

Letter from Christopher Prout to Wilfried Martens (Brussels, 28 February 1991)

Caption: In a letter sent on 28 February 1991 to Wilfried Martens, President of the European People's Party (EPP), Christopher Prout, Chairman of the Group of the European Democrats, outlines the main reasons which prompted the British Conservative MPs to seek membership of the Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament.

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Letter from Sir Christopher Prout, Chairman of the Group of the European Democrats, to Dr Wilfried Martens, President of the European People's Party (Brussels, 28 February 1991)

Dear Mr Martens,

In response to the request that you made at our meeting early this month, please find below the fundamental considerations underlying our application for membership of the Group of the European People's Party.

1. In June 1989, the 32 British Conservative Members of the European Parliament applied to become allied members of the EPP Group in the European Parliament pursuant to Rule 5(b) of the Rules of Procedure of the EPP Group ⁽¹⁾. Although given the go-ahead by the leading figures in the British Conservative Party, that initiative did not mean, for the time being at least, that the Conservative Party would be joining the party organisation of the EPP. The Danish Conservative MEPs have not officially applied to join the EPP Group but have intimated that they intend to do so. Bypassing consideration in the EPP Group, our application was referred directly to the Political Bureau of the party organisation for an opinion. In July 1989, the Political Bureau decided to defer consideration of the application for two years and recommended that in the interim cooperation between the two groups should be stepped up at parliamentary level. We should now like to be given a clear decision on our application for membership of the Group of the European People's Party.

2. We took the decision to apply for membership of the EPP Group because we have always taken the view that, in spite of our different traditions, the Christian Democrat parties were our natural partners. An examination of the political map of Europe clearly shows that each country has either a strong Christian Democrat party or a strong Conservative party, but does not usually have both at the same time. In their respective countries, the Conservative parties and the Christian Democrat parties are major people's parties which draw their support from almost every level of society and broadly occupy a similar position on the political landscape. In their respective countries, the Conservative parties and Christian Democrat parties operate in political systems which also include Socialist and Liberal parties. That is why, like the Christian Democrat parties, the Conservative parties set themselves apart from the Socialist parties and the Liberal parties.

3. Within the European Parliament, our Group has maintained a very good working relationship over the years with the EPP Group. We have worked together on most issues in committee and in plenary, and that has made it possible for us to vote together. Such cooperation has been evident not only in everyday parliamentary activities but also in relation to the key policy issues such as Economic and Monetary Union and Political Union. Our Group has given its firm support to the reports drafted by Mr Herman, Mr Martin and Mr Colombo. There is increased political convergence in that respect between the two groups, in spite of their differences in origin. The differences between the two groups are no more significant than those already existing between the various Christian Democrat parties.

4. Furthermore, as far as the future development of Europe is concerned, it is our view that fresh moves towards increased political integration and strengthened institutions will not succeed if the political parties are not integrated at European level. With that prospect in mind, the Christian Democrat parties and the Conservative parties will have to join forces if they want to reach out to the entire range of Member States of the Community in future. That requirement is even more pronounced in view of possible Community enlargement to Scandinavia and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

5. The Christian Democrat parties have, to a very significant extent, been the driving force for Europe's integration at political level, and indeed also at political party level: the Christian Democrats have succeeded in bringing into their ranks a number of parties of different origins. It was in that spirit that we submitted our application. We would like the European People's Party to carry on its historic role and recover its position as the dominant political force in the European Parliament, a position which has recently been taken from it by the Socialists.

6. It should be pointed out that our purpose in seeking to join the European People's Party is not to lock

horns with the Socialists. However, it must also be pointed out that when the Christian Democrat parties form coalitions with the Socialists at national level, they do so from a position of strength, whereas in the European Parliament the Socialists are the dominant force when they cooperate with the Christian Democrats. Our joining the Group of the European People's Party would result in a more balanced focus in such cooperation, and that would be in the interest of the Christian Democrat parties.

7. It would be unwise to underestimate the power of the other forces striving to regroup the political parties of Europe other than the Christian Democrat parties. In fact, it is possible to set up, outside the EPP Group in the European Parliament, a group of a size similar to the Group of the European People's Party. A group of that kind could become an attractive option for some MEPs or parties within the EPP Group and would certainly have a strong appeal, through its Conservative parties, among the parties from any new Member States, whether from Scandinavia or Eastern Europe. You could say that it is only because our Group has persevered in its efforts towards joining the EPP Group that a new group of that kind has not already been created. We hope that we will not be put in a situation where those pressures could become too great to resist. The only consequence of political regrouping outside the EPP would be the harsh blow dealt to the positions of all the centre parties, something which would benefit the Socialists.

8. The question raised by our application for membership of the EPP Group in fact involves the manner in which Community enlargement will be implemented at political party level and whether the EPP Group should retrieve the strength once wielded by the Christian Democrat parties in the Community of the Six. We submitted our application almost two years ago. We feel that those two years have enabled us to improve our mutual understanding. We have now reached a point where cooperation between the two groups can no longer bring anything further to our mutual relations. Only by our inclusion in the Group of the European People's Party will it be possible for us to develop our relationship further.

I therefore hope that the leading figures in the European People's Party of which you are President will come to a clear decision on our application for membership of the EPP Group in the European Parliament. I am sure that any administrative or financial problems that might arise in that regard could be resolved and would not hinder the process in question.

(Closing formula and signature)

(1) Members of the European Parliament may become allied members of the Group if they subscribe to the basic policies of the Group of the European People's Party and if they accept the Rules of Procedure.