

European transnational federation of political parties as a subject of law

(based on example of European People's Party -
EPP)

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1. Introduction

European Parliament is the only directly elected - and therefore having a direct mandate - institution of the European Union.² Description of profiles of political parties represented on this forum has therefore to take into consideration not only their national aspects, but also the fact that their existence is to some extent an effect of processes of direct democracy within European Union as an entirety.³ Explanation of current legal character of such supranational political organisations based on the example of European People's Party, the strongest of those represented at the European Parliament, is the objective of this article, while its basic subject - general description of the features of political parties on European level as well as answering the question whether the EU legal framework has appropriately regulated their activity at this community level.

2. General information about the EPP

The European People's Party is one of transnational federations of political parties – that is 'organisations active within the European Union, consisting of political parties, representing a defined ideological and programme party family as well as having certain procedural and structural features as a symptom of the institutionalisation process, that bestow them with character of

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² A. MAURER, *What next handicap for the European parliament*, London 1999; J. Schoo, *Zu Art. 251-252*, (in : H. VON DER GROEBEN, J. THIESING, C. D. EHLERMANN, *Kommentar zum EU / EG - Vertrag*, vol. 4, Baden - Baden 1999; J. SMITH, *Europe's Elected Parliament*, Sheffield 1999.

³ S. HIX, CH. LORD, *Political parties in the European Union*, London 1997; T. JANSEN, *Die Entstehung einer europaeischer Partei, Vorgesichte, Grundung und Entwicklung der EVP*, Bonn 1996.

European political parties'.⁴ EPP unites broadly-understood centre-right parties from entire Europe (commonly referred to as sister parties), and it deals mainly with co-ordination of their activities in all those institutions of European integration, where political divisions matter - that is at the European Parliament and Committee of the Regions of European Union, as well as in parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe, Western-European Union, OSCE and NATO. It may therefore not be mistaken for political groups created in some of these institutions – notably with the Group of the European People's Party - European Democrats (EPP-ED) at the European Parliament, where the 'second part' (ED) is composed of British conservatives and unionists, as well as the Czech ODS, which do not belong to the EPP.⁵ Such lack of coherence in composition of federations and groups is however a rule on European level, with only exception being the Party of European Socialists (PES). It is also the reason for certain information on these groups to be included in the following considerations in order to ensure clarity as well as a consequence of certain rights of the European Parliament with regard to political parties on European level.

European People's Party is therefore in the first place the venue of meetings and reflections of its sister parties on matters important for the entire continent - entire, as among these sister parties there are also those from countries outside the UE, including EFTA members (Norway, Switzerland), EU candidate countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Turkey) and others (e.g. post-Yugoslav states, Albania, Ukraine and Georgia).

3. European legal regulations regarding to political parties - primary law

European transnational federations of political parties do not constitute *per se* any new political entities, but exist simultaneously with their sister parties, which underlines independence of the latter.⁶ Provisions relating to 'European political parties' are contained in the first place in Articles 189 to 201 of the Treaty Constituting the European Community (hereinafter referred to as TEC), as amended by the Treaty on European Union of 7th February 1992 (EC Official Journal 1992 C 191; hereinafter referred to as TEU). Article 189 provides for the European Parliament to consist of representatives of nations of

⁴ A. ANTOSZEWSKI, J. HERBUT, *Encyklopedia politologii*, vol. 3: *Partie i systemy partyjne*, Zakamycze, Kraków 1999, p. 304-5; 'transnational federation of political parties', 'European political party' and 'political party on European level' are descriptions treated in this text as meaning exactly the same.

⁵ Cf. A. ANTOSZEWSKI, J. HERBUT, *op. cit.*, p. 46-7; authors underline the role of EP groups as 'base of creation' for transnational federations.

⁶ See i.a.: A. MAURER, J. MITTAG, *Die Europäische Koalitionen* (in:) W. Weidenfeld, W. Wessels, *Europa od A do Z. Podręcznik integracji europejskiej*, 4th edition, Gliwice 2002, p. 101.

