

The Similarities and the Differences in the Functioning of the European Right Wing: An Attempt to Integrate the European Conservatives and Christian Democrats

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Abstract

The text reviews the attempt of the European Conservative and Christian Democratic Parties to construct a common platform within which they could more effectively defend and develop the interests of the political right wing in the European Parliament. The text follows the chronological line of development of events, emphasizing the doctrinal and the national differences as a reason for the relative failure in the process of unification of the European right wing. The subcontext of the argumentation protrudes the ideological, the national as well as the religious-doctrinal interests of some of the more important Christian Democratic, that is, conservative parties in Europe, which emerged as an obstacle of the unification. One of the more important problems that enabled the quality and complete unification of the European conservatives and Christian Democrats is the attitude in regard to the formation of EU as a federation of countries. The weight down of the British conservatives on the side of the national sovereignty and integrity against the Pan-European idea for united European countries formed on federal basis, is considered as the most important impact on the unification of the parties from the right ideological spectrum on European land.

Key words: Conservative Party, Christian Democratic Party, CDU European Union, European People's Party.

1. Introduction

On European land, the trend of connection of political parties on the basis of ideology has been notable for a long time. This trend has been caused by few causes, one of which is considered as most important and it refers to the enlargement of the political subjects in the defense and affirmation of the doctrinal interests on supranational level. The international government bodies, primarily the European Union as such, are places where the unification of the common forces on ideological basis is considered as a precondition in the survival and the strengthening of the own political agenda.

If one considers as expected the unification and the enlargement of the left political forces on the basis of one of their ideological-doctrinal postulates – the internationalism, then the emergence of a counterpart at the European right-wing politicians is completely expected as a counterbalance of this European left-wing enlargement. However what distinguished this process, betoken in the right-wing, surely is the national commitment to the idea of having an own country as still the most important subject of the international politics and law.

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If it is expected that Socialist, Social Democrats and Communists have pro-supranational attitudes in favor of the nation-the country, then the differences that exists in regard to the future of the EU should be emphasized in the camp of the European right-wing, primarily between the pro-European minded and Catholic postulated Christian Democrats, versus the Royalist and fiscal-nationalistic rooted conservatives. The following text contains a historical representation of the attempt to unite the European right wing and the problems that obstructed and hampered that process.

2. The International Cooperation Within The European Right-Wing

During the process of construction of the European institutions, a need emerged for cooperation to be established between the political parties that lead this process, particularly the ones that show ideological closeness. In this regard, opposing the cooperation of the left-wing parties within the Socialist International and in the right wing there were attempts to coordinate the public policies. Few organizations were created with the objective to coordinate the public policies of the right-wing parties. The two most important organizations were the European Democratic Union, EDU and the European People's Party, EPP. These organizations were divided on ideological grounds. While the members within the EDU were mostly conservative parties, the members of the EPP were Christian Democratic parties.

2.1. The European Democratic Union (EDU)

The European Democratic Union (EDU) was created in 1978 and it was functioning on the basis of inter-party conferences (Kaiser and Starie 2005: 140). The members of EDU were mostly Christian Democratic parties, such as the CDU.³ The goal of the EDU was to establish relations of cooperation and mutual support of the member parties. Exchange of ideas for implementation of public policies as well as electoral cooperation was encouraged within the EDU. In 1983 most of the member parties of the European Democratic Party formed the International Democrat Union (IDU) composed of 80 member parties. In 2002 the existence of the EDU was formally terminated and it became a part of the European People's Party.

Although most member parties of the EDU were conservative, the name of this organization lacked the term conservative because the intention was to attract the Christian Democratic Parties in the membership. However, most Christian Democratic parties, especially the Dutch, the Belgian and the Italian Christian Democratic Party, refused to join the EDU, since they considered it as competition of the EPP. Due to the membership in the EDU, the remaining Christian Democratic Parties accused the CDU for being unprincipled (Johanson 1997:71). For the CDU on the other hand, the European Democratic Union was not a rival of the European People's Party. The CDU was working on making the Christian Democratic parties to become members of the EDU, and the Conservative parties to become members of the EPP. This policy of the CDU proved to be unsuccessful and after certain period of time it was abandoned.

