



Photo: © Dursun Aydemir / A. picture alliance

Shaping Europe Pragmatically

# In Search of Majorities

The Positioning and Future of the European People's  
Party in a Changing Party System

Olaf Wientzek

The European People's Party (EPP) has played a key role in shaping European politics over the past decades. Recently, however, it has repeatedly found itself in a difficult position, caught between left-wing and liberal forces on the one hand and right-wing parties becoming stronger on the other. Which partners can and should the EPP join forces with to implement its ideas for shaping the EU's future? And where will its place be in the European party landscape of the future?

---

### **The EPP as a Driver of the European Unification Process**

Since its foundation in 1976, the European People's Party has been one of the two major European political families and a central player in the European integration process.<sup>1</sup> No other party family has so many different national parties (83, of which 49 are in the EU). It has taken at least second place in all elections to the European Parliament and has been the largest group in the European Parliament without interruption since 1999. Many heads of state and government in the European Council have come from its ranks and continue to do so (more than half at particularly successful times). In total, it has provided eight presidents of the European Parliament, six leaders of the European Commission and two of the presidents of the European Council to date. Several heads of government from the EPP family, such as Helmut Kohl, Wilfried Martens and Angela Merkel, have left a lasting mark on European unification. The EPP has always seen itself as a driving force and pillar of the European unification process.<sup>2</sup>

The EPP's most important competitor has traditionally been the Party of European Socialists (PES): at their peak, the two major political families together provided up to two thirds of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and together with the Liberal group, around three quarters of the seats.<sup>3</sup> The major European political groups have dominated the

European Council to a similar extent, too. The party landscape has since seen gradual change: firstly through the rise of the (European) Greens, who won more than ten per cent of the seats in the European Parliament for the first time in 2019; and secondly as a result of the strengthening of right-wing populist and far-right movements at the European and national level. The days when a grand coalition of EPP and Social Democrats – usually more or less supported by the Liberals – sufficed in Brussels are long gone (see figure 1). In the European Parliament, only 45 per cent of MEPs currently come from the two major political groups. Taking current national polls as a basis, the EPP would win 23.75 per cent of the seats in the European Parliament elections (assuming 720 seats in the future), and the Social Democrats approximately 20 per cent (see figure 2).

The situation in the European Council has also changed. As of 13 December 2023, of the 27 heads of state and government in the European Council, 10 were affiliated with EPP partner parties and only 5 (6 if you include Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico whose party is currently suspended from the PES) from the Social Democrats and Socialists. Three members of the European Council were politically to the right of the EPP.

Thanks to its central position in the past decades, key integration projects also bear the EPP's signature, including the single market, monetary union, foreign trade policy, the Schengen area and the EU's asylum and migration policy.

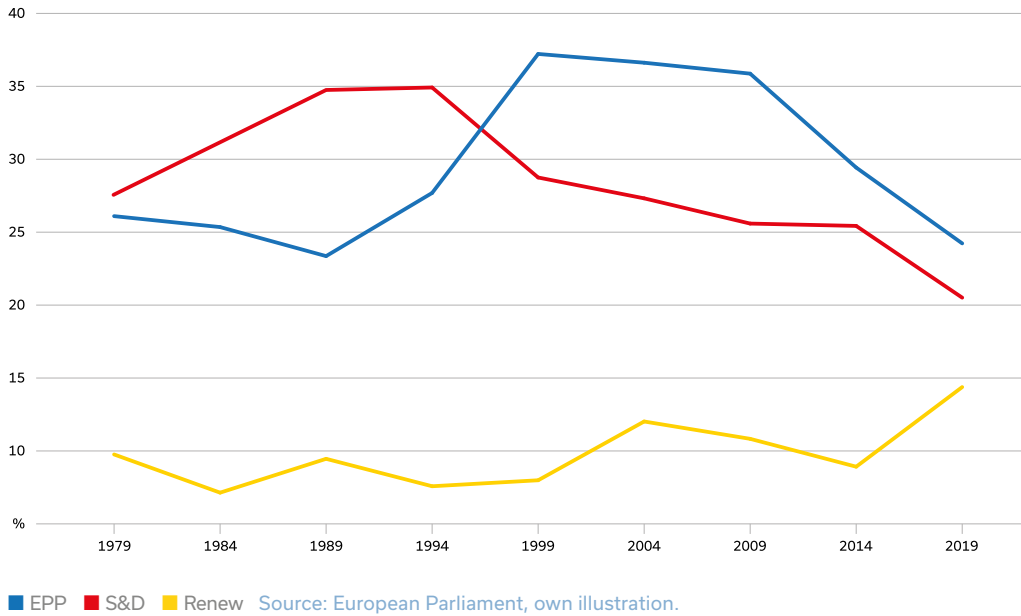
## From Christian Democratic Core to the Largest Force in Europe

