

## Interview with Jacques F. Poos: relations between the parliamentary groups and the political parties (Sanem, 16<sup>o</sup>April 2004)

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[Étienne Deschamps] As leader of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party, naturally you were directly associated with the socialists' efforts to organise themselves at the European level. We have mentioned these transnational parties. What personal memories do you have of these efforts and, looking back now, how do you assess the activities and achievements of the Party of European Socialists?

[Jacques F. Poos] The Party of European Socialists is a construction that only exists on paper; it has no real existence. It comes to life every time an election approaches; it tries to coordinate the different points of view, but, once again, by the intergovernmental method, when there is a burning issue on which the opinion of the Socialist Party is sought. It has no real impact on events. I would say the same for the other parties as well. However, a time may come — as was the case for the Socialist Party, when there were ten or twelve governments led by a socialist Prime Minister, and this was also the case for the EPP at one time — when they are able, via the group of the Heads of State or Government, to try to influence matters because they are the people who take part in, and sit on, the General Affairs Council or the European Council. They can confer, and they do so. But it is not the Socialist Party, currently chaired by Robin Cook and formerly by Rudolf Scharping, which holds the reins where the socialist family policy at the European level is concerned. It is rather the Parliamentary political group that influences the course of things because in the political group — and I cannot repeat this too often — decisions are taken by simple majority. Not qualified majority, but simple! And when it is a matter of Iraq, the Middle East, this or that legal text, a directive on harmonising water quality or qualitative guidelines concerning the environment, the group approves it by simple majority. The same is true for foreign policy. The result is that we are able to come to a conclusion; we can sometimes short-circuit the governments because Parliament has an opinion whereas the governments do not, because they are blocked by a veto. Therefore I think that the Socialist Party group — this is perhaps less true for the others, but above all the Socialist Group — has played a role that is innovative, a driving force; one that is perhaps misunderstood, but is easily explained by the frequency of its meetings — for it meets practically every week — and by the simple majority voting system.

[Étienne Deschamps] One man, one vote?

[Jacques F. Poos] One man, one vote.

[Étienne Deschamps] And what is the relationship between the group, within Parliament, and the party?

[Jacques F. Poos] It is a functional relationship. The leader of the group is always invited to the party committee's meetings and the group occasionally invites the party chairman to outline his programme. But all that is fairly formal.