2.2. The European People's Party (EPP)

The European People's Party is a transnational party formed by the Christian Democratic parties that are functioning within particular countries on the European continent. The objective of the European People's Party is to be able to manage the public affairs in the process of European integrations through the majority of the European Parliament (Gaffney 1996:16).⁴ This party helps in the strengthening of the identity and the cohesion of the Christian Democracy.

³ The CDU was also a member of the European People's party as well as of the European Democratic Union

⁴ The European Parliament was formed on September 10th 1952. Since 1979 the members of the European Parliament are no longer delegated from the national parliaments, and they are elected by a direct vote for a term of five years.

The inter-party cooperation of the Christian Democratic parties has its predecessors in the International Secretariat for Democratic Parties with Christian Inspiration which acted before World War I. After World War II, the cooperation between the Christian Democratic parties was much closer. In 1948 the NEI (Nowelles Equipes Internationales) was formed, which was the organizer of congresses and meetings not only for the Christian Democratic parties, but also for the intellectual elites close to Christian Democracy. The successor of the NEI is the “European Union of Christian Democrats, EUCD”, which was formed in 1965. The EUCD is a member of the Christian Democrat International, CDI. The European Union of Christian Democrats helped a lot in 1976 for the formation of the European People’s Party – EPP. Actually the Secretary General of the European Union of Christian Democrats, Leo Tindermans became the first president of the European People’s Party (Hanley 1994: 186; Moschonas and Kourvetaris 1996: 211-212; Gaffney 1996: 45; Kaiser and Starie 2005: 133).

Simultaneously, only the Christian Democratic parliamentary group was acting in the European Parliament. Unofficially it was formed one day after the formation of the European Parliament, and formally it started to work in 1953 after the parliament assembly adopted a resolution that provided the opportunity to form parliamentary groups (Kaiser and Starie 2005: 133).

The example of the European People’s Party once again shows the tensions between the Christian Democracy and the Conservatism as related public policies within the right-wing. The fact that the British Conservative Party is one of the last that qualified for the membership in the European People’s Party illustrates these tensions (Hanley 1994: 9).

Maybe the best way to reflect the complexity of the cooperation between the Christian Democratic and the Conservative Parties is the issue of the selection of the name for the European People’s Party. The CDU preferred a name that will not be repulsive for the conservative parties, which according to the attitudes of this party were also supposed to be members of the new party in the European Parliament. The CDU wanted a creation of an alliance with parties that do not need to have so close attitudes with the Christian Democratic Parties. For this reason the CDU insisted not to use the adjective “Christian” since this could be interpreted as papism or clericalism by the conservatives (the British and the Danish conservatives). The Dutch, the Belgian and the Italian Christian Democratic Parties were on the other side arguing that the name which is going to be the best expression of the identity of the parties must contain the word Christian. A compromise was achieved thereby making the Christian Democracy a part of the complete (longer) name of the European People’s Party.

Actually the complete name of the EPP is EPP-FCDPEC (European People’s Party-Federation of Christian Democratic Parties of the European Community). This compromise on one hand satisfied the requirement of the Dutch, the Belgian and the Italian Christian Democratic Party and on the other hand it left space for eventual future cooperation with the conservative parties (Johanson 1997; Hanley 1994: 186; Kourvetaris and Moschonas 1996: 220).

In 1979 the name of the parliamentary group of the European People’s Party from “Christian Democratic Parliamentary Group” was changed into parliamentary group of the European People’s Party. Something similar was also happening between the ranks of the conservatives. In 1979 the name of the parliamentary group of the conservative parties in the European Parliament was also changed as well into “conservative parliamentary group”, and this was irritating for the Christian Democrats in the European Democratic Group, EDG.

