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On the Foundation of the Party of the European Left (EL)

Europe is growing together. On 1 May 2004, after long labour pains, the old European Union of the Fifteen became the EU of the Twenty-five. Hardly anyone doubts that Romania and Bulgaria will be the next members in 2007. Turkey remains under discussion as a candidate, however shrilly the German conservatives may foretell the downfall of the Christian Occident.

For decades the unification of the continent was being spurred on by a twofold process. On the one hand there was the attempt to draw the lessons from the history of the two world wars that emanated from Europe. A strong movement for the unification of Europe also arose from the anti-Fascist resistance. The ruling elites as well had realised that without a fundamental change in the relations between Germany and France in particular a lasting peace in Europe was not possible. A Europe came into being whose members, once "hereditary enemies", have not waged war against one another for almost sixty years. At the same time, the unification of Europe was also a project of big business. The EU of liberalised markets and of the common military bears its handwriting.

Economic globalisation on neo-liberal terms and the return of war as an almost natural policy instrument, initiated by those who rule in the USA today, have left their mark on Europe. And in the EU Constitution, a document that is necessary for heightening integration in the expanded Union, important fundamental rights are given constitutional status and democratic elements of the EU are consolidated. At the same time the present logic of neo-liberal economic policy, progressive dismantling of social facilities and a militarised foreign and security policy is perpetuated. Arms build-up is becoming a constitutional duty.

The European Union is increasingly affecting the day-to-day life of millions of people. And yet it has remained alien to many of its citizens. Resistance is increasing among political parties of the left, trade unions and social and peace movements against the levelling of social standards, the dismantling of labour rights and the participation of EU soldiers in military operations abroad.

The gradual process of integration in which more and more countries of the continent are participating is an opportunity and at the same time a challenge to the political left to wage the battle for a different society at a new level. Today the EU is a concrete sphere of action where they have to offer their social solutions, organise their actions and fight for majorities.

Why Found a Party of the European Left at This Particular Time?

The European left is not in good shape. Split up into several political families and focused mostly on national struggles, it has so far done little to shape the features of European integration. More and more, the main reason for its weakness is proving to be that it lacks a coherent, credible and practicable alternative to present-day capitalism in Europe that goes beyond set phrases such as "a society free of exploitation".

For the left the alternative to today's EU cannot be withdrawal into national quarters. The left must pool its intellectual and political potential, present more coherent analyses, point out more convincing alternatives and organise more forceful actions. The founding of the Party of the European Left can be a chance to lead the left out of its present defensive strategic position.

In many countries of Europe today we see a tendency to forge US-style two-party systems of conservatives and social democrats that are gradually occupying the entire political space,

taking over the major media, coming to resemble each other more and more and presenting the maxims of their policy as without alternative. In view of the danger of being pushed into insignificance, the left has to fight for its independence as a political force still able to take action nationally and internationally. It is becoming necessary for survival for the left to consolidate its forces for that purpose.

The appeal to found the EL aroused a great deal of interest, approval and new hope in Germany's political left. Specifically among younger politically committed people, the idea that a strong, unified force could emerge for the whole continent has met with a good response.

Together with interest, curiosity and astonishment, however, the initiators of the project are being greeted with open disapproval, attacks and misrepresentations from certain quarters of the left. Representatives of the Communist Party of Greece are behaving particularly aggressively. Arguments from their paper *Rizospastis* are constantly being warmed over in publications of different countries and various shades of political opinion. The main reproach is that the founding of the Party of the European Left is a prearranged "splitting action" to disarm left parties and movements in their resistance to the EU.¹

The Founding of the Party of the European Left is the Outcome of a Long Process

Anyone who wants to grasp the historical dimension of the quality of cooperation of left parties in Europe that has been achieved today must go back at least to the watershed years of 1989/90. The failure of the state socialist model triggered a crisis that shook the international left movement much more deeply and lastingly than was realised at first. Debates sprang up everywhere about the ideological, political and organisational conclusions to be drawn from this defeat and about new answers. They led to restructurings, splits and refoundations of left parties and organisations in many countries. The field of their international cooperation was also reshuffled.