Member States of the EU, while Article 190 - for these representatives to be directly elected for a five-year term. (First general and direct European Parliament election has been held on 7th to 10th June 1979 on the basis of European Council of Ministers Act of 20th September 1976 - OJ 1976 L 278. Earlier MEPs were members of national parliaments delegated to the EP). Members of European Parliament are elected on the basis of electoral systems applicable in their appropriate countries. They can not simultaneously work in their national administrations, though it is possible for them to combine sitting in European and national parliament.⁷ The most substantive primary law provision in the respect of legal status of political parties is however Article 191 of the Treaty. It provides that 'Political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union'. On the basis of the so-called Nice Treaty of 26th February 2001 (OJ 2001 C 80), amending both TEC and TEU, Article 191 is being supplemented with paragraph 2, which provides that 'The Council, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251, shall lay down the regulations governing political parties at European level and in particular the rules regarding their funding'. Article 191 is therefore underlining an aspect of European political integration, which takes place at the level of activity of national political parties, as they are the entities – belonging, or not, to one of the transnational federations – that actually campaign on their own first in order to act within the framework of the already-mentioned multinational political groups (usually corresponding to their 'European political party' membership) later.⁸

Right of Members of the European Parliament to form these political groups - the only one actually expressed in EU primary law - results from Article 196 of the TEC. Grounds for their formation are the number and origin of MEPs wishing to create them. In particular, there has to be at least 29 MEPs coming from one Member State in order to set up a political group, while 23 if they come from two or three states, with threshold being lowered to eighteen if the number of member states concerned is three, and only fourteen if they come from four or more countries. These criteria are obviously a catalyst of the (already quite advanced) process of transformation of basic structure of European Parliament from national to community solidarity-based.⁹ Moreover, Article 197 of the TEC, being the legal basis of organisation of European Parliament bodies, guarantees for representatives of all political groups to be present among EP's fourteen Vice-Presidents. Analysis of changes introduced in this respect by the Nice Treaty shows obviously that political groups have

⁷ See Z. BRODECKI, M. DROBYSZ, S. MAKOWSKA, *Traktat o Unii Europejskiej. Traktat ustanawiający wspólnotę Europejską z komentarzem*, LexisNexis, Warszawa 2002, p. 403.

⁸ See C. ROSS, *Ogólny przegląd instytucji Unii Europejskiej. Struktury i procedury*, Warszawa 2000, p. 31 - quoted in: Z. BRODECKI, M. DROBYSZ, S. MAKOWSKA, *Traktat o Unii Europejskiej. Traktat ustanawiający wspólnotę Europejską z komentarzem*, LexisNexis, Warszawa 2002, p. 405.

⁹ D. SIMON, *Le système juridique communautaire*, PUF, Paris 1997, p. 136.

become an important tool of European integration in both political and supranational dimension, as on one hand these groups form common ground for MEPs from various member states, while on the other they allow for common European political interests to be created. Furthermore, the already-mentioned question of certain rigours pertaining to the formation of political groups is clearly pointing to the fact that creation of group consisting of representatives of only one country would prove difficult, especially when bearing in mind the number of MEPs to represent particular member states, fixed by Article 190 of the TEC.

Regulation on 'European political parties' may also be found in Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 7th December 2000, where Article 12 paragraph 2 provides: 'Political parties on the Union level contribute to expression of political will of citizens of the Union'.¹⁰

Analysis of primary law provisions from the point of view of law theory shows clearly the role assigned to the political parties within the European integration processes, as they not only refer to them as 'European parties', but also mention them fulfilling certain functions towards the community. Additional arguments for this thesis may be found in secondary law, consisting of more detailed regulations on legal status of transnational federations of political parties.

4. European legal regulations regarding political parties - secondary law

Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding (OJ 2003 L 297) is the basic one in this respect. In its Article 2 it has been affirmed that the political party on European level is an association of citizens pursuing political objectives, recognized by at least one member state in accordance with its internal order or created in at least one member state in accordance with it. In turn, an alliance of political parties has been described as a structured co-operation of at least two political parties.

Political party on European level has to:

- *possess legal personality at the member state, where its seat is located,*
- *to be represented in at least one quarter of the member states by Members of Parliament, at national or regional parliaments or in regional assemblies, or*

¹⁰ See e.g. http://www.europarl.eu.int/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

- to receive at least three per cent of votes in each of these countries in the most recent European Parliament election,
- observe in its by-laws the founding principles of the European Union,
- participate in European Parliament election or to express such will (Article 3 of the regulation).

