

'Into the European election campaign with vague slogans' from EUSO, Europe Socialiste (26 October 1977)

Caption: On 26 October 1977, EUSO, Europe Socialiste, the newspaper of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, criticises the political programme of its rivals in advance of the direct elections to the European Parliament.

Source: EUSO, Europe Socialiste. Sozialistische Fraktion, Europäisches Parlament. Hrsg. Fellermaier, Ludwig. 26.10.1977, Nr. 5. Bruxelles: Pressedienst-Sozialistische Fraktion. "Mit unklaren Sprüchen in den europäischen Wahlkampf", auteur:Sieglerschmidt, Hellmut , p. 4-6.

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Into the European election campaign with vague slogans

The political programme of the European People's Party

by Hellmut Sieglerschmidt

Associations of like-minded parties in the European Community are being put to the test at the beginning of the election campaign for the direct elections to the European Parliament. They must prove that they are capable of united action in terms of both organisation and political programme. Obstacles must be overcome of the kind which inevitably arise when differently structured national parties try to work together. This can be attempted in two different ways, as can be seen from the examples of the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community and the European People's Party.

The names of these two associations are already significant in this context: while the name of the Confederation of Socialist Parties reflects the fact that no European Socialist Party yet exists, the Christian Democratic Parties completely ignore the corresponding reality on the right, even though the differences and friction between them have become quite apparent, especially in recent weeks. (Suffice it to mention here the intention of Franz-Josef Strauss and the CSU to form, together with the French Gaullists under Chirac and the British Conservatives, a Conservative Federation for the purpose of the European election campaign.) A European People's 'Party' does not exist. It is a federation of parties. Similarly, the Christian Democrats have ambitiously dubbed the summary of their election objectives a 'programme', while the corresponding Socialist document modestly calls itself an 'election platform'.

There would be nothing wrong with this if a set of clearly defined policies did indeed set the 'political programme' of the Christian Democratic Parties apart from the Socialists' election platform. A comparison of the two drafts, however, reveals the exact opposite. But here again the European citizen, short of examining the draft down to the last detail, is likely to be taken in by deceptive wording. In what follows, the accuracy of this assertion will be tested against some of the forms of words used in the draft.

What is the Christian Democratic call for a 'participatory democracy' supposed to mean? The word participatory is based on the concept of 'taking part'. Is there such a thing as a democracy in which the citizens do not take part? Hardly. This call is therefore nothing but a vacuous pleonasm. The voter is not told what is meant by this fine-sounding verbiage, assuming it means anything at all.

The same is true of the expression 'society built on partnership', described as the better course but with no explanation of what such a society is supposed to be like.

The Christian Democrats also want to defend the right to income and health. A commendable proposal, no doubt. The only thing that is missing for this summer, then, is the right to good weather. All forms of cultural creation are to be promoted. All forms? That being so, certain advocates of the Christian Democratic programme ought in the past to have behaved differently towards some artists and writers of contrasting political orientations. Can they really have changed so much?

Other programme items also raise questions as to the meaning of what is being sought. Conurbations, for example, are to be 'dissolved'. It is as simple as that! As if everyone who has ever dealt with this difficult problem did not know that 'drastic measures' are not the answer.

Another example of a pompously vague proposal is the institution of a Council for the Defence of Human Rights. We all know that the United Nations has a Commission on Human Rights as well as a Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Within the Council of Europe, the European Commission of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights are charged with defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. A new institution of this kind is unlikely to strengthen this defence and can indeed be expected to complicate the task.

The Christian Democratic programme contains a series of concrete and thoroughly laudable demands. One

of these is for major economic and social policy lines to be defined by the State in a framework plan to be submitted to parliament for approval. Remembering, however, the statements on this subject by some leading Members of the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament, one cannot fail to be astounded. Considering, for example, that the CDU and the CSU shake in their shoes at the mere mention of the word 'planning', it seems fair to ask when the Opposition in the Bundestag will be putting forward a proposal for such a framework plan. Or can it be assumed that conservative Christian Democrats will make sure this 'Socialist' fly is taken out of the ointment?

Otherwise, at the next national elections, certain Member Parties of the European People's Party will find themselves having to lead an election campaign against their own European slogans.