

## European political groups

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In the early 1970s, there were still no transnational political groups in Europe. Since the late 1940s, European movements affiliated to political parties or European confederations of political parties have been created, i.e. the Christian-Democratic *Nouvelles équipes internationales* (New International Teams, NEI), the Socialist Movement for a United States of Europe or the Liberal Movement for a United Europe. However, these pressure groups did not really constitute genuine political parties.

In the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and later in the European Parliament, Members combined their efforts in accordance with their ideological allegiances: Liberal, Christian Democrat or Socialist. They agreed not to form national groups in order to foster a Community spirit which would transcend national antagonisms. The same applied to the Council of Europe's Consultative Assembly.

The major political families combined more closely in the run-up to the first direct elections to the European Parliament, but they generally went no further than to develop relatively loose structures of a confederal nature. The 'European parties' experienced difficulties in drawing up a coherent electoral platform for the European Parliament elections. On the eve of the first elections by direct universal suffrage, six political groups had been formed in the European Parliament: the Socialist Group (66 Members), the Christian-Democratic Group (53 Members), the Liberals and Allies Group (27 Members), the Group of the European Progressive Democrats (17 Members), the European Conservative Group (17 Members) and the Communists and Allies Group (17 Members). The European Parliament, with a total of 198 seats, also includes 'Non-attached' Members who are independent of any political party.

### The European Socialist Party

The Socialist Parties combined at international level in the Socialist International (SI), established in the 19th century. Since the schism in the Socialist Movement after the Russian Revolution in October 1917, the Social Democrats formed the Second International, also known as the Amsterdam International, while the Communists set up the Third International, governed by Moscow.

With an international cooperation structure much broader than the European Community framework, the Socialists were reluctant to set up a well-structured federation at European Parliament level. Nevertheless, on 23 June 1953, the Socialists in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community formed a separate parliamentary group. In October 1958, they set up a liaison bureau which held half-yearly meetings for the Socialist Members of the European Assembly.

The Socialist Congress held in Brussels in June 1971 established a supranational structure aimed at strengthening relations between the Socialist and Social Democratic Parties and the Socialist Group of the European Parliament known as the Liaison Bureau of Socialist Parties of the European Community. This was succeeded by the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC), a regional organisation linked to the Socialist International created by the Socialists on 5 April 1974, specifically with a view to the direct elections to the European Parliament. The CSPEC, which covered the entire territory of the Europe of the nine, took no public part in the election campaign but acted more as a coordination body.

Against the background of a persistent economic crisis, the Socialists experienced great difficulties in establishing a joint manifesto. They were represented in every Member State, and the national election concerns of the various parties were frequently more important than the desire to draft a joint manifesto. The economic and social difficulties were not conducive to the reaching of an agreement. Of course, the Socialists in the Community generally supported European integration, but they did not always agree on the role of the Community and on that of the institutions. They objected to the political nature of European integration, and the Social Democrats expressed strong demands for a Socialist Europe true to the Welfare State so as to combat unemployment more efficiently. The CSPEC met in Elsinore (Denmark) in January 1976 to try to draft a common election manifesto. On 23 and 24 June 1978, leaders of the Socialist Parties of the European Community met in Brussels to adopt a common policy slogan and officially to launch the

European election campaign. The joint manifesto focussed on reducing unemployment, improving working conditions, protecting the environment, training and education, and the enlargement of the European Community.

In the June 1979 European Parliament elections, the Socialist candidates secured 26 % of the votes cast and 113 seats out of 410. The Socialist Group was therefore the largest political group in the elected European Parliament.

### **The European People's Party**

The *Nouvelles équipes internationales* (New International Teams, NEI) a pro-European federalist movement set up in 1947, became the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) in December 1965 at the Group Congress held in Taormina. The EUCD collaborated with the Christian-Democratic Union of Central Europe (CDUCE), founded in New York in 1950, and with the Christian-Democratic World Union established in Santiago de Chile in 1961.

The EUCD, the umbrella organisation for eighteen parties in the countries of the European Community as well as in Austria, Spain, Malta, Portugal and Switzerland, constitutes the European wing of the Christian Democrat World Union (CDWU). On 27 April 1970, a Permanent Conference of parliamentary groups and Christian-Democratic parties in the Member States of the European Community was also founded. The following year, the Permanent Conference in turn established a Political Committee of the European Community's Christian-Democratic parties.