In 1991 a number of reformed communist, left-wing socialist and red-green parties founded the New European Left Forum. (NELF). What the initiators of this network had in common was the breach with Stalinism and with the model of a "New Type of Party", the critical reappraisal of their own past, inner party pluralism and the goal of democratic socialism. These forces see themselves as a capitalism-critical, anti-capitalist left striving for a transformation of society from within its present state and working for peace, social justice, defence of the welfare state, redistribution of wealth, resistance to neo-liberal globalisation, sustainable development, more democracy, genuine gender equality, and an open Europe of many cultures. This view of social change found expression in the term transformative left.

The PDS has been a member of the NELF since 1995. Access was not made easy for it as the successor to the leading force in a real socialist state. The preconditions for its acceptance in this circle were a) a thorough and honest reappraisal of its own history, b) a clear commitment to democracy as the principle of inner party life and social change and c) a perceptible influence in society. These criteria still apply for parties with similar origins from the countries of central and eastern Europe. The strong point of the NELF is the sustained cooperation in the course of which a strong basic political consensus and basic trust has grown up among the parties and their concrete representatives. At regular meetings every six months information and opinions are exchanged, common positions on important matters of European policy are developed, statements are drafted and occasionally common actions

¹ See inter alia *Rizospastis*, 15 Feb. 2004; *Junge Welt*, 8 April 2004; Fausto Sorini, *The Fragile Illusion of the "European Party"*, www.kominform.at

are organised. Today there are 14 member and four observer parties working together in the NELF.²

The relaxed, flexible form of the network was for many then – after their experience in the international communist and workers' movement of the pre-watershed years – and is for some even today the type of cooperation of left forces appropriate to our time. On the other hand, the experience of the NELF itself aroused in many parties in the course of time the desire for more cooperation. The *idea* to tackle the project of a common European party was *born in that circle*.

After the European elections of 1994 the previously existing two left parliamentary groups in the European Parliament (EP) amalgamated to form the Confederal Group of the European United Left (GUE) – a not inconsiderable advance in the process of unification of the left. When Sweden and Finland joined the EU in 1995 the Nordic Green Left, an alliance of the MEPs from the Socialist Peoples' Party (SF – Denmark), Left Alliance (VAS – Finland) and Left Party (VP – Sweden) was added as an autonomous component. From then on the group called itself GUE/NGL. The confederal tendency was strengthened by the technical link-up with two French Trotskyite parties, the Communist Revolutionary League (LCR) and Workers' Struggle (LO) after the 1999 European elections. At the end of the current parliamentary term in June 2004 the group consisted of 49 MEPs from 14 parties and 10 countries. They were joined by observers from the acceding countries Czechia, Slovakia, Lithuania and Cyprus. This made the GUE/NGL the fourth largest force in the EP after the conservative, socialist and liberal groups and ahead of the Greens. The PDS and the French Communist Party (PCF) were the largest sub-groups with 6 MEPs each.

The GUE/NGL group has been steadily active for two parliamentary terms now. It is the unanimous opinion of the participating parties that it should continue its successful work in the coming parliamentary term if the election results so permit.³

Between 1996 and 1998 the chairpersons of a number of European left parties met three times in Madrid and Berlin to jointly define European policy positions at the top level. This series, somewhat rashly dubbed the “Madrid process” by some optimists, was not continued in the following years, however. At the Berlin meeting on 5 June 1998, PDS Chairman Lothar Bisky urged that new ways and forms of common political work above and beyond the NELF and the GUE/NGL be considered. The suggestion met with general approval. That was the *start of the concrete discussion about the idea* of forming a party of the European Left.⁴

² Present member parties of the NELF are (in alphabetical order of the German country names): Socialist People's Party (SF – Denmark), PDS, Estonian Social Democratic Labour Party (ESDTP), Left Alliance (VAS – Finland), French Communist Party (PCF), Citizen's Movement (MdC – France), Coalition of Left, of Movements and Ecology (SYNASPISMOS – Greece), Communist Refoundation Party (PRC – Italy), Party of the Italian Communists (PdCI), Socialist Left Party (SV – Norway), Left Party (VP – Sweden), Labour Party of Switzerland (PdAS), United Left (IU – Spain), Initiative for Catalonia/Green (IC/V – Catalonia/Spain).

