

# THE PRESENT SITUATION OF CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE



**T**owards the end of the seventies, some people believed that European Christian-democracy was a stagnant and practically worn-out ideology. No-one denied that after the war it had fulfilled the important task of reconstructing a number of countries in ruins and healing the moral wounds. This task allowed the reconciliation of two important continental powers, France and Germany, and was the beginning of the process by which Christian-democracy laid the foundations of a united Europe. Its founders were Schumann, in France, de Gasperi, in Italy, and Adenauer, in Germany. It was even recognized that the Christian-democrats played an important role in the attempt to save democracy and freedom in countries which eventually fell into the soviet orbit, for example, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Furthermore, the best-informed experts on modern history were generous in their praise of those who had achieved independence for the island of Malta: the Christian-democrat Nationalist Party. But, having recognized these facts and others of less importance, it seemed that the Christian-democrats only continued in a handful of governments: Italy, the Benelux states and Switzerland. The severe ideological crisis in the old M.R.P. in France and its virtual disappearance from politics following general De Gaulle's victory, the relegation of the German and Austrian Christian-democrats to the opposition for many years, and the fiasco of the CDS in Portugal and of the "Equipo Demócrata del Estado Español", along with the fleeting success of the "Neia Democracia" in Greece, did not seem to offer much hope.

But the stubborn defence of the European ideal, with two remarkable successes in the two direct elections to the European Parliament, were to be the threshold of a new situation. Although Christian-democracy hardly exists in Denmark and not at all in Great Britain, it has managed to be the most voted force on two occasions. However, the multiple, and sometimes, contradictory electoral systems have meant that it is not the parliamentary group with most deputies.

At the same time, thanks to Dutch organization, the Scandinavian Christian-democrat parties began to emerge and

soon became established in Norway, where they were later to collaborate with a centralist government; in Sweden, where they got a substantial municipal and even parliamentary representation, and in Finland, where they have important youth sections. But in the eighties there has been a Christian-democrat explosion from north to south and from east to west. At the moment, there are Christian-democrat ministers in the governments of Ireland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria, as well as in the autonomous governments of Catalonia and the Basque Country. Furthermore, five of the ten EEC commissioners are Christian-democrats, as is the former president of the *Parlament de Catalunya*.

The Christian-democrats in Europe have rethought their strategy and have joined forces at European Community level to form the P.P.E., the most cohesive political group on a European scale.

At the same time, they are simultaneously drawing on their origins and modernizing the philosophical ideas that infuse them, with frequent meetings under the wing of the Jacques Maritain Foundation or the Praglia Study Centre in Italy. This has led them to create specialized organizations such as the Christian-democrat European Union of Workers and its namesake of local representatives.

But perhaps, what makes them different from that other great world family, the Socialists, is their federalist vocation, their defence of human rights and their respect for those of the people.

For example, the Christian-democrat European Union permits membership to more than one party per state when this responds to a pluralism of nationalities within a state, or to the existence of a different language or culture or historical or political tradition. Thus there are two Christian-democrat parties in Belgium, the Flemish and the Walloon, and in Italy the German-speakers of the southern Tyrole have their own party. This respect for the different communities is a characteristic of the majority of the European Christian-democrat parties that should not be underrated.

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