It is pointed out by the European academics that the first two of these criterions have objective character, with the third being undoubtedly ideological and fourth - subjective, as it rests on the will of the given political party.¹¹ In consequence, the first two criterions are to be *ex officio* verified by the European Parliament. Verification of ideological criterion is somewhat different, as it may only be triggered by one-fourth of Members of European Parliament, representing at least three political groups. Parliament ought then to hear first from representatives of the party in question, as well as to turn to a three-member committee of 'eminent personalities' for a reasoned opinion on the matter (Parliament appoints one member of this committee, while the two remaining ones are appointed by the Council and the European Commission). Final stage of this procedure is a resolution of Parliament – if it expresses a negative opinion, the controlled party loses the status of political party at European level as well as the financial support of Communities (Article 5 of the regulation).

In order to obtain this support, a political party at European level has to submit each year to the European Parliament an application in this respect. This application ought to be supported by certain documents, including political programme of the party, setting out its objectives at the European level as well as by-laws of the party. Any change of their contents requires informing the Parliament within 2 months, lack of which may result with suspension of the financial support (Article 4 of the regulation). The European Parliament always grants this support within 3 months after the reception of application, indicating its amount as well. This amount is in turn proportionally dependent on the number of the party MEPs. The principles of financial transparency play an essential part as well. Parties applying for or receiving financial support ought therefore to publish their accounts as well as to refrain from accepting anonymous donations, donations from a single donor, that exceed 12 000 EUR a year, being made by public authorities or – which is worth stressing – by political groups in the European Parliament (Article 6 of the regulation). Prohibition of transferring financial support directly or indirectly to third parties – in particular national political parties – is also provided for (Article 7 of the regulation). Financial assistance for political parties at European level is also given on principle of advisability, and therefore the means thus acquired

¹¹ So F. JASIŃSKI, C. MIK, *Partie polityczne na poziomie europejskim*, Zeszyty Ośrodka Informacji i Dokumentacji Europejskiej, no. 4/2004, p. 17-18.

ought to be used in order to fulfil objectives stated in the political programme of the party attached to each application. It is also pointed out, that granting support is based on the principles of financial control, laid down in the Regulation No. 1605/2002 of the Council of 25 June 2002 (OJ 2002 L 248) and Regulation of European Commission No. 2909/2000 of 29 December 2000 on the management of accountancy of non-financial fixed assets of European Communities (OJ 2000 L 336). European Accounting Court of Auditors, as well as statutory auditors, undertake the direct financial control of political parties on European level (Article 9 of the regulation).

5. Internal law of the EPP – by-laws and regulations

Current by-laws of the European People's Party, aimed to adapt the legal status of this transnational federation of political parties to the above-described provisions of the European Union law, have been adopted by a decree of the King of Belgians of 23 May 2005 (on the basis of Act of 27 June 1921 of non-profit associations, international non-profit associations and foundations) and consist of eleven titles as well as transitional provisions. This document affirms for the EPP to possess legal personality in the form of an international non-profit association of Belgian law (see the preamble).

Title I of the by-laws (Articles 1 to 4) specifies the name, seat, objectives and duration (undetermined) of the federation. These objectives are defined by Article 3 as acting to:

- promote and foster close and ongoing co-operation among its members for the purpose of implementing their common policy at European level;
- encourage and organize unanimous action by its members at European level;
- work (i) to achieve free and pluralistic democracy, (ii) for respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on the basis of a common programme;
- promote the process of unification and federal integration in Europe as a constituent element of the European Union in Europe.'

This provision also states that sister parties support, through their national policies, positions taken by the EPP in the context of European Union, and expresses an obligation in reference to all their representatives in different bodies on the European level (see Chapter 2 *supra*) to join respective EPP groups (which may sometimes be a source of problems, e.g. in the Council of Europe).

Title II deals with membership of the federation, and therefore it is described in greater detail below. The next four titles (Articles 10 to 18) are devoted to representation of the EPP and its bodies, therefore constituting the largest from among the blocks of questions contained in the by-laws.

Representatives of sister parties - first of all the elected delegates, at least three for each party, in proportion to their representatives in lower chambers of national parliaments as well as, alternatively, in European Parliament - meet at congresses, assembled either when need arises or triennially (in fact, these take place more or less each one and a half year). Every 'regular' congress - being first of all the body deciding on the EPP political programme - elects Presidency of the federation (Article 10 of the by-laws). Proceedings in this respect - always by secret ballot and usually by simple majority - commence with the EPP President being elected, who then submits to the Congress name of the candidate for Secretary General (whereas both these positions may only be occupied by representatives of ordinary or associated member parties). The Presidency consists also of ten Vice-Presidents and the Treasurer, as well as of the President of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament and honorary presidents of the federation, elected by the Political Bureau (see below). The congress carries out a separate vote on every candidate, which in practice makes it possible to maintain political equilibrium among sister parties and countries they represent. Re-election is allowed. Congress may dismiss everyone it has elected at any time. In case of vacancy occurring in Presidency, by-elections are carried out by the Political Bureau, though this has to be confirmed by the following Congress.