The line-up of the EPP and the EPP Group has been in a constant state of flux from the very beginning: in 1976, the EPP was founded by Christian Democratic parties from Germany, France, Italy, the Benelux countries and Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Today, only a quarter of the MEPs in the Group are from these founding parties, and only two heads of state and government in the

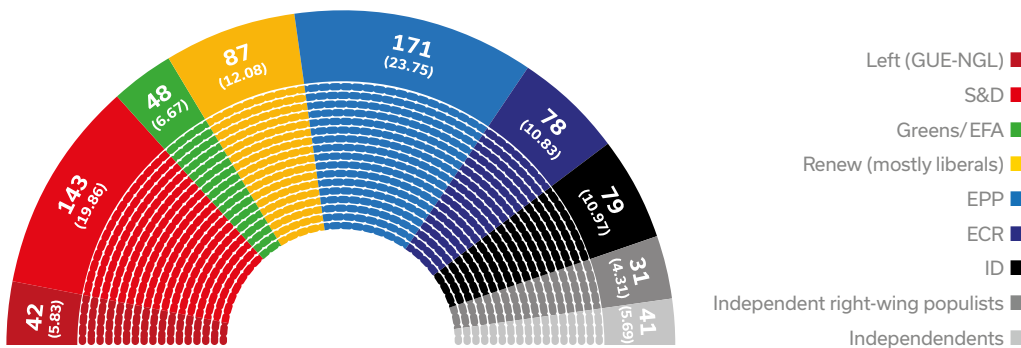
European Council. The question quickly arose as to the possible admission of conservative and liberal parties, such as those in Spain or France. This was given the green light – supported among others by the then CDU leader Helmut Kohl.

One aspect of central importance was the proactive strategy pursued in the 1990s towards new parties from EU candidate countries from Central Eastern and South Eastern Europa that

**Fig. 1: Share of Seats Held by the Three Largest Party Families in the European Parliament following Past European Elections**



**Fig. 2: Make-up of the European Parliament Forecast on the Basis of Current Predominantly National Polls (as of 23 Nov 2023, Share of Seats in Per Cent Shown in Brackets)**



Source: own illustration based on the EPP Party Barometer November 2023, Wientzek 2023, n. 11, p. 14.

**Fig. 3: Parliamentary Groups in the European Parliament and Selected National Member Parties**

Faction		Selected national member parties
■ ID	Identity and Democracy	Lega (Italy), Rassemblement National (France), AfD (Germany), FPÖ (Austria)
■ ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists	PiS (Poland), Fratelli d'Italia (Italy), Vox (Spain), ODS (Czechia), Sweden Democrats (Sweden)
■ EPP	European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	CDU (Germany), Partido Popular (Spain), PO (Poland), Néa Dimokratía (Greece), ÖVP (Austria)
■ Renew	Renew Europe	Ciudadanos (Spain), Mouvement démocrate (France), Renaissance (France), FDP (Germany)
■ Greens/EFA	The Greens / European Free Alliance	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Germany), Europe Écologie – Les Verts (France), GroenLinks (Netherlands)
■ S&D	Socialists & Democrats	PSOE (Spain), SPD (Germany), Partito Democratico (Italy), Parti Socialiste (France), SPÖ (Austria)
■ GUE-NGL	European United Left & Nordic Green Left	Die Linke (Germany), La France insoumise (France), Syriza (Greece)