The following have observer status: Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL – Cyprus) and the Group of the Unified European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) in the European Parliament.

³ Member parties of the GUE/NGL group at the end of the 1999-2004 parliamentary term were: SF, PDS, VAS, PCF, Revolutionary Communist League (LCR – France), Workers' Struggle (LO – France), SYNASPISMOS, Communist Party of Greece (KKE), Democratic-Social Movement –Social Movement (DIKKI – Greece), PRC, PdCI, Socialist Party (SP – Netherlands), PCP and IU.

Observers were sent by the Socialist Party of Lithuania (SPL), the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM – Czech Republic) and AKEL.

⁴ Attending the Berlin Meeting of the Chairpersons of European Left Parties were:

Communist Party (PC – Belgium), SF, PDS, VAS, PCF, MdC, SYNASPISMOS, KKE, Democratic Left (DL – Ireland), PRC, SP, SV, KPÖ, PCP, VP, PdAS, IU, IC/V, AKEL and GUE/NGL.

In 1999, 13 left parties first worked out a common election appeal for the European elections. After the elections its content became the basis of the activity of the renewed GUE/NGL group.⁵

On the fringes of the NELF meetings in Copenhagen in June 2002 and Paris in January 2003, more intensive discussions took place on the project of founding a party of the European left. In March 2003 an initiative group met in Athens and took up the work on a Manifesto and Statutes for the future EL. The initiators were the PCF, the Coalition of Left, of Movements and Ecology (SYNASPISMOS – Greece), the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC – Italy), the PDS, the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), the United Left (IU – Spain) and a few other parties. The initiative group carried on its work until the end of 2003.

After consulting with the initiative group the PDS invited its members and a number of other parties to a Berlin meeting on 10 and 11 January 2004. There a common appeal of 11 parties to found a party of the European left was published, a draft manifesto was adopted and a draft statute was presented. The hosts had deliberately invited to the meeting European parties known to have a wait-and-see or sceptical attitude to the project.⁶ A lively exchange of views took place on current tasks of the European left and the most suitable ways of carrying them out. From today's vantage-point the Berlin meeting can be seen as the *catalyst for the foundation process*, which was given new impetus. Also, the massive media presence had the effect that the project became known to a wide European public for the first time. Soon afterwards, the initiative group resolved at a meeting in Athens on 7 and 8 February 2004 to convene the Foundation Congress of the Party of the European Left in Rome on 8 and 9 May 2004. The circumstance that Athens on that very weekend was struck by a catastrophic snowstorm and a number of participants failed to reach the venue was not enough to prevent the decision from being taken. They voted via the Internet.

The founding of the Party of the European Left was thus the logical consequence of more than a decade of close, constructive and trustful cooperation by the parties of the European transformative left in the NELF network, in the GUE/NGL group and in other international contexts.

Two main motives can be sifted out of the multitude of factors that speak for the EL project today. One is that the loose, relatively noncommittal cooperation in the network and confederal parliamentary group is no longer enough for the parties that decided to be members of the EL. They have a strong common urge to pool their forces to influence the course of European events more strongly. The other is that they want the EL to be an attractive, politically and conceptually potent partner for the increasingly active social and peace movements in Europe, taking their concerns into the parliaments, receiving stimuli from them and giving them stimuli. It runs like a red thread through the founding documents of the party that it strives for a relationship of equals to equals with the movements, that any leadership pretensions, any vanguard aspirations of woeful memory are automatically ruled out.

