

An Introduction to the European Green party - and how you can play your part in it.

Lin Tabak/EGP Individual Supporters' Group, translation Greet Goverde

Green Parties have existed in Europe since the ecological wave of the seventies. And since the early eighties, just after Europeans were allowed to vote for the European Parliament, they have been involved in European politics, just like other political parties. But unlike the classic political families, which still mainly operate nationally, the Greens have a growing common presence, not only within the European Parliament but also outside of it: the European Green Party. Below you will find out about its origins and that of the Green Group in the European Parliament, about its projects for the future. And you'll read how you can play your part in it. Because you can: the Greens are the first political family that allows individuals to participate and join hands across borders.

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1. EUROPE'S GREEN PARTIES

To date, mid-2008, the European Green Party has 34 member parties, 28 in the European Union and 6 outside of it, and 9 observers, mostly outside the EU. Those parties differ considerably. The German Grünen have almost 50.000 members and GroenLinks (The Netherlands) has some 20.000. But there are also smaller parties like Déi Gréng (Luxemburg), De Groenen (Netherlands) and the Cyprus Green Party with only a couple of hundred members or less. Some parties are convinced pro-Europeans, like the Finnish Vireät or the Belgian parties Écolo and Groen!, but many members of the Miljöpartiet de Gröna (Sweden) hardly believe in supranational democracy. And whereas the Green party of England and Wales is first of all Green, many members of les Verts (France) feel close to the radical left and the Austrian Greens strongly emphasise sexual freedom and human rights. In spite of those differences the EGP members have enough in common to join hands.

1973: People & Parliament

Europe's Green political history begins in 1973, a year after the Club of Rome shook the world's belief in progress with its report '*Limits to Growth*', and the UN conference of Stockholm first put the environment on the global political agenda. In the English town of Coventry a group of people around the magazine *The Ecologist*, propagating '*sustainable survival*', decides to go for seats in the national parliament under the name of 'People'. The attempt fails, among other reasons because of the district system, which is unfavourable to small parties. And although the *Green Party of England and Wales* - as it has been called since 1986 - still has to win its first seat in the House of Commons, it is more and more present in local and European politics. The first party to win a seat in the national parliament however are the Swiss Greens, who originated from a protest group against a motorway. And the first party to provide green ministers is Vihreät, the Finnish Green Party, in 1995.

1984: Government

The German Grünen, the most influential party until now, is founded in 1979, as an *anti-party party*, by feminists, pacifists, environmentalists and anti nuclear activists. It enters the Bundestag – the federal parliament - five years later. In 1997, after a near-death experience that leaves Die Grünen without any parliamentary representation for some time, they enter government, to stay for eight years. They do not only play an important part in phasing out the German nuclear programme but also in the Afghanistan conflict, in which foreign secretary Joschka Fischer plays a crucial role. But Fischer remains an exception.

Although the Finnish Greens make a modest step towards a *basic income*, elsewhere in Europe Green influence remains practically restricted to the environment.

2001: Terrorism drives out the environment

The best time for Greens are the years around the millennium, when the Kyoto-protocol against global warming is signed (1997), and the UN conference on sustainable development in Johannesburg (2002) takes place. At some point the Green parties have governmental responsibilities in no less than seven European countries: Finland, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Sweden (where they support a minority government), France and Latvia. But 9/11 takes its toll: the war against terrorism pushes back the fight against global warming. A victory of the right forces the French, Italian and German Greens back into opposition. Their Finnish colleagues give up their government posts after having lost in a conflict about relaunching the nuclear programme. And the Flemish Greens disappear completely from Parliament after a government participation that finishes badly for them. By 2005, Latvia is the only EU country with a Green minister in government.

2007: New allies

The low appears to be temporary; towards the end of 2007 the environment is back on the agenda, because of growing concerns about climate change. And Greens are in government in Latvia, Finland, Ireland, the Czech Republic and Italy – where they disappear in 2008 after the left Prodi coalition is forced to resign. There are some important differences to former times, however. Participating in

government in two new member states, the Greens have a stronger position in the former Soviet countries than many had expected. And they don't see left parties as their only possible allies any longer; in three of the above

mentioned countries they have joined forces with the centre or the right. A third trend is set by the Finnish Greens: they provide ministers for Employment and Justice, but not for the Environment.

2. The Green Group in the European Parliament

The Green Group is only the fifth largest in the European parliament. But it is one of the most productive ones. Because most Greens are convinced Europeans. And because their core issue, the environment, is for a large part decided at the European level, including vast issues like climate change, the chemicals that surround us and agriculture which produces our daily food. The Greens have a fairly good start on the European stage. After entering the European Parliament in 1979, they become the third largest group only ten years later, just after the Brundtland Report 'Our common Future' has shaken the world. A second high occurs in 1999, one and a half year after the Kyoto Protocol is signed. The enlargements of the Union in 2004 and 2007 somewhat weaken their position, because they don't manage to win seats in any of the new member states. After the French-Dutch-Irish No to a new European treaty a general backlash of the European project is feared, which doesn't do their position any good either. But as the environmental problems are more and more linked to social and democratic challenges, they hope to make a comeback in 2009.

1979: first elections for the European Parliament

Before the first direct elections for the European Parliament, five parties join forces: the German, English and French Greens, the Italian Partito Radicale and the Dutch Political Party of Radicals (PPR, one of the founding parties of GroenLinks). Only the Italian Greens make the electoral threshold, with 3 members of the European Parliament (MEP's). The Partito Radicale however differs so strongly from the other parties that it soon leaves the cooperation.