Source: own compilation.

emerged in the course of the democratic transformation process. The strategy orchestrated by the then Secretary General of the EPP, Klaus Welle, and EPP President Wilfried Martens, in consultation with the national member parties, was successful in several respects. For example, it was pivotal in the EPP permanently replacing the PES as the largest force in the European Parliament in 1999 – something that still has an impact to this day: the EPP owed its electoral victory in 2019 primarily to its above-average performance in Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> This strategy has also impacted positively on the European integration process: the anchoring of numerous parties from the accession countries in one of the large pro-European political families has facilitated the acceptance of the European integration process in those countries. At the initiative of the then Secretary General, the EPP formulated a list of criteria for admission to the political family in the mid-1990s in the course of this enlargement process:<sup>6</sup>

1. a result of at least ten per cent in the last general election or at least five per cent in the last two general elections;
2. no split in the past two years;

3. membership of the EPP Group in the European Parliament or with the respective EPP Groups in parliamentary assemblies (such as the Council of Europe);
4. commitment of the party to the European integration process (on the basis of a federal model). The party programme must reflect the guiding notion of personalism (i. e. both freedom and responsibility) and acknowledge the principle of subsidiarity.

The latter programmatic criterion in particular marks a clear distinction from Eurosceptic forces, but it is also a feature that distinguishes the EPP from the other political groups. In connection with the current discussions on how to deal with the parties to the right of the European People's Party, EPP President Manfred Weber specified three criteria for "cooperation" in 2023: pro Europe, pro Ukraine and pro rule of law<sup>7</sup> – here explicitly distinguishing the EPP from the German AfD, the French Rassemblement National and the Polish PiS. Two other aspects were later mentioned by representatives of the EPP leadership: there should be no cooperation with new parties if such cooperation is opposed by current members of the EPP

political family, and programmatic proximity should be ensured.

In the course of the very broad expansion of the EPP, discussions have also arisen regarding its absorption capacity – in terms of both ideas and organisation: an ideas paper prepared by a member of an EPP working group in 2010 expressed concern at the impact of admitting new parties too quickly, not least in terms of the coherence and image of the EPP political family, and proposed a number of measures for a more

precise screening and stronger support (“godparenthood”) for new parties by established EPP partner parties.<sup>8</sup>

### **How Should Parties to the Right of the EPP Be Dealt With? A Look Back at the Past**

For more than 20 years, member parties of the EPP have increasingly had to address the question of how to position themselves vis-à-vis right-wing conservative, right-wing populist and extreme right-wing parties at the national



Pro Europe, pro Ukraine and pro rule of law: These were the criteria that EPP President Manfred Weber named for possible cooperation with parties to the right of the European People's Party – thus clearly distinguishing his party from political forces such as the German AfD, the French Rassemblement National and the Polish PiS.  
Photo: © Frank Hoermann, Sven Simon, picture alliance.

level. In doing so, they have adopted very varied strategies, including a rightward shift in narrative and policy, minority coalitions tolerated by far-right parties, and participation in government. In many countries, however, the opposite approach still prevails: a policy of strict non-cooperation. Some of the strategies chosen have given rise to controversy: in 2000, the coalition between Austria's conservative ÖVP and the far-right FPÖ led to a serious crisis not just in the EU but also within the EPP.<sup>9</sup> There are now hardly any countries in which there is no significant party to the right of the EPP, and cooperation can be observed in several countries. For a long time, the rule seemed to be that a pro-European centre-right government and a pro-European centre-left government would alternate in the EU member states, guaranteeing a certain degree of predictability but also a reliable and steady support for the European integration process, but this now no longer holds true either.

## Forces to the right of the EPP are likely to grow stronger in the European elections in June.

---

In the European Parliament, too, there have been parties to the right of the EPP ever since the first elections to the parliament in 1979. Initially, these were rather Eurosceptic conservatives. Since 1984, however, anti-European and far-right forces (including the Front National) have sat in the parliament, too. For a long time, the number of MEPs to the right of the EPP was fairly modest. Later, divergences and animosities between these parties often prevented the formation of a strong parliamentary group to the right of the EPP. Due to the strong position of the “grand coalition” in the European Parliament, the EPP usually did not need votes from parties to its right to find a majority at the European level.

