

Point of View

Self-Service in Brussels

How alliances of political parties in the European Parliament want to enrich themselves by using tricks and dodges and thereby violate current EU-law

Hans Herbert von Arnim

Sometimes ludicrous plans are made in Brussels, for example laws which defy all normal standards of member states and even European primary law. The financing of European political parties on the basis of a regulation dating from 2003 is such a case. This financial support is added to public financing of national political parties. The Party of European Socialists (PES), the European People's Party (EPP) and eight other such organizations call themselves "European Political Parties"; in reality they are merely alliances of national parties. Natural persons play a marginal role and, in any case, candidates for the European Parliament are nominated by the national political parties. European political parties thus lack everything which constitutes a political party. European political parties cannot meet the functions – for example to express "the political will of citizens" – ascribed to them in Article 191 EC, simply because they lack citizens as members.

Nevertheless, it seems almost impossible to take legal action against this regulation:

Repeatedly, lawsuits have been rejected because of inadmissibility, but this does not attest this system of financing lawfulness by any means. Some erstwhile plaintiffs now profit from Brussels' money themselves.

In the apparent certainty to be able to disregard laws with impunity one seems to be willing to go even one step further: the EU Commission has – on the basis of detailed specifications of the parliament – presented a proposal for extending the regulation on European political parties, which is under consultation at the moment and should come into force as soon as possible.

According to this proposal, European financial means given to European party alliances could in the future be used for campaigning in European elections. However, this would be a breach of primary European law which mandates that no European money should be used either directly or indirectly for financing national parties as long as these hold separate European elections in the respective 27

member states. But how should party alliances finance election campaigns without benefiting their national member parties – even if only indirectly? The campaign clause represents a clear violation of law.

Ignoring legal limits has a tangible reason. One aims to make the party alliances ready for the European election in 2009. A whole range of well-calculated innovations should clear the way for shoveling immense additional financial means on the party alliances.

Just for one, taxpayers are to finance 85 % of the revenues of European political party alliances. The remaining 15% mainly stem from contributions from member parties and are thus to a great extent also public funds. Altogether, the public share will consequently be much higher than 85% and will turn party alliances into mere “state”-parties – a provocation of the general public. In Germany the state-funded share of political parties may amount to no more than 50% in order to prevent dependency on the state.

Furthermore, it is planned that party alliances shall be allowed to accumulate

savings from their own resources exceeding their share of 15% in the budget. This way they would have a full second budget to be used for election campaigns before European elections.

The most fantastic, however, is the intended financing of European party foundations. Does the EU have any competency at all in this field? Article 191 EC does not mention any foundations. At best, they are admissible as a part of European political parties. But why then foundations at all? The European party alliances could well carry out the functions meant for the foundations themselves, if their budget would openly be raised. As it stands now, it seems as if the foundations are to be used as a vehicle for clandestinely distributing even more money to the party alliances.

So far, European party financing stays within tolerably acceptable limits: 2004 party alliances received 3.2 million Euro, 2005 7.2 and 2006 8.1 million. The intended revision, however, threatens – in disregard of existing legislation – to open the floodgates for party financing from EU-funds.

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