With the very admission of Great Britain in the EEC, the Conservative Party, together with the Danish Conservative Party formed a separate conservative parliamentary club in the European parliament and it did not join the parliamentary group of the Christian democratic parties, for which there were estimations that it has more centrist rather than right-wing orientation, but it also did not join the parliamentary group of the European Democrat Union where the Gaullists dominated, which according to the British Conservative Party had too nationalist orientation (Johanson 1997; Kaiser and Starie 2005:133).⁵ One of the most important reasons for the establishment of the conservative parliamentary group in the European Parliament and the reason why it was maintained for many years is that in this manner the conservatives were able to maintain the independence of the public policies of their parties.

After the elections for the European parliament in 1989, the Conservative Party of Great Britain submitted an application for membership in the EPP.⁶ This application was exposed to resistance by the Conservative Party itself. Hence, prominent members of the British Conservative Party such as Norman Tebbit opposed the idea for the representatives from the Conservative Party in the European Parliament to be full members of the Christian Democratic parliament group, due to the corporatist economic and federalist European policies of the Christian Democratic parties (Gaffney 1996: 130). At the same time the application surprised the Christian Democratic parties since the electoral platforms of the conservatives and the Christian Democrats at the European Elections in 1989 were very different. While the basic slogan of the Democratic Christians in these elections was “United European Countries”, the conservative party of Great Britain issued publications where it indicated that the party would strive that Great Britain never becomes part of the “United European Countries” and criticized the ideas for federal Europe. On 7th July 1989, the EPP decided to postpone the review of the application of the British conservative Party.⁷ On 1st may 1992 however, the Conservative Party became part of the EPP, and the representatives of the European democratic group became associate members of the parliament group of the European People’s Party. (Kaiser and Starie 2005: 133).

The very fact that from the reference of the request for alliance to the realization of the idea and the establishment of the alliance in May 1992, a period of three years passed, indicated that there were certain difficulties for the implementation of the idea for an alliance of the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives. There were many reasons that hampered the admission of the conservatives in the EPP such as: the economic and the social policies and the process of European integrations. The economic and the social policy of the Christian Democrats insisted on the social chapter from the Maastricht Treaty and the social dimension of the common European market, which was categorically refused by the conservatives, and in the process of European integrations the Christian democrats had the goal to form united European countries which is also unacceptable for the conservatives.

Ever since the announcement of the alliance between the Christian Democrats and the conservatives within the EPP there were great misunderstandings. The British conservatives insisted to change the name of the parliament group of the EPP in order to symbolically show their separate identity from the Christian Democratic parties.

⁵ The parliamentary groups of the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives within the European parliament had good cooperation which was strained in the period when the coordinator of the Christian Democratic group became Alfred Bertrand 1975-77, a member of the Belgian Christian Democratic Party and a syndicalist.

⁶ One of the reasons referred to the weakened positions of the “European Democratic Group” in the European Parliament, since the British and the Danish conservatives had weaker electoral results and less representatives in the European Parliament.

⁷ Although the EPP was generally against the application, official refusal is not served, but rather a delay of the consideration of the application

For this reason in 1999 the name of the parliamentary group of the EPP was changed into “parliament group of the APP and the European democrats” (Kaiser and Starie 2005: 134). In 2004 the conservative parties once again negotiated for their membership in the EPP and announced separation from the EPP and formation of a conservative parliament group in the European parliament, after the European elections in 2009.

3. The Difference between the Christian Democratic and Conservative Policies of European Integration within the European People’s Party

The European People’s Party has the image of a European Federalist Party. In the very program of the party it is indicated that the party strives for “United European countries”. At the congress of the EPP held in November 1995 in Madrid, a document was adopted where a commitment to build federal Europe was indicated. The Christian Democratic commitment for federal Europe implied formation of a European Government which will be elected in direct elections. These attitudes of the EPP differ significantly from the Euro-skeptical position of the conservatives. Actually as members of the EPP they voted against this document from the congress in Madrid which envisioned the construction of federal Europe (Gerven 2005: 343).