Remarkably, over the past almost five decades, the EPP repeatedly succeeded in winning over – either temporarily or permanently – parties that

had joined more conservative and Eurosceptic party alliances (formerly Union for Europe, later Union for Europe of the Nations, now the European Conservatives and Reformists Group – ECR): at the end of the 1990s, Forza Italia and the Gaullist RPR (the party of Jacques Chirac) switched from the Union for Europe to the EPP Group, as did the small Portuguese Christian conservative party CDS-PP. As a result of the former in particular, the EPP secured a strong position in France and Italy and promoted the increasingly moderate stance being adopted by these parties on European policy as a result of the responsibility they had assumed in government. From then on, Forza Italia, which was successfully integrated into the EPP group by EPP Group Chairman Hans-Gert Pötering, became a very reliable member in terms of its voting behaviour for a long time.<sup>10</sup>

A more recent example is the Slovak conservative party OĽaNO, which originally joined the ECR Group in the European Parliament in 2014 before switching to the EPP Group in 2019. One only intermittently successful partnership was between the EPP and the European Democrats (ED), which included the British Conservatives and the liberal-conservative Czech ODS from 1999 to 2009.

### Changed Overall Situation in Brussels and Strasbourg

Given some of the developments of the past four years, the discussion about how the EPP should deal with parties to its right is taking place in a different context in several respects: in 2019, the very close election of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen probably also succeeded with votes from the ECR Group, and in 2021, after numerous controversies and suspension of membership, Hungary's Fidesz left the EPP.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming European elections, there are signs that forces to the right of the EPP are likely to grow stronger: if current polls are anything to go by, there may be a pool of some 180 to 190 MEPs in the next European Parliament who belong to parties to the right of

the EPP. Together, therefore, they would possibly be stronger than the EPP (which – before the possible inclusion of as yet unaffiliated parties – would be at around 170 to 175, according to current opinion polls). Both the far-right group Identity and Democracy (ID) and the ECR Group would hold more than ten per cent of the seats.<sup>11</sup> The Greens and likely also the Liberals could lose seats. Renew is even in danger of losing the third place either to the ECR or the ID. There is much to suggest that it would take the united support of at least three major political groups to gain a stable majority in the European Parliament.

Parallel to this, programmatic differences between the EPP and the three other pro-European political groups have increased recently: in 2023, for example, the EPP has been unsuccessful in votes on individual projects in connection with the European Green Deal – such as the Nature restoration law in July 2023 – by a narrow margin<sup>12</sup> against a broad alliance of the Left, Greens and the liberal group in particular. Even if, as things stand, the EPP has a good chance of becoming the strongest force once again, recent experience raises questions in terms of the constellations needed for it to be able to implement its ideas in terms of both personnel and programme. Accordingly, there has recently been repeated speculation about “cooperation” between the EPP and the ECR (or some of the parties belonging to the ECR) – modelled on the governing coalition in Czechia, which is formed almost exclusively of EPP and ECR parties.

### **Anything But Homogeneous: The Parties to the Right of the EPP**

The parties to the right of the EPP are a very diverse group, currently largely divided into two political groups at the EP: the Eurosceptic, more nationally conservative ECR (which also includes a number of right-wing populist parties, however) and the clearly far-right populist ID. There are also some parties (including Hungary’s Fidesz) that are independent of any parliamentary group. The range of parties represented here is enormous, so they cannot be perceived

as a coherent group: the ECR includes the ODS, which leads a coalition with EPP parties in Czechia and whose current orientation is largely compatible with the EPP. Liberal-conservative MEPs from the Flemish nationalist N-VA are also to be found here. The EPP was in a parliamentary group with the ODS for ten years (at the time of the EPP-ED parliamentary group mentioned above).

