

Interview with Willy Claes and André Cools, from EUSO, Europe Socialiste (14 March 1977)

Caption: In an interview appearing on 14 March 1977 in EUSO, Europe Socialiste, the newspaper of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Willy Claes and André Cools, Co-Chairmen of the Belgian Socialist Party, talk about the political issues involved in the first direct elections to the European Parliament.

Source: EUSO, Europe Socialiste. Sozialistische Fraktion, Europäisches Parlament. Hrsg. Fellermaier, Ludwig. 14.03.1977, Nr. 7. Bruxelles: Pressedienst-Sozialistische Fraktion. "Interview mit Willy Claes und André Cools, Kopräsidenten der Sozialistischen Partei Belgiens", p. 4.

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Direct elections to the European Parliament and the task of the Socialists

Interview with Willy Claes and André Cools, Co-Chairmen of the Belgian Socialist Party

— What is the significance of direct elections to the European Parliament?

— Our party particularly welcomed the signing of the act of 20 December 1976 concerning the election by direct universal suffrage of the Members of the European Parliament.

After all, the Belgian Socialist Party has been working towards the democratisation of the European institutions — beginning with the European Parliament — ever since the European Community came into being! We were always true to this principle, even when the Belgian Prime Minister submitted his report on European Union which seemed to us to include rather meagre conclusions.

Before the elections can take place in 1978, there are, of course, still numerous difficulties that must be overcome. For example, the national parliaments still have to ratify the Treaty, and each Member State has to take decisions on the appropriateness of a 'European' electoral procedure and on the determination of the constituencies, etc.

Whatever happens, it seems that the decision to elect Members of the European Parliament directly is of very special significance, for, in addition to the existing institutions of the European Community that are based on national legitimacy, such as the Council of Ministers and the Commission — and this is the important prospect resulting from the decision — a European body will emerge that is the product of the sovereign will of the citizens of the European Community. From the point of view of both democracy and of the European idea, this is of extraordinary significance for further progress in the integration of the countries of Western Europe.

This will also have repercussions for the policies of the various political parties. The great political families that are represented in the Member States will compete against each other in an election campaign covering the whole of Europe, something unprecedented in history, and the prerequisite for this is the actual existence of European political groups or parties in some form or other.

— What is the particular responsibility of the Socialists in this Parliament?

— For us, the creation of a directly elected European Parliament is only the beginning. Although the elections are enormously important in many ways, they are still only the first step along the road to the true democratisation of the European Community.

The European Parliament must now acquire actual powers. Its Members should now be able to set to work in European politics and act as a counterweight to the various power structures that have developed at European level. The same also applies — and this means for each in its particular field — for the trade unions and the political parties. We shall definitely be taking up this challenge. The Socialists and, in particular, their Members of Parliament, must become the engine of a unified Western Europe, in which freedom and Socialism are two sides of one and the same policy, one which constitutes a fundamental element for peace between the superpowers.