Even during the submission of the application for membership of the Conservative party of Great Britain in the EPP, the party came up with an attitude that for the EPP the development of the European Community into a federal political union which will include both monetary and a security union, is a goal with the ultimate priority. In the speech from November 1991 the Secretary General of the EPP, Thomas Jansen indicated that “an alliance with the conservatives will be accepted, only if this does not imply retraction of the Christian democratic values, especially on the issue of construction of a European federation.” At the moment when in April 1991 the Conservative party was accepted as an associate member of the EPP, a resolution was adopted according to which the membership of the EPP was able to accept parties with different tradition if they accept Christian Democracy and the program on European federation as an important part of the party program (Johanson 1997:175).

Although the conservatives during their admission in the EPP accepted the program about federal Europe, the doubts about their honesty remained, i.e. the tactical dimensions of the acceptance of the federal vision about Europe. The common goal of the member parties of the EPP was to form federal Europe, but also the British conservatives emphasized only the economic aspects of the process of European integrations.

Reactions arrived within the Conservative Party about the acceptance of the program determination for EPP for federal Europe. Most of the members of the British Conservative party considered that the party policy on the issue of the European integrations should be turned on its head. They considered that the Conservative Party is in a condition of schizophrenia, on one hand to become the biggest protector of the British identity and sovereignty, and on the other hand to lead a policy for federal Europe, which implies change of the identity and the sovereignty.

Soon it became clear that the acceptance of the Christian Democratic policy for construction of federal Europe is only a tactical move by the British conservatives. George Kourvetaris and Andreas Moschonas (Kourvetaris and Moschonas 1996: 220) noticed that there are serious differences between the Christian Democratic idea of federal united Europe and the conservative Euro-skepticism that prefers the nation state.

The attitudes of the leading people of the British Conservative Party went in the same direction. According to Margaret Thatcher, the Christian Democrats did not show the capacity to deal with the issue of the relations between the nation states and the supranational institutions. There was a similar opinion by Norman Tebbit, one of the most influential people in the Conservative Party, according to who the cooperation with the Christian Democrats on the issue of European integrations is problematic, since the EPP strives for the construction of centralized European country in which the nation states will be provinces. (Johanson 1997:179-180). The successor of Margaret Thatcher, John Major (as well as Thatcher herself) distanced himself from the politics for construction of federal Europe, which was also done by all future presidents of the Conservative party.

4. Conclusion

The process of unification and enlargement of the European right wing, as it was shown, suffers from several problems and difficulties. It became evident that the European right-wing unlike the left-wing has bigger obstacles for enlargement of its ranks in the defense of the doctrinal-ideological postulates at supranational level. The example with the quenching of the European Democrat Union and the attempt by its member parties to transit to the European People's party is the best example of this. Of course what is also worth to denote is the failed attempt of the German Christian Democrats – the CDU, which tried to be used as a bridge for rapprochement and enlargement of the European right wing through the membership in both organizations. The genesis of the enlargement of the European right wing was also presented by the European Democrat Union as one of the attempts and an intermediate stage for the final embodiment of a strong European right-wing, which is why the greatest hopes were directed towards the emergence of the European People's Party in 2002. Principally formed as a club of the European Christian Democrats, this coalition of the right-wing in the European parliaments also attempted to attract the conservative parties within their ranks.

During these, one has to admit, not entirely successful efforts, the German Christian Democrats (GCD) have proven to be most fervent. However, in this entire process against the German generosity expressed in the absorbing enthusiasm of CDU towards the conservative parties in Europe, there was the skepticism and the national pride of the British conservatism. The attempt to join the British conservatives within the European right wing was always accompanied by the demand of concessions and the right to act independently. This was obvious from the demand to change the name of the common organization in the European People's Party to the open disagreement with the concept European united countries postulated on federal basis. Within the European People's Party the process of European integration was followed by diversity of the Christian Democrats and the conservatives in regard to the economic and the social policies. The economic and the social policy of the Christian Democrats insisted on the social chapter from the Maastricht Treaty and the social dimension of the common European market, which was categorically refused by the conservatives. The suspicion of the British conservatives in regard to the ability of the European Christian Democrats to organize the interests of the national countries in terms of the supranational (federal) structures, inter alia, proved to be of key importance for the failure of the enlargement of the European right wing.

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