However, the majority of the MEPs in the ECR belong to parties with which the overlaps in European policy are significantly smaller and which in particular do not meet one (and in some cases either) of the first two of the three criteria put forward by Manfred Weber – pro EU, pro rule of law, pro-Ukraine – such as the right-wing populist Vox, the Polish national conservative PiS, the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party and the Dutch JA21. With its pragmatic course on European policy under the current leader, the ODS is an exception rather than the rule, even within its own parliamentary group. The ECR also includes Fratelli d’Italia, the party of the Italian head of government, Giorgia Meloni.

### **The formation of a large parliamentary group to the right of the EPP seems illusory for the time being.**

---

The ID is dominated by right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties (including the AfD, the Rassemblement National, Lega, the FPÖ and the Czech SPD): here, programmatic reasons alone are enough for the EPP to rule out cooperation. In the past, there have been efforts – as yet unsuccessful – to form a joint far-right faction of parties from the ECR and the ID. Overlaps in programme between the two existing parliamentary groups are to be found in their Eurosceptic orientation (of differing degrees), harsh criticism of the European Commission, and also in terms of their votes and positions on migration and asylum policy; otherwise, however, the

parties of the two parliamentary groups have little in common. What might be the last major attempt to initiate such cooperation dates back to 2 July 2021, when 16 parties from the two groups – including the PiS, the Rassemblement National, Lega, Fidesz, the FPÖ but also Meloni’s Fratelli d’Italia – voiced massive criticism of EU policy. All in all, that statement reflected a European policy stance that is incompatible with the EPP.<sup>13</sup> One noteworthy point here is that the AfD was not involved in that initiative. Not least the enormous differences between the ECR (pro-Ukraine) and the parties in the ID (pro-Russian orientation) in connection with the war in Ukraine make close cooperation and the formation of a large parliamentary group to the right of the EPP seem illusory for the time being. However, the 2021 initiative and also earlier initiatives highlight the fact that the majority of these parties have limited compatibility with the EPP in terms of their position on Europe.

### Partners in the Political Centre

When considering the potential for cooperation and also the potential for expansion to include new parties, the first place to look is at forces that are still unaffiliated and are not in the right-wing populist camp. Close partners could include new political forces in the Netherlands with roots in their country’s EPP partner party (CDA), for example the new NSC party.

The liberal Renew parliamentary group also includes some parties that have significant ideological overlaps with the EPP and do not belong to the (left) liberal core of the political family – the Portuguese PSD and the Romanian PNL are among those that have switched to the EPP in the past. What is more, it is not known what will become of Emmanuel Macron’s party – Renaissance – which has absorbed numerous figures from the centre-right spectrum in recent years and is the largest group within Renew. So in terms of its long-term strategic orientation – as in the 1990s – the EPP should turn its gaze not only in the direction of conservative parties but also to centrist and liberal parties. It should also be noted that the EPP Group traditionally has

the greatest voting overlap with the Liberals on most issues in the European Parliament – to a greater extent than with the ECR.

## The EPP is inherently committed to the European unification process as well as to democracy, freedom and the rule of law.

---

### What Strategy Should the EPP Adopt?

When talking about cooperation between the EPP and other parties or parliamentary groups, a distinction can be drawn between three forms of political cooperation:

1. The lowest threshold is collaboration between the EPP and another group in the European Parliament – be it of a structural nature in the form of a coalition or on an ad hoc basis on specific issues.
2. A higher-threshold form of cooperation would be to actually join the EPP Group: parties that are still unaffiliated often join a parliamentary group after the elections and before parliamentary groups are formed (though without becoming a member of the party). Transfers from other political families are also quite common, however. It is possible both to join and leave a parliamentary group without having to go through a lengthy procedure. However, the admission of a larger group to the parliamentary faction in particular has a significant impact on the balance of power in the group and on its programmatic orientation and strategy. A party that could bring 20+ members of parliament (such as Fratelli d’Italia, if current polls are anything to go by) would put forward a claim to be proactively involved in decision-making and the exercise of power.
3. The closest possible form of cooperation is the admission of a party to the EPP party family. This would presuppose ideological



coherence and requires basic trust in the party's programmatic compatibility, reliability and also structural sustainability. The admission of a party as a full member gives it access to party bodies with voting rights and hence the opportunity to leave a lasting mark on the political family. The EPP thus requires candidates to undergo a process consisting of several stages here. Moreover, past experience has shown that ousting parties is a lengthy process with fairly high hurdles, which – as in the case of Fidesz – can cause considerable upheavals within the EPP political family itself.