The parties of the EL are aware that they are not tilling the fields of left-wing politics in Europe alone, if only because a number of their members are active in other left contexts as

⁵ The common election appeal for the 1999 European elections was signed by: PC, PDS, PCF, SYNASPISMOS, PRC, KPÖ, PCP, SP, VP, PdAS, IU, IC/V and AKEL.

⁶ Attending the Berlin Meeting on the Founding of a Party of the European Left were:

As signatories to the Foundation Appeal:

PDS, ESDTP, PCF, SYNASPISMOS, PRC, The Left (DL – Luxemburg), KPÖ, KSS, IU, KSCM and Party of Democratic Socialism (SSD – Czech Republic).

As observers: PdCI, PCP and AKEL

As guests:

VAS, Party for Equal Rights (ERP – Lithuania), SP, SV and Democratic People's Party (DEHAP – Turkey).

well. Several of them take part in the international meetings of communist and labour parties that the CP of Greece regularly convenes in Athens at intervals of several years.⁷ Some components of the EL parties also cooperate in the European Anti-capitalist Left (EAL), an association of left parties of Trotskyite leanings that was founded in Lisbon in the year 2000.⁸ This is the reality that the Party of the European Left is prepared to confront. Its statute explicitly allows its member parties to be members of other alliances, including those outside of Europe.⁹

The Party of the European Left is a Reality

The Foundation Congress of the EL took place in Rome on 8 and 9 May 2004. About 200 delegates of 19 parties in 15 countries of Europe attended. Guest delegations were present from 23 left parties all over the world. This significant act was performed democratically, in dignity and in an inspiring atmosphere. The congress unanimously resolved to found the party. It adopted the Manifesto and Statute and a financial concept for the organisation with only a few dissenting votes and abstentions. Fausto Bertinotti (PRC – Italy) became the first Chairperson and Pedro Marset (United Left – IU – Spain) was made Treasurer. The rotation principle applies to these functions. The member parties each delegated one female and one male representative to the executive of the party, and they were unanimously endorsed by the Congress. The IU will submit the names that are still missing later. The nomination of the representatives of the PCF will take place after the poll of members that is traditional in that party. For the first time in post-1989 history the European Left now has a common organisation – a truly historic moment.

The EL now has 15 member parties.¹⁰ That is four parties more than were at the Berlin meeting of January 2004. Three parties declared themselves observers.¹¹ At the time of its founding the EL has more than 500 000 members. Manifesto, Statute, speeches and contributions to the discussion at the Foundation Congress identify it as a democratic, transparent, open and emancipatory left party that is geared to common political actions for a social, democratic, ecological, peaceful and cosmopolitan Europe, to close cooperation on equal terms with other left parties, trade unions, social and peace movements and non-governmental organisations. At the same time its policies are not arbitrary: the basic consensus includes internal democracy, autonomy of the parties in their national politics, and anti-Stalinism.

Throughout the foundation process, it was an important concern of the participating parties to demonstrate in what traditions the EL wanted to stand from its inception: those of the labour movement (the participants in the Berlin meeting joined the powerful procession to the graves of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde on 11 January 2004), of the progressive left thinking (the Foundation Congress visited the grave of Antonio Gramsci in Rome), of anti-Fascism (it commemorated the victims of the massacre by the German fascists at the Fosse Adriatine), of peace (the party was founded on 8 May, the Day of Liberation), of anti-Stalinism and advocacy of a social, democratic and peaceful Europe (the Mayor of Rome received the delegates on 9 May in the City Hall, where the foundation treaties of the European Community were signed).

⁷ E.g. PRC, KSS, Communist Party of Spain (PCE), Labour Party (AP – Hungary) and AKEL.

⁸ This applies to the PRC, DL and United Alternative Left (EuiA – Catalonia/Spain).

⁹ See Article 6, Para 2. In: <http://sozialisten.de/sozialisten/el/dokumente>

¹⁰ EL member parties are:

PDS, ESDTP, CPF, SYNASPISMOS, PRC, KPÖ, the Socialist Alliance Party (SAP – Romania), Communist Refoundation (San Marino), PdAS, KSS, PCE, IU, EuiA, SDS and AP.