On 8 July 1976 in Luxembourg, the European People's Party (EPP) became its official successor under the chairmanship of Leo Tindemans, Belgian Prime Minister and former President of the EUCD. Established in the run-up to the first elections to the European Parliament by universal suffrage, the EPP, which has its seat in Brussels, was a federation of the European Community's Christian-Democratic parties. Included were: the German Christian-Democratic Union (CDU/CSU), the Walloon Christian Social Party (PSC) the Flemish Christian People's Party (CVP), the French Social Democratic Centre (CDS), Ireland's Fine Gaël, the Italian Christian Democracy (DC) the South Tyrol People's Party (SVP), the Christian Social People's Party of Luxembourg (PCS-CSV), the Dutch Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the Greek New Democracy Party (ND). The EPP was also open to observers from Christian-Democratic parties in the applicant countries seeking accession to the European Communities: the Portuguese Social Democratic Centre (CDS) and the Spanish *Equipo democrata cristiano des estado*. The EPP had no British or Danish representatives. Every party affiliated to the EPP, which became more and more heterogeneous as its membership increased, remained wholly autonomous.

Today, the European People's Party is the European political group with the most intricate structure. Decisions are taken by a simple majority. To ensure its smooth running, it has a political bureau which meets once a month and a permanent secretariat, it holds a half-yearly congress, issues publications and organises meetings between heads of government who are members of the EPP. Specialist structures were quickly put in place to cover relations, in particular, with young people, women and the various socio-professional categories.

Chaired by a head of government in office or now retired, the aim of the EPP is to achieve political union in Europe on the basis of a federal constitution. At the party's inaugural congress held on 6 and 7 March 1978 in Brussels, the EPP declared its desire to create a European federation such as the one proposed by Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950. It adopted the main thrust of the 1975 Tindemans Report. In response to internal disagreements on the name of the party and the validity of the Christian reference, the name 'Christian-Democratic Group in the European Parliament (Group of the EPP)' was adopted. In the 1979 June elections, EPP candidates secured 29.6 % of votes cast and 107 seats out of 410. From that date, the EPP has constituted one of the major transnational political forces in the European Parliament.

### **European Liberals and Democrats**

In April 1947, the Liberals set up a Liberal World Union which, however, consisted solely of the European Liberal parties and therefore had only a small number of supporters. In the same year, in Oxford, it became the Liberal International.

On 26 March 1976, in Stuttgart, the Liberals founded a Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties in the European Community. Included were: the German Free Democratic Party (FDP), the French Republican Party (PR) and Radical Socialist Party (PRS), the Walloon Party for Reforms and Freedom (PRLW) the Flemish Party of Freedom and Progress (PVV) the Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Luxembourg Democratic Party (DP), the Italian Liberal Party (PLI) and the Italian Republican Party (PRI), the British Liberal Party Organisation (LPO) and the Danish Venstre Liberal Party. Eight of the nine Member States were represented in the Liberal Federation. The political aim of the Liberals, set out in the Stuttgart Declaration, was the transformation of the European Community into a European Union with a Liberal and Democratic Constitution.

On 18 July 1977, the Federation decided to enter in the election campaign for the European Parliament elections as the 'European Liberal Democrats' (ELD).

At the 1979 European Parliament elections, the Liberals secured 14 % of the votes cast and 39 seats out of 410. They were the third largest group in the Assembly after the Socialists and the Christian Democrats.

### **Other political groups**

The European Parliament elected in 1979 was largely dominated by the three traditional political families: Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals. However, other political groups were also represented, including the Communists, various right-wing parties not under the umbrella of the Christian Democrats, far-right parties, regional and independence parties and Non-attached groups.

#### The Communists

In the 1970s, Communism had many followers in both France and Italy. The Italian style of Eurocommunism, a title which emphasised its distance from Moscow, did not go down well with the more orthodox line of other European Communist parties who had yet to assert their independence from the political interests of the USSR. Although their position has become more ambiguous over the years, the Communist parties are still, on the whole, hostile to the European Community which they consider to be a capitalist instrument.

#### Non-attached Members

Conservative or nationalist parties, such as the British Conservatives or the French Gaullists, did not want to sacrifice their national interests on the European altar. They did not succeed in forming a genuine parliamentary group which was more than just a technical coordination body because they were unable to overcome internal conflicts of interest.