

European People's Party and European Democrats

Increasing Europe's competitiveness through more investment on research and lifelong learning is just one aim of the European People's Party - European Democrats - the largest political group in the Parliament.



With 264 MEPs from all 25 states of the Union the party is an important force on the European political landscape. In the wider political context 10 of the EU Prime Ministers as well as the President of the European Commission come from this political family. In terms of nationalities the largest bloc in the Group is the German delegation with 49 MEPs whilst the smallest are Denmark and Estonia with just one apiece.

To give its full name, the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, or EPP-ED as its more commonly known, brings together Christian Democrat, Conservative and other centre right parties and MEPs from across Europe. The group has been the largest in the Parliament since 1999, but was founded in 1953, when the Christian Democrat group sat in the assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community - the very first parliamentary institution. It enjoys a comfortable majority over its main rival the Socialist Group, which has 200 members from 23 Member states.

The last European elections in 2004 - the first held with the 10 new countries from central and Eastern Europe - were a success for the group, which polled 38.11% of the vote. This was an improvement of 3 percentage points on their previous showing in 1999.

As the largest Group in Parliament the EPP-ED is entitled to the lion's share of the influential positions in Parliament. It currently holds the Chairs of nine of the Parliament's 22 Committees or sub committees, and seven of the 14 vice-Presidencies.

The leader of the group is Hans-Gert Poettering, a German with a doctorate in Law, Politics and History, who has been an MEP since 1979 and leader of Group since 1999. He has championed the cause of reform in Europe, speaking recently at a debate on the plans by the EU to become the most competitive, information-based economy by 2010, Mr Poettering said "what we need is reform, flexibility, responsibility, and less bureaucracy...Our challenge to the Member States now is that they make their contribution to a Europe that can promote growth and allows Member States to create jobs and put people into work exploiting their own potential."

The sheer diversity of the parties represented from across Europe in the Parliament's political groups - and their respective traditions and domestic policies - mean that ideological cohesion in the groups and outright partisanship is less marked than in domestic parties.

This is reflected in the approach the EPP-ED group has adopted by trying to "build majorities on all important subjects" and "not neglect smaller groups," according to an EPP source. While key posts on special committees used to be shared between the two big groups now an effort is made to give the smaller groups a fair share.