### **The EPP should not allow itself to be beguiled by simplistic slogans that invoke the cohesion of pro-European forces at all costs.**

---

Before looking at coalition options and a possible opening to the right – the size of a political family is not an end in itself – the question for the EPP is what vision it has for the EU and what priorities it wishes to set in the coming legislative period and beyond. If we look at the DNA of the EPP, as well as that of the overwhelming majority of its member parties, the prevailing idea is a clear commitment to the European unification process and its main achievements, as well as to democracy, freedom and the rule of law. Any departure from these core values would not be supported by a majority of its members. The guiding principles of the EPP also traditionally include a clear commitment to the transatlantic partnership and to the social market economy, based on responsibility, solidarity, solidity and subsidiarity.

In view of the challenges facing the EU, obvious points to address would be the strengthening of competitiveness, a comprehensive concept of sustainability that includes not only the environmental aspects but also the financial, economic and social dimensions, support for Ukraine, a

pragmatic asylum and migration policy, and advocacy for a free democratic world order. A paper by the EPP-affiliated Martens Centre identifies “seven Ds”<sup>14</sup> here as both challenges and priorities for action: defence, debt, digitalisation, demography, democracy, de-carbonisation and de-risking globalisation.

The next step would be for the EPP to consider which constellations would enable its priorities to be implemented most effectively. If the EPP remained true to the guiding principles it has followed to date and set the above-mentioned priorities, there would still be large areas of overlap with the political groups of the other pro-European forces – above all the Liberals. At the same time, the EPP should not already bind itself unconditionally to a left-liberal alliance of Socialists, Liberals and Greens in every policy area – not least because it otherwise risks the forces to its right filling the ensuing gaps, e.g. in the areas of migration, environmental and energy policy. In this connection, too, the EPP should not allow itself to be beguiled by simplistic slogans that invoke the cohesion of pro-European forces at all costs. The EPP was given an impressive demonstration of just how much such sometimes pompous appeals are worth in 2019 when Liberals and Socialists quickly abandoned the *Spitzenkandidat* principle, thereby destroying the chances of the EPP's *Spitzenkandidat* Manfred Weber of being elected to the office of Commission President.

At the same time, there are currently limits to the desire for alternative alliances: the ODS – which is currently certainly compatible with the EPP and has indeed signalled an interest in closer cooperation – does not represent the majority view of the present ECR parliamentary group in its current orientation. At the same time, it is in the interests of the EPP not to cut off any possibility of pragmatic collaboration with constructive forces in the ECR. This applies to issues of personnel policy as well: the European Council plays an essential role in determining the President of the Commission, and the heads of state and government of two countries are from the ECR Group. How promising any ad hoc cooperation with the ECR might be depends not least on the



On the rise: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's party could replace Poland's PiS as the strongest force among the "European Conservatives and Reformists" after the 2024 European elections. In the picture, Meloni and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz are seen at a meeting in February 2023. Photo: © Bernd von Jutrczenka, dpa, picture alliance.

dynamics within the ECR parliamentary group: Fratelli d'Italia could overtake the Polish PiS and become the largest member in the 2024 European Parliament elections. Should the Fratelli d'Italia maintain the comparatively pragmatic course that Meloni has adopted since assuming government responsibility in the European Parliament as well, the ECR could possibly become a more constructive partner. A formal permanent coalition with the ECR and without the Socialists is hardly realistic as it will likely not have the necessary numbers. The Liberals, the EPP and the ECR would currently gain 330 to 340 seats (see figure 2), but in view of the lack of compulsory

unanimity within a parliamentary group in the European Parliament, a viable coalition actually really needs 390 to 400 seats. Furthermore, leading Liberals have already clearly distanced themselves from the possibility of such a "centre-right" alliance.<sup>15</sup> It should also be borne in mind that given the EPP's own internal diversity, a lasting and more vehement left-right confrontation in the European Parliament could be a stress test for the EPP, too.

