

Interview with Jacques Santer: the Christian Democratic concept of a united Europe (Sanem, 6 April 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] What was then, and still remains today, the Christian Democratic concept of a united Europe?

[Jacques Santer] It was really the same approach as that of our founding fathers, who were all Christian Democrats and who shared our concept: that of hard-line Christian Democracy, the federal concept, the federal or Community concept, as they say today, but based on the two principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. It was also based on personalism, as advocated by Jacques Maritain, who was the great pioneer of Christian Democracy. It is curious to note that the great pioneer of Christian Democracy was French, whereas later on, the parties moved away somewhat. In France, this was Christian Democracy as practised by Robert Schuman or by Georges Bidault, or Poher who was one of the last ones with Lecanuet, or even Jacques Barrot now, who was the last Secretary-General of the party in France. So they really were men who were as we still are today: the Christian Social Party in Luxembourg, as in other Benelux countries, who have maintained their own identity as Christian Democrats, and who later allied themselves with others who subscribed to their programme.

That is why the Christian Democratic Party was called the European People's Party. It should be remembered that in some countries where there were Christian Democratic groups it was already called the people's party, as, for instance, in Italy with Don Sturzo's *Partito Popolare*. When I was Chairman of the European People's Party, one of my first tasks was precisely to see how we could promote Christian Democracy in the new Member States of the European Union, particularly in Spain and Portugal.

At that time I managed to merge all the parties that I would describe as Christian Democratic that had existed before the civil war, but which had no chance of winning the elections, with Ruiz-Giménez, with Rupérez, and so on, with new parties, the then *Alianza Popular*, which was nonetheless dominated by elements further to the right, such as Fraga. I was lucky in having in the Council of Europe the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marcelino Oreja, who was the first Foreign Minister in the period after Franco. With him we organised, from Luxembourg, the assembling of the Christian Democratic and centre or centre-right parties in Spain, but this was very difficult because, first of all, there was the issue of personalities to consider. There were three or four Christian Democratic parties that did not have much success in the elections but there were some eminent figures leading these countries who had been anti-Franco, in opposition to Franco. On the other hand, there were others that had changed afterwards but had been linked to the Franco Government, especially later on, like Fraga. Ways had to be found to forge an alliance between them. So in the case of Fraga, who was already quite old, he was rusticated, and a Vice-President was placed in his stead — a young man who had not been involved in the Franco regime. It was somebody that was quite unknown at the time: Mr José María Aznar, an inspector of finances who was appointed Vice-President, with responsibility for international and European relations. At the subsequent congress, he was the one that became chairman of the *Popular* party. As for the other Christian Democrats, we tried to form an alliance with them; for example, Rupérez was appointed President of the European Parliament Committee in the Senate, and later on given responsibility for European relations, and so forth. Ruiz-Giménez became Ombudsman. It was he who became President of Pax Romana, and, incidentally, he had been the lawyer representing many people in the opposition during the Franco regime. So there were some very strong personalities, but they needed to be united, and this took days of protracted discussions. We had them come to Luxembourg — not many people know this — and the alliance for the new Spanish *Popular* party was formed under the presidency of Aznar. This took place in my office, when I was Prime Minister of Luxembourg. We sealed the alliance in the restaurant opposite, with Mr Marcelino Oreja. There were no journalists present. That was why the alliance was formed here in Luxembourg, without any official communication. I believe that it was a great success at that time. At any rate, there were benefits later. Aznar took over from Felipe González, which was not easy since Felipe González had become a great Head of Government, very European, very pro-European.

For Spain and Portugal it was rather difficult because Freitas do Amaral, the present Minister for Foreign Affairs, was there, but then he was the last Chef de Cabinet to Salazar. He had the centre party — he was the

leader of the centre party — and then there was the Social Democratic party, as it was called, led by Cavaco Silva. In that period, according to our statutes, if a Christian Democratic party, or a party that was a member of the European People's Party, was opposed to the entry of another party from the same country, it could not join. Given that a Christian Democratic party was already represented, Freitas do Amaral opposed the entry of the Social Democratic party, which therefore joined the Liberals, although it was Christian Democratic in essence.

There was still the previous Portuguese leader, who sadly died in an accident, whom I had met on several occasions. This was someone I had also met in Luxembourg on several occasions and who unfortunately has died. So, there was Cavaco Silva who took over the Presidency, and that was all very new. There were again changes and shake-ups in the country, so that the party of Freitas do Amaral, from which Freitas had withdrawn following internal difficulties, no longer declared its support for the right, and was therefore excluded from the European People's Party. This then was the chance to give Cavaco Silva the representation within the EPP. And in this way, the landscape was, to some extent, recast by our party and also within the various Member States. This is one aspect that in my view is not widely known, even by those involved in politics. And that is why, to reply more precisely to your question, the European parties have a role to play, especially now that Europe is expanding. Especially now, when it is much more difficult to distinguish between the Christian Democratic parties and the others, centre parties or otherwise, and so forth — above all in countries that have a different history, such as the Baltic states, for example. Where do you draw the line between centre and non-centre parties? There are countries where parties exist that were formed only recently, which have no history, because they existed as part of the Soviet Union. There was but one party, a single Communist party, which fell apart later on. That is the direction that I feel the European parties should take: to see how they can ensure that they are represented in each Member State. Today, it is in the new Member States, such as Poland, for instance, such as Hungary, where elections are currently being held, that we must look for allies. Now, for instance, *Fidesz*, led by Viktor Orbán (who is the former Prime Minister and is standing for Prime Minister once again), is our ally, but we had to find it. We had to give it a platform and help it in its approach. For example, Romania or Bulgaria. So there has been a plethora of parties that always claim democratic ideals, not always Christian, but popular democratic ideals. At that point, what is essential is to possess a manifesto. They have to draw up a manifesto, or a platform for a manifesto, where it is at least laid down — even if it is not evident in their denomination — that the country will at least undertake to respect this manifesto in their national and European campaign. This is the role to be played by the European parties, I should say, and I now see that European parties are being formed on the left just as they are on the right. This is an important step, and I think it is also an essential one for the development of democracy or of a democratic spirit in our European institutions.