¹¹ EL observer parties are:

PdCI, DL and AKEL.

The EL unites the most important parties left of Social Democracy from Southern, Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately it has not yet been possible to involve the Scandinavian left parties in the process. The recently founded Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA) sent the party secretary of the Socialist Left Party (Norway) as an observer. This can well be conceived as a sign of interest and future cooperation. The Portuguese Communist Party, which showed great interest in the foundation process, was present as a guest but has so far not decided in favour of the expected observer status. This no doubt has to do with fear of foreign determination of its national policy. Great Britain, Ireland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia and Bulgaria continue to be blank spaces in the sphere of the EU and associated countries.

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM – Czech Republic), owing to internal controversy over the question of Europe (the party recommended voting no in the EU accession referendum), participated in the foundation process only in the final stages. Compromises were found on most of their wishes for amendment of the draft statute already agreed on among the other parties. There was still no agreement on the reference to the history of the left in the preamble of the Statute when the meeting started. Since no consensus could be reached on this point, the delegation of the KSCM did not take part in the vote on the founding of the Party. However, it did take part in the Congress debates right up to the end. Its status is currently open. A press release from Prague expresses the conviction that the problem can be resolved before the first party congress of the EL.¹²

There was lively discussion during the preparatory phase about the idea of permitting not just parties but individuals as well to be members of the EL. That would enable interested persons to join the party if they live in EU countries without EL member parties or for some reason do not wish to join the member parties in their own countries. Since no definitive decision could be reached it was stipulated in the Statute that the possibility would be accorded on a trial basis for a two-year period and a final decision would be adopted after a thorough evaluation. Until then each party should decide for itself what practical procedure is suitable for its country.¹³ At its meeting on 17 May 2004 the executive of the PDS resolved to allow individual EL membership in Germany. The first applications have already been received from interested persons.¹⁴

After the successful founding congress, the creation of preconditions for rapid commencement of the practical activity of the EL has now come to the fore. As the Foundation Congress already showed, the life of the EL will always take place in the conflict area between resolutions of the leading bodies and actions and demands of the grass-roots organisations and members. There is a great need among the last named for the development of horizontal contacts and cooperation, and we have to satisfy and promote it.

First of all it is necessary to prepare the content of and ensure organisational backup for the first meeting of the Executive Board, called for the end of June. A plan of work for 2004 has to be prepared from the many recommendations of the Congress. The first major issue will be the active performance of the EL at the next European Social Forum in London in October 2004.

The Party of the European Left is Not Undisputed

The entire preparatory process and especially the Foundation Congress in Rome have provoked critical commentary in the public discourse. The motives extend from sincere

¹² See "Halo Noviny", newspaper of the KPBM, 10 May 2004.

¹³ See Article 7.

¹⁴ The basic documents of the EL adopted in Rome, the speeches of the PDS representatives, a list of Executive Board members and press coverage of the Foundation Congress can be found at the PDS website. Source as in Note 9.

concern about the continued joint action of the left forces in Europe to absolute rejection of the project. A few of the most frequent arguments will be dealt with here.

One reproach is that the EU framework is too narrow. If there is to be a European party at all it should be open to the left of all of Europe. A European party that does not include the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and other parties of Eastern Europe does not merit the name. It would be better then to have no European left party at all.

Here we might draw attention to the slogan that was to be read in many languages on the walls of the Rome conference hall: "Ce n'est qu'un début!" – "This is just the beginning!" sprang forth towards the participants with the verve of the Paris students of 1968. Meaning: There will be more! Politically and territorially. The Party of the European Left leaves no doubt about that. As it says in the Manifesto: "For that reason the European Union as well as the whole European continent are becoming an increasingly important space for alternative politics". For reasons of pragmatism and realism, the framework of the EU with its associated states was chosen for the first step. It is hard enough to tread new territory here. First, because far from all left parties in Europe are prepared to take such a step. Second, because the situation of upheaval in which the EU finds itself at present (it has to cope with the accession of ten new member states and is in the process of codifying decisive lines of future development in a Constitution) calls for an enormous concentration of forces and efforts by the left to make their influence felt in this strategic course-setting. After all, this will affect all of Europe. And third and last, because acceding to a common organisation with all its consequences is such a crucial turning-point for the self-image of some parties that the debates about it sometimes become real tests of stability and maturity. And that in parties that are close to one another in their history, political culture and experiences. Any more stress could have already derailed the train when it was starting up.