Presidency of the federation - except for its duties attributed to it by provisions of European and Belgian law - ensures the implementation of decisions taken by the Political Bureau, prepares the annual accounts and budget, ensures the permanent political presence of the EPP, monitors the work of the General Secretariat, and in particular the budget management, issues statements on behalf of the EPP in the framework of its political programme further to a decision of the Political Bureau and proposes candidates for nomination as honorary presidents as well as for the function of Deputy Secretaries General to the Political Bureau (Article 11 of the by-laws). In order to exercise its tasks the Presidency meets at least eight times a year, deciding by absolute majority of votes, whereas in case of a tie the casting vote belongs to the President (Article 12 of the by-laws). Decisions may also be taken by correspondence.

An important body of the European People's Party (which its by-laws define outright as 'strategic') is the *Political Bureau*, composed (in accordance with Article 14) of members of Presidency as well as Presidency of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, Presidents of ordinary or associated member parties or their mandated representatives (the former in number proportional to the number of individual members of the federation - see Chapter 5 below - the latter in number established by Presidency), presidents of national delegations of member parties to the EPP-ED Group,

representatives of recognized associations,¹² European Commissioners or bureau members of European Parliament or Committee of the Regions, provided they belong to an ordinary member party, and presidents of the EPP groups in the Committee of the Regions (here also representatives of the group in a number settled by Presidency) and parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe, WEU, OSCE and NATO. Political Bureau meetings are also attended by EPP deputy secretaries general, general secretaries of its groups in all the above-mentioned parliamentary-type assemblies, and last but not least representatives of observer sister parties (two each). In fact, actual attendance at these meetings (provided by Article 16 to take place at least four times a year and always *in camera*) depends much on the interest of particular persons entitled to take part with particular points on the agenda. Political Bureau decides by absolute majority.

Tasks of the Political Bureau (enumerated in by-laws on exemplary basis, which allows to name it as the body with presumed powers on matters not attributed to any other) are the following: ensuring unity of action by the EPP and influencing the achievement of European policy in the spirit of its programme, electing the deputy secretaries general on the proposal from the Presidency, adopting the annual accounts and the budget, deciding on the applications for membership as well as on exclusion of members, granting and revoking recognition of associations, deciding on the amount of annual dues to be paid by the members, formulating recommendations for the Congress as to modifications of the by-laws, electing the Honorary Presidents on the proposal of Presidency, and appointing the statutory auditor.

Current political works of the EPP take place in the framework of five working groups, devoted to various scopes of activity: general, economic and social policy, enlargement (of the federation), Common Agricultural Policy, foreign and security policy. These groups are formally appointed by the Political Bureau (Article 15 of the by-laws) after each Congress, but in fact they are working incessantly, which is possible due to their very informal mode of composition and style of proceedings (any representative of a member party may attend without any inter-party proportions being observed, there are no internal regulations, no minutes and hardly any votes take place).

In this place one extra-statutory body ought to be mentioned. This is the EPP Summit – an exclusive meeting, that unites heads of states and governments, European commissioners and EPP sister party leaders, convened the day before every European Council summit. It creates wide possibilities for open

¹² These currently are: European Union of Women (EUW), European Democrat Students (EDS), European Seniors Union (ESU), European Union of Christian Democratic Workers (EUCDW), Small and Medium Entrepreneurs' Union (SME-Union) and Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP).

exchange of opinions and co-ordination of activities, which are eagerly used.¹³

The everyday management of the federation is assured by the Secretary General of the European People's Party, assisted by the general secretariat, who co-ordinates its activities, executes the budget, prepares the agenda and activity reports as well as authorises an attorney at law to represent the EPP should a need arise (see Article 17 of the by-laws). His deputies are - as it has already been mentioned above - appointed in agreement with him, and upon proposal from Presidency, by Political Bureau for a three-year term (that is between 'regular' congresses). There are in practice two of them: one deals with substantive side of the EPP activity, while second with administrative and financial matters. The general secretariat also consists of External Relations Representative, adviser attached - one each - to every working group,¹⁴ as well as representatives of some recognized associations and technical staff. This is therefore a small (never more than twenty persons in total), but effective organization.