With regard to the second form of cooperation – the admission of new parties to the EPP Group – it is crucial to bear in mind that the inclusion of

larger parties in particular changes the ideological orientation and the balance of power within the faction. In the hypothetical case of Fratelli d'Italia, or an alliance under its leadership, being admitted, much would depend on the line-up of this new delegation – whether it was made up of pragmatic forces or in fact of far-right actors. The inclusion of a controversial party in the parliamentary group could also lead to alienation and an exodus of long-serving members. The founding Christian Democratic EPP parties from the Benelux countries, for example, have repeatedly warned against admitting Eurosceptic forces, and they called for the exclusion of Fidesz early on; they are also among the forces critical of admitting Fratelli. Other forces considered this step to be at least premature at the present time. Although together they have fewer MEPs than Fidesz, they have demonstrated above-average participation in the EPP for decades, and the Dutch in particular are close to the German Christian Democrats. Admission of the Flemish nationalist N-VA to the EPP Group could meet with similar resistance – not least from parties that are confronted with separatist parties in their own countries.

### **It is important to identify potential partners early and to maintain communication channels.**

---

On the other hand, the admission of new parties to the parliamentary faction (without simultaneous admission to the political family) could enable forces to prove themselves in the European Parliament and in the day-to-day work, thereby strengthening mutual understanding. What is more, it is important not to underestimate the socialising power of the parliamentary group itself. This is especially true of new forces that are still unaffiliated. The admission of a party such as Fratelli d'Italia – which was still supporting European policy positions incompatible with the EPP in 2021 (see above) – can only succeed if its European policy orientation has changed credibly and

sustainably since then. The triad of “pro EU, pro Ukraine, pro rule of law” is a necessary precondition for cooperation based on trust, but for an entire legislative period it is not sufficient on its own. Ultimately, the influence of a political group in the European Parliament is measured not only by its size, but also by its unity. For this reason, an important criterion for new admissions should be that a high degree of loyalty can be expected. The admission of Fratelli d'Italia is not currently on the agenda anyway.

The closest possible form of cooperation – admission to the European People's Party – should be weighed up particularly carefully. Not only arithmetic should be considered here but also ideological compatibility and therefore the political family's absorption capacity. The EPP's broad line-up provides flexibility, but its parties are held together by a fundamentally pro-European and pro-integration consensus: questioning this would probably plunge the political family into a crisis. The criteria for joining the EPP formulated in the 1990s – updated with a view to current challenges (pro Ukraine and pro rule of law) and with a clear focus on programmatic compatibility – ought to provide a solid basis for future admissions practice. Serious consideration should also be given to the idea of “godparenthood” for newly admitted parties, as was suggested in 2010.

At the same time, as in the 1990s – while continuing to remain cautious with regard to admitting potential (large) new members – it is important to plan ahead, identify potential future partners at an early stage and maintain channels of communication. For a political family that sees itself as a “people's party” and aspires to shape the future accordingly, it is not a satisfactory state of affairs in the long run to be below ten per cent in France and Italy, i.e. two of the largest EU countries. The EPP should therefore closely follow developments in the centre and centre-right spectrum in these two countries, provide support and encourage a possible change in Italy towards a constructive European policy orientation, for example – not least in order to prevent new attempts to form a major force to the right of the EPP in the long term. If they establish themselves in the Italian

party system as the most important force within the conservative spectrum, Fratelli d'Italia (or a successor party) could otherwise become a key centre of power for such an alliance to the right of the EPP. It would also serve the European integration process if, in the long term, a situation were to arise in France and Italy in which more than one pro-European force existed in the broader political centre with a realistic prospect of leading a government.

