–142,
 152–154, 157, 159, 160, 162,
 163, 165, 166, 168, 169,
 176, 178
 EUCD (European Union of Christian
 Democrats), 8–10, 73, 74,
 93–95, 97, 99–103, 112–114,
 121, 133, 139
 EYCD (European Young Christian
 Democrats), 2, 3, 73–77,
 81, 86, 89

F

Fianna Fáil, 7, 36, 153
 Fidelitas, 87
 Fidesz, 125, 168, 169
 Fine Gael, 82, 85–87, 141
 Fomenchenko, G., 86
 Forza Europa Group, 60, 153

Forza Italia, 6–8, 35, 36, 51, 59–62,
87, 123–125, 127, 141, 146,
147, 153–158, 166
Forza Italia Giovani, 87
Fraga, M., 43

G

Galeote, G., 154
Gaullist(s), 7, 8, 36, 53, 54, 112,
116, 122
Giscard d'Estaing, V., 59, 88

H

Hague, W., 52
Hahn, M., 82, 86
Hajdinjal, V., 76, 77
Hanns Seidel Foundation, 143
Harbour, M., 52
Harmon, J., 82
Havel, V., 94
HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska
zajednica), 9
Hebben, R.-J., 87
Hennig, O., 7
Höckmark, G., 169
Howard, M., 152
Høyre, 3, 114, 122, 126
Hurd, D., 50

I

IDU (International Democratic
Union), 117

J

Jackson, C., 52
Jansen, T., 2, 21, 94, 179
Jędrzejewska, S., 86, 88
Jeunes PSC (Parti social chrétien), 77
Jeunes UMP (Union pour un
mouvement populaire), 87

JKKD (Junior klubu křesťanských
demokratů), 87
Juncker, J.-C., 9, 10, 65, 86,
133–135, 163
Junge Union, 3, 75, 76, 80, 87

K

Karamanlis, K., 86
Karas, O., 169
Katainen, J., 86
KDH (Kresťanskodemokratické
hnutie), 65, 66, 68, 126
Kekkonen, U., 108
Khol, A., 9, 107, 108, 111–122
Kok (Kansallinen Kokoomus), 114,
122, 125
Klepsch, E., 7, 152
Kohl, H., 1–4, 6, 7, 9, 15–20, 27, 35,
60, 62, 65, 94, 95, 113, 117,
134, 140, 153, 154, 161,
180, 187
Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 7,
18, 24, 143
Konservative Folkeparti, 114, 122,
125, 141
Korthoudt, G., 1
Kristdemokraterna, 141
Kristendemokraterne, 141

L

Letta, E., 2, 94
Loyola de Palacio, I., 160
LR (Les Républicains), 20, 165
Lubbers, R., 17, 19, 20, 22,
139, 179

M

Macron, E., 9
Major, J., 50, 52, 140
Marini, F., 7
Maritain, J., 16, 21

Martens, W., 2, 3, 5–7, 9, 16, 18–20, 22, 25, 28, 29, 33–37, 43, 51, 61, 62, 65–67, 73, 75, 77, 82, 89, 94, 95, 101, 133, 139, 141, 145–148, 152–154, 159–164, 167, 170, 171, 179, 180, 187

Mečiar, V., 65–67

Merkel, A., 157, 162, 163

Metsola, R., 86

Mitsopoulou, E., 82

Mitterrand, F., 139

Mock, A., 93, 94, 108, 115

Moderaterna, 81, 83, 112, 113, 115, 141

Mounier, E., 16, 21

Murphy, B., 76, 77

N

Néa Dimokratía, 2, 86, 114, 122, 123, 125

NG PPCD (Noua Generație
Partidul Popular Creștin
Democrat), 87

NG SLS (Nova Generacija Slovenske
ljudske stranke), 87

Niinistö, S., 9, 107–118

NNGG (Nuevas Generaciones),
75, 82, 87

Nouvelles Équipes Internationales, 73,
74, 100, 133

O

ODS (Občanská demokratická strana),
125, 152

ONNED (Youth Organisation of New
Democracy), 82, 86, 87

Orbán, V., 168, 169

ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei), 9,
17, 36, 93, 112–117, 122, 125

P

Partido Popular, 2, 5, 17, 35, 36,
39–46, 51, 60, 87, 126, 140,
151–153, 162, 166

Partito Democratico, 7, 9

Patten, C., 50, 140

PDP (Partido Demócrata Popular), 140

PDSH (Partia Demokratike e
Shqipërisë), 9, 125

Peterlik, M., 76, 77

Pflimlin, P., 166

Plumb, H., 49, 153

Political Spring, 153

Pösentrup, M., 75, 86

Pöttering, H.-G., 28, 95, 151–158,
162, 169

PPI (Partito Popolare Italiano), 6, 7,
60, 61, 141

Prodi, R., 155, 156

Prout, C., 50, 54, 140

PSD (Partido Social Democrata), 6, 36,
123, 126, 141

PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero
Español), 43, 44

R

Rebelo de Sousa, M., 6

Reinfeldt, F., 4, 74, 76, 77, 79–84, 94

Renew Group, 9

Rinsche, G., 7

Robert Schuman Foundation (for
Cooperation among Christian
Democrats in Europe), 143

Robert Schuman Institute, 102,
103, 143

RPR (Rassemblement pour la
République), 8, 51, 60, 114, 122,
124, 125, 127, 153–158,
165, 166

Rudloff, M., 166

S

- S&D (Socialists and Democrats)
Group, 10
- Sandu, M., 171
- Santer, J., 94
- Sarkozy, N., 8, 87, 155, 165
- Schlüter, P., 117
- Schröder, G., 155
- Schulz, M., 163, 170
- Schuman, R., 53, 62, 96
- Schüssel, W., 9, 65
- SDK (Slovenská demokratická koalícia), 65, 66
- SDKÚ (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia), 66–68
- Séguin, P., 8, 154
- SKD (Slovenski Krščanski Demokrati), 93, 95
- Smyrlis, Y., 86
- SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), 117
- Strauss, F.J., 113
- Sturzo, D.L., 16, 21, 60, 62
- Sudre, M., 166

T

- Tajani, A., 8, 59–62, 153, 163, 169
- Taus, J., 113–115
- Thatcher, M., 17, 25, 50, 113, 139, 140
- Tindemans, L., 17, 113, 152
- Tobisson, L., 112, 113, 115, 117, 118
- Tories, 17, 112, 113, 116
See also British Conservatives and British Conservative Party
- Trump, D., 23, 189
- Tuđman, F., 94
- Tusk, d, 62, 86, 163

U

- UCD (Unión de Centro Democrático), 44, 114, 122
- UDC (Unió Democràtica de Catalunya), 140
- UDF (Union pour la démocratie française), 166, 167
- UFE (Union for Europe) Group, 60, 61
- UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire), 8, 87
- Ureña, B., 77, 82

V

- Van Hecke, J., 141
- Van Peel, M., 145–148
- Van Velzen, W., 9, 99–104
- Varadkar, L., 4, 85–90
- Vogel, B., 115, 117
- von der Leyen, U., 10, 62, 118, 161, 171
- von Nell-Breuning, O., 16, 21

W

- Weck, W., 76, 77, 82
- Welle, K., 1–10, 28, 51, 53, 75, 76, 94, 102, 157, 162, 169, 187–189
- Wintoniak, A., 9, 107, 112, 114, 115, 117, 118, 121–128

Y

- Yilmaz, M., 122
- YEPP (Youth of the European People's Party), 4, 73–77, 79–83, 85–89
- YFG (Young Fine Gael), 82, 85–87
- YUDF (Youth Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria), 87