However, in this situation it is a very real problem and an important task for the EL to pave ways to closer cooperation with those left parties of Europe that are unable or unwilling to join for the time being. This is equally the case for partners outside the European continent. Globalisation is pressing the continents together and confronting the left all over the world with more and more similar problems and challenges that require a new quality of cooperation.

The individual member parties of the EL, which are strongly networked internationally, will also have to continue to cultivate their bilateral relations in all directions. In any case, the PDS is determined to go on developing its broad contacts with partners all over the world.

Another reproach is that only certain parties are admitted to the EL and the communist element in particular is being excluded.

The foundation process was open and transparent from the beginning. Initially eleven parties came together, prompted by a serious interest in this project. Every party that considered it important and topical was able to take part. In a very democratic and cooperative manner, the initiating parties worked out a political platform for themselves (transformative left) and basic principles for the Statute (inner party democracy, pluralism). The platform is not calculated to be superficially ideological, but neither is it arbitrary. It has now been adopted by the Foundation Congress delegates (each party, large or small, had twelve gender quota mandates) by a large majority. Anyone who accepts that basis can join.

Exclusion of the communist element? A whole series of EL member and observer parties define themselves as communist and would not stand for anyone disputing that. Others have a different self-image. Tolerance is the fashion in the EL. It is open to newly formed non-communist left parties as well. And finally, the 22 parties and movements that took part in the

Foundation Congress as guests demonstrated the lively interest of communists and other left-wingers from all over the world in the EL.¹⁵

One accusation that is meant to hit particularly hard is that the EL is actually not an initiative of the participating parties but a tool of the European Union for breaking the resistance of the European left to the EU. Usually a reference is made to Article 191 of the EU agreements and the Regulation of the European Parliament and Council on the Status and Funding of European Political Parties.

The formulation “Political parties ... contribute to forming a European awareness“ in Article 191 is virulently attacked. All that can be said to that is the EL is not an anti-Europe party. Its Statute states unmistakably that it “actively supports the development of a European identity according to our values and aims”¹⁶. Values and aims are formulated that are defined from the left and have nothing to do with those of big business.

The Regulation mentioned stipulates that political parties at the European level have to register with the EP and the Commission and have to act on the basis of valid European law. These are requirements that every political party has to meet if it wants to be politically active on a legal basis in its own country. The ardent critics of the EL project meet them as well. The attempts to construe fundamental differences here between national and European law have a rather scholastic ring. In any case, the PDS protests in Germany against occasionally being made out by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution to be anti-constitutional.

Basically the critics are suggesting that the EL’s commitment to the legal foundations of the EU rules out any political opposition to the prevailing policy and automatically makes it an advocate of the present course of development of the EU. A glance at the foundation documents of the EL proves the contrary. It was practically a reason for founding the party to consolidate the resistance to the neo-liberal, militarist policy line of the EU and thus make it more effective.

The initiators of the EL are further alleged to have only thought of this idea because there will be money from the EU for European political parties; they are selling their soul, as it were, to the imperialist EU. The nasty word “Euro-Party” stands for this.

What is the real situation with regard to EL funding? First of all, the Regulation will for the first time implement a transparent political party funding arrangement at the European level. Up to now the European parties of other political leanings that have existed for a long time have more or less openly helped themselves to the monies of the EP parliamentary groups, which was actually forbidden. The PDS was in favour of making political party funding stricter, clearer and more transparent in Germany. Why should it be against that at the European level?

