

'Impact of the European elections' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (30 November 1977)

Caption: On 30 November 1977, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung considers that the first direct elections to the European Parliament may change the structures of smaller political parties in Western Europe.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 30.11.1977, Nr. 278. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Wirkungen der Europa-Wahl", auteur:Wenz, Dieter , p. 1.

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Impact of the European elections

By Dieter Wenz

It is considered good form to take the first elections to the European Parliament, scheduled for next year, not excessively seriously. They might, however, bring about a change in party political structures throughout Western Europe, including the Federal Republic of Germany. Some people at Party Headquarters are well aware of the opportunities and dangers of new European dawns that have all of a sudden become possible. But the political systems in all European Community countries are being worn out by the primacy of domestic policy whose day-to-day burdens force professional politicians to take short-term views. Quite a few of them are also secretly hoping that, at the end of the day, 'Europe' might crumble. The Governments in London and Paris have, after all, enforced the condition that the Parliament in Strasbourg will not receive any additional powers, or at least not in the immediate future, even after being directly elected by the people. 'National sovereignties' are to remain inviolate. There are, nevertheless, signs of unmistakable impulses, 'inside' as well as 'outside', that might bring about a change in traditional politics.

'Inside', that is in the Community of the Nine, parties have merged and now appear as political groups in the European Parliament. While their influence on the individual national parties is still modest, it is likely to become stronger if the direct elections, 'Europe's last major chance', as the enterprise is widely considered, is to have a serious future beyond the first election date. And the seriousness of their intentions is proclaimed by all.

In the 'European People's Party' (EPP), party groupings of such ideologically and historically different backgrounds as the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Socialist Union (CSU), whose Bavarian division intends to enter the European election campaign with the slogan 'Freedom or Popular Front', and the Christian Democrats under the Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans, who is currently in a coalition government with the Socialists, will have to take joint decisions. In the 'Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community', the German Social Democratic Party (SDP), standing rather isolated in the Socialist International because of its at least verbally harsh anti-Popular Front line, and the Socialist Party of François Mitterrand, linked to the French Communist Party through the 1972 Government Programme, will have to find a common aim.

At the European Parliament, CDU and Democrazia Cristiana (DC), which is obliged at home to Enrico Berlinguer's Italian Communists, are sharing the bench of the same Christian Democratic political group. The CDU had fought the last Bundestag election campaign with the slogan 'Freedom instead of Socialism'. However, at the Parliament in Strasbourg, with the support of Communist votes, it elected the representative of its Italian sister party, the DC, Emilio Colombo as President of the European Parliament and, in return, voted for the French Communist Gérard Bordu as Mr Colombo's Vice-President. In Strasbourg, the CDU's 'remarkably constructive cooperation' with French and Italian Communists in various parliamentary committees is being praised. Studies on the European Parliament's future composition all point to a close balance of forces between the various party blocs. Thus, as a member of the Socialist coalition, the SDP will also have to rely on the occasional support of the Communists if it wants to assert its political will. The Socialist coalition will definitely want to do so. And such decisions will, in return, have a knock-on effect all the way down the party structure.

'Outside', developments are even more obvious. The CSU caused a great stir this summer by challenging existing party structures. The Bavarians had informed their sister party, the CDU, that the revoked Kreuther Plan, which would have turned the CSU into the fourth largest party nationwide, could again become applicable for the European elections. Although this has currently lost some relevance again, the issue is still not completely closed. Munich continues to treat the long-established and tried and tested party spectrum with contempt. Although its verdict is based on little more than a mathematical calculation, it nevertheless shows that the old course is considered worn out and obsolete. New ideas are to put things right.

Such new ideas also frighten the SDP which, not without good reason, is dreading the confrontation, after the fourth party of the right, with the fifth party of the left. Willi Brandt knows why not to underestimate the

professors and left-wing intellectuals on the 'Green List' who have now announced their 'test' candidacy to the European elections. The Federal Association of Citizens' Action Groups for environmental protection, incorporating nearly a thousand separate initiatives, had done the same only a few days ago. The German Communist Party DKP has decided to fill its party lists for Strasbourg not just with party members but to keep them open for 'independent' and, preferably, prominent candidates. This method might set a precedent. The SDP is said to be seriously thinking in this direction. Preparations have already been made, and many of its members seem willing to turn words into deeds.

Will these European elections go down in history as a date when previously united political intentions began to break up? Could it be the beginning of certain 'clarifications', which some might find rather worrying, while others will consider them positively conclusive?