Due to its internal diversity and its history marked by several waves of enlargement, the EPP already performs an important bridging function between various political forces – more so than other European political families. As it has already done several times in its 47-year history, it will face the important challenge in the coming years of positioning itself with a clear vision regarding key issues that confront the EU based on its core values, while at the same time responding to developments in the party systems of its member states and attracting new forces in the medium term.

The EPP will remain a central pillar of the European unification process after the 2024 elections. Its positioning in the European party system and its strategy vis-à-vis the parties to its right will have consequences not only for itself but also for the further advancement of the European unification project.

*– translated from German –*

---

**Dr Olaf Wientzek** is Director of the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue Brussels of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and author of the EPP Party Barometer.

- 1 For more on the history and background of the EPP, see Gehler, Michael / Gonschor, Marcus / Meyer, Hinnerk / Schöner, Hannes (eds.) 2018: Transnationale Parteienkooperation der europäischen Christdemokraten und Konservativen, Munich.
- 2 Jansen, Thomas 2006: Die Europäische Volkspartei – Entstehung und Entwicklung, Brussels.
- 3 Wientzek, Olaf 2019: Europawahlen, Europaparteien und die Europäische Volkspartei, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 14 Feb 2019, in: <https://ogy.de/9hkh> [25 Oct 2023].
- 4 The founding members were the CDU and CSU (Germany), the CDS from France, the DC and SVP from Italy, the PSC and CVP from Belgium, the CSV from Luxembourg, the KVP, CHU and ARP from the Netherlands (now merged into the CDA) and the Irish Fine Gael. See also Jansen, Thomas / Van Hecke, Steven 2011: At Europe's Service: The Origins and Evolution of the European People's Party, Heidelberg.
- 5 Wientzek, Olaf (@AguirreOl) 2019: Seat distribution in the #EP2019 in the 11 Post-Communist EU countries, via Twitter, 1 Jun 2019, in: <https://ogy.de/7ulj> [25 Oct 2023].
- 6 Jahrbuch der EVP/EUCD 1996: pp. 46 f., p. 185.
- 7 Manfred Weber in an interview: "We stand for a course that excludes radicals. The AfD, Le Pen – these are our political enemies. I have formulated three conditions for any cooperation: pro Europe, pro Ukraine, pro rule of law. In this way we are building a firewall to the PiS [...]", in: Gutschker, Thomas / Kafsack, Hendrik 2023: "Von der Leyen wäre in der Poleposition", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25 Jun 2023, in: <https://faz.net/-gq5-bb04d> [25 Oct 2023].
- 8 Weilemann, Peter R. 2010: Erweiterungsstrategie der Europäischen Volkspartei, Reflection paper, Oct 2010.
- 9 Martens, Wilfried 2008: Europe: I Struggle, I Overcome, Dordrecht.
- 10 Welle, Klaus 2023: Le nouveau visage des droites en Europe et le conservatisme du futur, Le Grand Continent, 30 May 2023, in: <https://ogy.de/100j> [25 Oct 2023]; Gehler, Michael / Gonschor, Markus 2020: Ein europäisches Gewissen – Hans-Gert Pöttering, Freiburg i. Br.
- 11 Wientzek, Olaf 2023: EPP Party Barometer November 2023, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 23 Nov 2023, in: <https://ogy.de/pwg1> [5 Dec 2023].
- 12 European Parliament 2023: Minutes of proceedings: Results of roll-call votes – Annex, 12 Jul 2023, in: <https://ogy.de/674e> [25 Oct 2023].
- 13 Gotev, Georgi 2021: Orbán, Le Pen, Salvini, Kaczyński join forces to impact on the future of EU, Euractiv, 5 Jul 2021, in: <https://ogy.de/627p> [25 Oct 2023].
- 14 Welle, Klaus / Hefe, Peter et al. 2023: The 7Ds for Sustainability: 175 Proposals for the Next Legislature, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, in: <https://ogy.de/yatq> [15 Nov 2023].
- 15 Castaldi, Roberto 2023: EU liberals seek to drag EPP away from Meloni's 'extreme right', Euractiv, 13 Jun 2023, in: <https://ogy.de/9r1l> [25 Oct 2023].