Political parties at European level: statute and financing

2003/0039(COD) - 19/02/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to establish a framework for the European political parties and their financing from the Community budget. CONTENT : Article 191 of the Treaty recognises the important role that European political parties can play in developing political debate at the European level, thereby enhancing the quality of democracy and improving the functioning of the institutions of the Union. It also recognises that in order to perform the role that the Treaty wishes to assign to them, it will be necessary that they should be at least partially financed from the Community budget. The main points of the proposal are as follows: 1) The Commission considers that it would be inappropriate to establish intrusive or over prescriptive political requirements for the registration of European political parties, but considers it essential to lay down minimum standards of democratic conduct for such parties. Accordingly, the proposal states that to be that to be registered by the European Parliament a party must: - have participated or declared their intention to participate in elections to the European Parliament; - have clearly defined bodies responsible for financial management; - ensure that the statute and activities of the European political party respect the basic purposes of the Union with regard to freedom, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. 2) The proposal establishes a procedure for verification of respect for the basic values of the EU. The European Parliament can deregister a party which no longer satisfies the conditions for registration. 3) To ensure transparency, the Statutes must be published. 4) The registration procedure represents a first, necessary but not sufficient step to obtain financing. A party must first register its statute and then meet the specific additional conditions set out in the proposal before it can obtain financing. Registered parties would make application for funding to the Parliament which would decide within two months. 5) Community financing is given to parties that are reasonably representative, either in the European Parliament or in a number of Member States. A European political party: - must have elected members in the European Parliament or national or regional Parliaments in at least one third of the Member States, or -it must have obtained at least five percent of the votes at the most recent European elections in at least one third of the Member States of the Community. The parties must also commit themselves not to accept certain kinds of donations defined in the proposal. Parties would then be eligible for financing from the Union budget. This financing is not intended to replace the autonomous financing of the European parties, which must represent at least 25% of the budget of each party. 6) Each party would receive a flat-rate basic grant plus a second component based on the number of elected representatives in the European Parliament. The two components would account for 15% and 85% of the appropriations respectively. 7) European political parties must publish their accounts and declare their sources of finance (excluding donations not exceeding Ç 100) from whatever source. Standard reporting, accounting and audit procedures are laid down in accordance withthe Financial Regulation. 8) There is provision for an external and independent auditing of the accounts of the parties. 9) This proposal will be financed by specific administrative expenditure of the Parliament (section I of the budget), in accordance with the provision for an article entitled "Contribution to European Political Parties" made by the Budgetary Authority in the Parliament's budget for 2002 and 2003.