Article 18 of the by-laws pertains to representation of the federation, affirming laconically, that any act in law going beyond usual management or a special delegation of powers must be signed by the President or two members of the Presidency.

Title VII deals with changes in by-laws, which can be undertaken upon proposal from the Presidency or any of the ordinary or associated members, EPP-ED Group, chairman of the EPP group in any other parliamentary-type assembly, and at last a chairman of a recognized association. Proposals of amendments are discussed by the Political Bureau, which approves them by a two-thirds majority. Thus confirmed recommendations become object of debates of the Congress, which may adopt them by simple majority or reject by two-thirds of its votes (Article 19 of the by-laws).

Title VIII of the by-laws (Articles 20 to 22) regulates various financial matters. It formally asserts contributing by ordinary associated members as well as observers to the funding of the federation (Article 20). It provides Presidency with powers to close the accounts at the end of each financial year (which is anyway identical with calendar year) and submit them for approval of the Political Bureau, while the Treasurer - to assist the Presidency in drawing up the accounts and the budget as well as to control its management (Article 21). It elaborates on appointment of the statutory auditor (by the Political Bureau for a renewable three-year term) as well as his revocation (by Presidency) and remuneration (Article 22).

The two remaining titles are devoted to the possibility of a dissolution of the

¹³ See also A. ANTOSZEWSKI, R. HERBUT, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

¹⁴ One current exception is a generally inactive CAP working group.

federation (by three-fourths majority of votes of Congress members present - Article 23) as well as to the internal regulations, defined as the act 'in which issues of internal order and of financial order not mentioned in these by-laws shall be set out' (Article 24).

It may be interesting, that it is only in these regulations - passed on 28 June 2005 - there are formally recognized such bodies as Congress and Summit (Article 1 and 2 of the internal regulations; their Article 6 subparagraph e mentions, alongside statutory, of 'extra-legal bodies' of the federation) and some notions used in the by-laws are explained. It is planned, however, for the prospective Congress in Rome on 30th-31st March 2006, to pass amendments in the by-laws, which - together with inclusion of references to the draft EU Constitutional Treaty and taking into account Union's possible future enlargements - would also get rid of these 'extra-legal bodies' (except for the Summit) as a crowning of the process of EPP becoming international non-profit association of Belgian law.

6. Membership in 'European political parties' on the example of the EPP

As it has already been mentioned transnational federations consist in the first place of political parties from particular countries and - in a way similar to those - they themselves decide who joins them. Articles 5 and 6 of the by-laws of the European People's Party, which constitute an example of that rule, provide for three types of membership: ordinary, associated and observer status. Parties applying for membership are actually going in turns through all these three stages.

Ordinary and associated membership is granted by the Political Bureau if party applying for it subscribes to the objectives and political programme of the federation. However, only parties coming from member states of the European Union may become ordinary members, while associated membership is open for parties 'based outside the European Union, from states whose applications for membership of the European Union have been introduced and / or states belonging to the Stability Pact and to the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)'. In consequence, associated members can not take part in taking decisions that relate to structures and institutional system of the EU (Article 5 of the by-laws).

Observer status - granted by Political Bureau on proposal from Presidency - may be obtained by parties 'close to the EPP', both from within the European Union and beyond, if they are based in Council of Europe countries (Article 6).

The catalogue of limitations put on the associated members and observers by the federation was introduced above (Chapter 2).

Interesting part of membership regulations are those referring to the individual membership (defined by Article 5 paragraph 4 of the by-laws). Political scientists' claim, that none of the transnational federations has introduced such provisions,¹⁵ is no longer entirely valid. Currently the EPP acknowledges as individual members all MEPs elected from its sister party lists and belonging to the EPP-ED Group. Political Bureau may accept, upon proposal from the Presidency, any other MEP in this character.

Ordinary members, associated members as well as observers are obliged to pay annual membership fees, established each year by Political Bureau, however no more than 500 000 EUR a year (Article 7 of the by-laws). These fees - calculated on the ground of result of the party in the recent European Parliament election as well as the number of its representatives in the EP or the national parliamentary election result (Article 6 of the internal regulations) - are in fact considerably lower, especially that now (i.e. after the provisions mentioned in subchapter 3.2 *supra* have entered into force) they are no more the main source of income for the federation. Nevertheless, any arrears in fee payment are additionally covered with interest on the level doubling current annual Belgian inflation rate, and result in depriving the member of speaking and voting rights in the EPP bodies, and if accumulate over at least two years - may constitute the basis for expelling from the federation (Article 6 subparagraph e of the internal regulations - though the rigorous appearance of this provision will most probably be toned-down by considerably gentler practice).

