

'A European People's Party' from Le Soir (20 November 1976)

Caption: On 20 November 1976, in an article published by the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir, the Social Christian MP, Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb, welcomes the creation, four months earlier, of the European Christian-Democrat Party in preparation for the first direct elections to the European Parliament, initially planned for 1978.

Source: Le Soir. 20.11.1976, n° 271; 90e année. Bruxelles: Rossel S.A. "Un parti populaire européen", auteur:Nothomb, Charles-Ferdinand , p. 1; 6.

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Free Tribune

A European People's Party

There will be a Europe, and we shall be part of it.

Europe stretches, in all its diversity, from Palermo to Hamburg, from Brest to Munich. It will have to find compromises between powerful, legitimate national and regional feelings and obvious European requirements. The latter can be imposed only by European legitimacy.

Direct election of the European Parliament in 1978 will provide this legitimacy to an Assembly elected by citizens to represent Europe.

This election will be pointless and no legitimacy will be gained unless, from Palermo to Hamburg and from Brest to Munich, candidates come forward for election with a credible common manifesto.

There will be credible common manifestos only if the major political groupings prepare them. It is already 1976 — it is high time.

Only previously-organised political groupings can have a realistic chance of presenting a manifesto that will be broadly accepted in the geographical sense.

It is important, though, that there be innovation, with the creation of a truly European party, not simply a linking of national parties in federations.

Like any new party, it needs to be wide open to all, on the basis of the manifesto that it is developing.

Hence, in preparation for the election of the European Parliament in 1978, we, the Christian Democrats of Europe, decided, in July 1976, to create the European People's Party.

In the diverse national and regional contexts, we wish to seek European legitimacy based on a common European manifesto. We are able to do this because, from the outset, we have the assurance of a European-scale political force.

This force is more than a mere federation of the existing parties out of which it was born. It is a new party, with its own manifesto, open to individual membership.

It will hold its first large public event in France, organised by our French friends of the Democratic and Social Centre, on 4 and 5 December 1976 in Strasbourg. We look forward to attending it in large numbers.

The 'preparatory Europeanisation' was an essential process. First of all because, between 1950 and 1957, there was a need to step up the pace and find formulas that everyone, from the hastiest to the most cautious, could accept.

It was also essential because of the need to translate into tangible form the political will to build Europe, without waiting for the theologians of integration or the institutional purists to reach agreement or gain majority support.

Most importantly, changes needed to develop gradually, giving material and psychological differences the chance to adjust to one another, without breaking a system that, had it been too logical and integrated, might not have stood up to unexpected problems or tolerated unavoidable delays.

This 'preparatory Europeanisation', which some *a posteriori* call 'the Europe of technocrats', provides considerable benefits, the greatest of which is Europe itself, despite ten years of Gaullism, permanent peace between France and Germany and enormous economic and social operations such as the common

agricultural policy, the conversion of the coal-mining areas, the unification of the internal market and global negotiations such as the Kennedy Round.

But now, in 1976, the problems are of another kind, and the generalised crisis in the operation of the European economic and social apparatus calls for solutions that are both more political and more coordinated. These cannot be taken without a political authority that would exercise at least partnership in major decisions; it would need to possess European legitimacy and be able to lead Europe, on behalf of Europe, beyond short-term measures or lobbies.

This calls not only for European elections but for the development, no less importantly, of major political forces. If the election takes place with the current national-level political groupings, this will mean more than a hundred political movements seeking to be elected. Many would have fewer than five Members representing them in the European Parliament. Patently absurd. Even the champions of ideological diversity and, particularly, of a regionalised Europe must realise that their ideas will be better reflected by an organised grouping that represents something at the European level, where it is better placed to argue its case than in a whirlwind of mini-parties that have only their isolation in common.

It is already too late, for those who have not seized the initiative, to have a chance of presenting a European manifesto to European electors in 1978.

Preparations for the election of the European People's Party have been under way for two years. It was created in July 1976 in Brussels.

The choice of the name 'People's' has nothing to do with people's democracies, as a number of my correspondents have wondered with concern; in the political culture of Europe, in both Romance and Germanic-language countries (1), it refers to a body that is not based on a doctrine, like liberalism, socialism or nationalism, but one which aims to respect human beings and represent all social groups, national and regional identities and the community as a whole in a grouping that seeks to promote the general interest.

It does not reject any person on the basis of social class, ethnic origin or religious conviction.

We are currently drafting the actual manifesto.

In the new, diverse context of Europe, this is the party best placed to handle the transition and juggle Europe's needs with national and regional realities, in a spirit of solidarity that will protect the most vulnerable.

Mr Mitterrand is reported to have said: 'There will be a Socialist Europe or none at all.' We say: 'There will be a Europe, and we shall be part of it.'

Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb
Member of Parliament for the PSC (Christian Social Party)

(1) *Mouvement républicain Populaire* in France (after 1945) — *Partito Popolare* in Italy (before 1940) — *Volkspartei* in Austria, Holland and Belgium.