In practical life, there will be limits to what the EL can get. The modest sums that could possibly be used will be distributed according to the size of the individual political parties and the votes they get in the European elections. We know what share of the votes the left has had up to now. There are certain criteria that a European political party has to meet in order to be recognised as such: it must consist of political parties that are represented in at least

¹⁵ The following parties and organisations attended the Foundation Congress of the EL as guests: Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), Party of the Working People (PT – Brazil), Red-Green Alliance (Denmark), DKP, Respect (Great Britain), Communist Party of Finland, Communist Party of Israel, Yachad (Israel), Attac (Italy), Japanese Communist Party, Communist Party of Columbia, Communist Party of Cuba, Lebanese Communist Party, Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS – Morocco), Unified Socialist Left (GSU – Morocco), Democratic Coalition of Palestine, PLO, PCP, Left Bloc (Portugal), Nordic Green/Left Alliance (NGLA), Hungarian Social Forum, Communist Party of Venezuela and Anti-capitalist Left (Venezuela).

¹⁶ Article 5, for source see note 9.

seven states of the Union (one quarter of the total number) with members of the EP or the national or regional parliaments – a definite goal for the left to fight for.

It is a fact that the EL has to make efforts of mobilise funds of its own, because its political effectiveness will depend in part on its financial strength. The financial statute adopted at the Foundation Congress cites three sources of funds: first EU funds, which it will not refuse but will use transparently without accepting any political conditions; second membership fees, and third donations. One of the urgent tasks of the new Party Executive Board is to make concrete decisions in this regard.

Fears are repeatedly being voiced that the EL could liquidate national political parties or at least make it harder for them to go on focusing their political work on their own countries.

There is a consensus among the member parties that the EL should bring a new quality of cooperation among the left to European politics and offer, propagate and politically implement alternatives at the European level. National politics, on the other hand, remains something for the individual member parties to decide on and be responsible for. To the EL respect for the independence of every party is one of the greatest goods. At the European level, however, it should act as a real political party, an autonomous political subject. Here a new quality is indeed aspired to compared to present forms of cooperation such as GUE/NGL and NELF. And the EL will not content itself with the role of an umbrella organisation that simply coordinates the actions of political parties acting in parallel. It should be a party that lives through its members, not a mere collecting tank for individual political parties and organisations. It will be a political party with a common leadership structure, a chairperson, a Council of Chairpersons and an Executive Board. What is special about it is that decisions have to be reached and adopted by consensus.

Many have misgivings about such matured forms of left cooperation in Europe as GUE/NGL and NELF being impaired or even becoming superfluous. It is the unanimous will of the member parties of the EL that that should not happen. These forms should survive and further distinguish themselves.

The GUE/NGL parliamentary group has always been the instrument of parliamentary work and not a substitute for party relationships, and these relationships have not been implemented through the parliamentary group. The confederal character of the parliamentary group makes possible on the one hand a greater political breadth than the EL could achieve at present, but also limits common action because the differences on fundamental questions are at times considerable. Political parties have joined the EL that want to generate more conformity in action than is possible in the parliamentary group. No doubt an active EL will influence the work of the parliamentary group as well. But the GUE/NGL parliamentary group, if it is resurgent in the same form after the 2004 European elections, will not be the parliamentary group of the EL.

The NELF remains a network whose advantage will continue to be that it regularly carries on left analysis and opinion-forming considerably beyond the circle of the EL. It has great potential to influence still more strongly and broadly the organisations and networks of civil society all over the European continent. The PDS will continue to take an active part in its work.

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The Party of the European Left is neither the product of an imperialist conspiracy, nor a tool of the EU, nor a splitting device. It is the result of years of experience of a part of the European left with the present forms and results of their cooperation, which no longer appear sufficient and topical to them today. It is a step of historical dimensions. But the participants are treading unexplored territory. They will have to accumulate experience and learn some

things the hard way. The EL is open to other political parties that want to adhere to its democratically adopted programmatic base. It has embarked on a promising path on which the opportunities outweigh the risks.¹⁷

¹⁷ For further info see Disput issues 4, 5 and 6/2004.