The expelling is of course - alongside such obvious cases as the voluntary parting with the EPP or MEPs death or mandate expiry - a basis for cease of membership, decided upon by the Political Bureau (Article 9 of the by-laws). Such decision does not have to be officially motivated, but bearing in mind that a proposal in this respect may only be put forward by Presidency or seven ordinary or associated member parties from at least five countries (and in reference to individual members - only the EPP-ED Group Presidency) it may be safely claimed, that members' rights are well-protected. The outgoing members are obliged to settle their financial commitments to the federation, though practically (especially at present) there is not much pressure exerted on them if problems arise in this respect. This is caused by intention not to spoil further possibilities of political co-operation.

It is also worth noting, that all the decisions of Political Bureau on membership are only taken following an opinion of the Working Group on Enlargement.

¹⁵ A. ANTOSZEWSKI, R. HERBUT, *op. cit.*, p. 305; individual membership, understood as membership of natural persons not performing any public duties, used to have been provided for by EPP internal law; relic of this institution - regulation on voluntary membership fees from 'supporting members' - may be found in Article 6 subparagraph c of the internal regulations, referring to 'individual members' under the current law.

Presidency is obliged to hold membership register of the federation (Article 8 of the by-laws). The EPP currently consists of 40 ordinary member parties, 11 associated members and 16 observers. (In Belgium there are two members, both ordinary: Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams and Centre Democrat Humaniste.)¹⁶ This constitutes a wide spectrum, not only in geographical terms, as it includes formations both such as the Swedish conservatives (classical free-market Reaganomic/Thatcherite right, standing for flexible and deeply globalised economy)¹⁷ as well as the already-mentioned CDH (centrist party, able to struck many compromises with Socialists and staunchly supporting European social model).

The current by-laws grant the European People's Party with legal personality in Belgium, which equates to fulfilling the first criterion mentioned in the Regulation of 4 November 2003. Furthermore, the EPP takes part in the European Parliament elections, where it is represented by MEPs from each and every single EU member states (the only exception being United Kingdom - representatives of which are, however, present in the EPP-ED Group - see Chapter 1 *supra*). As far as the ideological criterion is concerned, one may claim that bearing in mind the above-mentioned statutory objectives of the EPP as well as its Christian-Democrat political roots - 'Fathers of Europe': Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi are also 'spiritual fathers' of the EPP - this party would be easily able to prove its pro-EU credentials in case of any dispute.

6. Conclusions

All the primary and secondary law regulations discussed above express the idea of promotion of political organizations on the European level, as they lead to durable supranational co-operation of various political parties as well as integration towards shared political objectives. These processes will most probably induce further improvement in status and importance of the European Parliament,¹⁸ though rather indirectly (through strengthening transnational federations represented by political groups in the EP). Some political scientists mention however, that the provisions of the Regulation of 4 November 2003 will encounter problems, first of all in their internal implementation on the national level.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the outcome of efforts undertaken by European Union institutions towards regulating political parties on European level may be assessed positively, as it has laid down clear rules on their funding as well as defined quite transparent criteria, allowing to classify them as such.

¹⁶ <http://www.epp-eu.org/memberparties.php>, website visited on 8th February 2006.

¹⁷ A. ANTOSZEWSKI, R. HERBUT, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

¹⁸ F. JASIŃSKI, C. MIK, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

European People's Party is one of the leading transnational political federations. Recent years has seen a significant rise of its influence (which was caused i.a. by the absorption of almost entire competitive Conservative entity - European Democrat Union, EDU). The party acts dynamically, and in 2005 it has reinvented much of its image (e.g. introduced a new logo). For many years now, however, its President has been Wilfried Martens, former long-serving Belgian Prime Minister, and Secretary General - Antonio Lopez Isturiz, former close adviser of Jose Maria Aznar, Prime Minister of Spain.

The EPP is not only, however, a political success story. Its process of adaptation to the new legal framework on organisation and funding of 'European political parties' within the European Union - making them in fact independent of political groups in the EP they originated from - may be rightly perceived as a model of its kind. For this reason its activities and further evolution ought to be vigilantly observed by interested researchers, both lawyers and political scientists.