

'The Liberals' European manifesto' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (23 April 1977)

Caption: On 23 April 1977, in its coverage of preparations for the first direct elections to the European Parliament, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung describes the content of the political agenda of the Federation of the Liberal Parties of Europe which had met 10 days earlier in Bonn.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 23.04.1977, Nr. 94. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Europa-Programm der Liberalen", p. 4.

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The Liberals' European manifesto

Presentation of a common draft by the 14 member parties

MY. Bonn, 22 April. The Federation of Liberal Parties is the first European party grouping to present a draft manifesto for the direct elections to the European Parliament scheduled for next year. It is to be discussed during the next few months in the 14 national member parties from eight Community countries (with the exception of Ireland) and adopted at the Federation Congress in Rome in late November. A more concise election appeal is also scheduled at a later date for the election campaign itself. The President of the Federation's Executive Committee, the FDP Member of the Bundestag, Martin Bangemann, said in Bonn on Friday that, once the manifesto had been adopted, it would be binding on all member parties, although some issues in the draft, such as agricultural policy, were still controversial.

The draft manifesto was drafted during intensive discussions between the participants from all eight countries. As he said himself, Mr Bangemann was able to avoid crucial votes on certain contentious issues. The FDP Parliamentary Party spokesman on European policy in Bonn put great emphasis on the fact that this draft was a true European manifesto and not just a mixture of elements from the various national party manifestos.

The preamble to this comprehensive document states that the prime objective even of a political European Union must be to protect the individual's rights and freedom and to guarantee human and civil rights in Europe. The chapter dealing with sociological and social policy expresses the concern that welfare systems are becoming too expensive through over-perfection and therefore may well turn out to be anti-welfare again from a cost point of view. The topical subject of energy policy takes up a lot of space among the numerous chapters. It states that nuclear fission energy might 'present a necessary, though only temporary, option for the meeting of increasing energy requirements'. Because of the attendant dangers, however, nuclear energy should not be allowed to become permanently a main pillar of energy supply. The chapter on environmental protection amplifies this with the Liberal Federation recommendation that priority be given to better use of conventional energy, to the strict saving of energy and to 'make truly greater efforts' in the development of new energy sources.

As for the European Community's external relations and security policy, the draft manifesto calls for, *inter alia*, a common foreign policy for the 'European Union'. The Community should pursue a consistent development aid policy which, according to Mr Bangemann, must not remain, not even in part, a national matter for the individual Member States. A suitable departure point, according to the draft manifesto, would be the Lomé Convention concluded with 46 developing countries. One of the most original proposals can be found in the chapter on Economic and Monetary Union. Apart from supportive measures such as the pooling of a part of the monetary reserves of the individual Member States and the extension of mutual loans, a European 'parallel currency', using the florin or guilder as a unit of account, would be introduced and gradually developed, from the establishment of the European budget via payments to the Third World and relations between the participating Central Banks, into a natural European currency, without, for the time being at least, replacing national currencies.

Chapters setting out strongly unifying intentions are to some extent in contrast with regional policy demands. The latter attach particular value to the preservation of cultural particularities and, in the words of Martin Bangemann, try to prevent Europe from becoming a 'uniform mass'. As far as the expansion of the European institutions is concerned, the manifesto calls, *inter alia*, for the strengthening of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The European Parliament should thus have the final say in the appointment of the Members of the European Commission, be able to extend its budgetary authority and secure the right to ratify treaties between the Community and non-member countries. The final version of the European Liberals' manifesto will probably be preceded by a declaration on human and civil rights in Europe which, in the Federation's view, might one day form the basis of a European Constitution.

Mr Bangemann was optimistic as to the date of the direct elections. Now that franchise issues are becoming clearer in Britain and France, he did not think that the originally scheduled date of May/June 1978 was

‘utopian’. Elections would certainly be held ‘in autumn at the latest’. As for the disagreement in Germany on the subject of electoral law — either a federal list of candidates or combined regional lists — Mr Bangemann predicts a compromise based on the federal list favoured by the Bonn Coalition but also allowing for exceptional regional arrangements.