

Thomas Jansen, Developing supranational European parties: an important initiative

Caption: On 1 January 1992, with a view to clarifying that an article on the role of the European political parties in the new treaty was inserted on the initiative of Wilfried Martens, Belgian Prime Minister and President of the European People's Party (EPP), Thomas Jansen, Secretary-General of the EPP, sends a copy of an article that he wrote on the scope of the initiative, which was published in *Il Popolo*, to Emanuele Gazzo, Vice-President and leader writer of *Agence Europe*.

Source: Archives historiques de l'Union européenne, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. Emanuele Gazzo, EG. Groupes politiques, EG.B.A-03.01. Populaires et conservateurs au Parlement européen, EG-68.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/thomas_jansen_developing_supranational_european_parties_an_important_initiative-en-b392862d-8d9a-4708-b901-6deab4401982.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Developing supranational European parties: an important initiative

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In a joint declaration to the Presidents of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission of 10 July 1991, the Presidents of the Federation of Liberals and Democrats of the European Community (FLDE), the European People's Party/Christian Democrats (EPP) and the Union of Socialist Parties of the European Community have asked for an article on the role of the 'European Parties' in forming consensus and political will to be included in the new treaty on political union. The initiative for this joint letter came from the President of the European People's Party, Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, who had no difficulty in persuading his colleagues and fellow nationals, liberal Willy De Clerq and socialist Guy Spitaels, of the importance of his proposal. In the declaration, he calls for 'the express recognition of the role played by the European Parties in the process of integration and democratisation of the European Union's political system.'

The Presidents of the three European parties (or rather federations of parties) have suggested the following wording for their proposed Treaty article: 'The European Parties are absolutely essential as factors of integration within the Union. European Parties shall be deemed to be the federated unions of national parties existing in most of the Member States of the EC and having the same goals and policies; they shall form a single Group in the European Parliament. The sources of their funding shall be made public.'

According to the first part of this wording, along the lines of Article 21 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, the European Parties will essentially play the same role as their parties in national systems in the political system of the EC (or rather the European Union). This is a federal concept. In practice, parties or party sections in federal states perform, at their different levels, the same tasks in their respective areas of action, and also act according to the same principles, while obviously using different methods in keeping with their different responsibilities and circumstances.

In this way, the leaders of European parties expect that, if their proposal is accepted, 'it will be possible to enact European legislation in the medium to long term that, in keeping with national practice, provides the European Parties with a framework for their operation.' Leaving aside the fact that their Parliamentary Groups operate in accordance with a statute endorsed by the European Parliament, the existing federations of parties and their bodies at present lack the legal basis they need in order to function. They do not, for instance, exist as legal persons: they cannot recruit workers directly or enter into agreements, and may not, for instance, issue a receipt, with the result that they have to act under the auspices of their Groups in the European Parliament or their national associations in order to carry out their tasks. This is not at all an optimum situation, as it precludes the mobility and reactivity needed for a cohesive and politically aware approach to the integration that they are pursuing.

In the second part of the draft article to be included in the Agreement on Political Union, the European Parties are defined as 'federated associations of national parties'. The respective associations of the three traditional families of parties — Liberal, Socialist, and Christian Democrat — are in practice federations whose members undertake to work together in the long term under an agreed statute and in accordance with a programme for the achievement of their common policy, approved by the competent bodies. The purpose of cooperation within the federation is 'the unity of European action of its members'. This is laid down in the statute of the European People's Party, which also requires associated parties to 'support, in their national policies, the positions taken by the European People's Party in the context of the European Community'. Otherwise, they retain their own name, identity and freedom of action in respect of their national responsibilities.

It is likely that other groups to be set up in the future or keen to organise themselves at a European level will also adopt a federated form for this purpose, mirroring the structures of the Union. In practice, it would seem completely impossible for any European party to be able to survive for long and perform its tasks if it did not have its own links and could not work with its grass roots, especially the nation states forming the

Union. The attempt a few years ago by Marco Panella to found a ‘transnational’ federated party was based on a false notion of federalism and ended up, as might have been predicted, as little more than a propaganda slogan. This would have been a party of European unity which any European could have joined irrespective of nationality or membership of a national party. Federalism undoubtedly does not mean, as Panella thought, an imposed kind of unity in which all the differences it encompasses can just be swept away; federalism is rather a process in which several independent parts converge and, without giving up their own identity, work together in unity.

Both components of the definition are essential if the concept is to be coherently encompassed in a legal regulation. Although this could be enacted in different ways, the two conditions mentioned above are essential: a European Party that is not based, in the majority of Member States, on national organisations ‘with the same policies and goals’, and that is unable to rally the representatives of its associated parties within a single group, would hardly deserve such a name.