

Preface

This year the European People's Party (EPP) celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary – an excellent moment to look back on what has been achieved thus far. From its birth on 8 July 1976 as the Federation of Christian Democratic parties of the European Communities, the EPP has been a factor in shaping European integration. At the time of its origins, it was one of three partly overlapping party organisations of Europe's centre right, along with the older, continental European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) and the European Democratic Union (EDU), a loose association of right-of-centre parties. It was by no means clear in 1976 that by the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century the EPP would have grown far beyond its original Christian Democratic core, absorbing the other two organisations and continuing as the strongest political force, both in the European Parliament (EP) and in most of the European Union Member States. Consequently, it has not only become the definitive party family on the centre-right, but also a truly European party, closely cooperating with, but distinct from, the EPP Group in the EP. This happened earlier in the EPP's development than in that of the respective organisations of the Liberals, Socialists and Greens.

Today, the EPP family consists of Christian Democrats and many other non-collectivist strands, encompassing a broad range of political tendencies and identities of the centre-right. Many of them, both in Western Europe and especially in Central and Eastern Europe, do not fit the classic labels of Christian Democrats, Conservatives and Liberals, but are woven of combinations of those threads. In that sense the EPP in its own expansion mirrors the enlargement of the EU, and the strengthening of EPP structures over time mirrors the institutional deepening of integration over

recent decades. The EPP has always been, more than anything else, essentially at Europe's service.

The EPP family has faced many decisive challenges. From the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of Communism and the unification of Germany, to the accession of Central Europe's new democracies to NATO and the EU, to the financial and economic crisis, the EPP has time and again played a key role in defusing conflicts of interest, creating synergies between people and between institutions, always taking European integration another decisive step forward. This skill is again in demand in the severe crisis that surrounds the euro today. We can prevail only by relying on the fundamental values that have nurtured us through our history: the Christian image of man as a point of departure, human dignity, freedom in responsibility, solidarity, subsidiarity – and the recognition that only a strong EU guarantees Europe's future in the world. Drawing on these values, the EPP family will be able to master present and future challenges: the euro crisis, climate action, demographic change, immigration and integration, and regaining competitiveness in the globalised economy.

This book describes how the EPP was created and how it developed into its present shape and structure. Co-authored by Thomas Jansen, the former Secretary General of the EPP, and Steven van Hecke, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Antwerp, the book is based on an original text from 1996 by Jansen, which appeared in an updated version in 2006. For the 2011 edition, the entire text has been reviewed, restructured and once more updated, and now includes an account of the creation of the EPP's political foundation, the Centre for European Studies (CES), in 2007.

I have been closely involved with the development of the EPP as described in this book, not only as its President since 1990 but also in its founding stage in 1975 and 1976. I am proud to present this revised text on the origins and evolution of the EPP. My thanks go to the authors for their tireless work, and to the CES for editing and coordinating this volume.

Wilfried Martens, EPP President and CES President,
Brussels, March 2011

At Europe's Service

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Party

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