1984: Rainbow Group

The second attempt is more successful: the Greens obtain 11 seats, 7 for the German Grünen, two for the Dutch party GroenLinks and one each for Écolo (Wallony) and Agalev (Flanders). They still are seven seats short of being entitled to forming a group on their own and having the right to submit amendments and participate in committees. Therefore they join forces with regional parties from Scotland, Wales and Basque country, four Danish anti-Europeans, and two intellectual communists, in the Rainbow Group.

1989: Breakthrough

In the aftermath of the UN-Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (1987) acid rain and the Greenhouse effect are at the top of the political agenda. The Greens win 27 seats. Les Verts (France) and Die Grünen (Germany) are,

with 9 and 8 MEP's respectively, the largest parties, followed by the Italian Verdi (5). If the Green Party of England and Wales could have converted its election victory into seats, the group would have been larger still. But because of their national district system which is unfavourable to smaller parties, their score of 14,5% doesn't bring them any seats at all.

1994-1999: Down and up

Just two years after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the Europeans seem to have forgotten their promises, because the Greens fall back to 21 seats. But after the **Kyoto Protocol** has been signed, in 1997, and the rapid destruction of the rainforests has hit the headlines, the environment is back on the agenda. And the Greens win 36 seats. Together with the regionalists and the independent parties of the European Free Alliance (EFA) they form a 48-strong group, the fourth largest in the European Parliament.

2004: Enlargement, but not for Greens

9/11 takes its toll: reduction to 35 seats in a larger Parliament, 13 of which are occupied by Germans. However, the score could have been worse: in the old member states of the European Union only one party is still in government: Die Grünen. And in none of the new member states a Green party manages to cross the electoral threshold. Together with the five members of the EFA and the two

members of Europe Transparent (Netherlands) they form a group of 42. Halfway through 2007 a French Green leaves his party after disappointing elections, but he remains a

member of the Green Group, as do the two members of Europe Transparent, which has fallen apart.

See for recent points of view www.greens-efa.org.

3. TOWARDS A EUROPEAN PARTY OF PEOPLE?

Almost 30 years after the first direct elections for the European Parliament, there are not yet any truly European parties, parties you can join regardless of your nationality and in which European issues are discussed cross borderly, by Europeans who form a true sounding board for their representatives in the European Parliament. But the European Greens get closer and closer, reaching out across the borders and closing ranks.

1983: Coordination

At the initiative of the Belgian parties Écolo (Walloon) and Agalev (Flanders, later renamed Groen!) eight parties join forces in the *European Coordination of Green Parties (ECGP)*, when running for the European elections of the following year. They share their commitment to the environment. But *regionalisation* is an important common theme as well. As European cooperation increases, they reason, the national political level will lose ground, not only to the European level but to the regional as well, because regions usually are a better forum for cultural identity. Formally the Coordination does not have much substance: party representatives meet regularly to discuss possibilities for the convergence of ideas and for joining forces, but a structure is lacking. And since decisions have to be unanimous hardly any decisions are made.

At the end of the eighties, when the Iron curtain is torn down, this set-up is under pressure. The number of national green parties has increased considerably and new parties from Eastern Europe are knocking at the door. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, at a European Conference in Paris 1988, the Lithuanian greens announce the foundation of their party. A more structured form of organisation is needed.

1993: Federation

Established in Helsinki in 1993, the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP) is the first official supranational Green structure. It has members in almost all EU-member states, but also outside of it, like the Norwegian Grønna or the Ukrainian Green Party, and in regions like Scotland and Catalonia.

It consists of an Executive Committee, a half-

yearly Council and a Congress of representatives of parties that decides by simple majority. It adopts a Manifesto based on the principles of sustainable development, global security and a social policy based on human rights and the rights of minorities. On two points the document is vague: war and peace, and the future of the European Union. The reason is that on these points the parties don't agree.

2004: European Green Party

During the run-up to the European elections of 2004 the EFGP is renamed European Green Party (EGP). At the origin of this change is the Treaty of Amsterdam, It gives European political parties an important role in the European integration process, since they *'contribute to European consciousness and can convey the political will of the citizens'*. According to the European Commission the parties can only fulfil that role if they are funded independently: no longer by the parties and parliamentarians of the member states but directly by the Commission. This change of funding requires a change of statutes. The Greens are the only ones who seize the opportunity to forge more unity: they replace the *Federation* by a *Party*: during the elections congress in Rome the European Green Party is born.

Sceptics call this change of name a pure election stunt. And that is what it seems to be: all energy is focused on a common campaign, with a common manifesto, common posters, a Dream Team and the common motto *Europe – You Decide!* The common material is used extensively by some parties, like those in the new member states, but largely ignored by a few others that consider giving up national cultures too much of a risk.

2005-2009: Political integration

However, the common campaign turns out to be the start of slow but certain integration process. Its start is a common Climate campaign starting in 2005, which is followed by the adoption of a new Charter the following year. Although the Charter tackles tricky subjects such as a call for further European integration, it is adopted unanimously. At the same time, a process of common policy making comes off the ground. The first result is *A Green Vision for Europe* (2006), adopted after a heated debate on social issues and the role of the market. The paper lays the foundation for a common election programme in 2009, together with position papers on economy and migration adopted in Spring 2008.

And while working groups are addressing climate change, social affairs and security policies, a common campaign for 2009 takes shape. Its slogans, posters and other texts are more likely to be used by many parties than the 2004 ones, because this time many national campaign officers take part in the preparation.

Other initiatives are the *Gender Observatory* (2007), the *European Green Foundation* (2008), which supports weaker and upcoming parties, stimulates the debate and helps to develop common campaigns and training programmes; the integration of the Federation of Young European Greens in the EGP board (2007) and the admission (2008) of the European Federation of Green Seniors as an observer.

www.europeangreens.org

Going Global

Although most Green parties focus on the national level, their real frame of reference is the world. As the new EGP manifesto puts it: *think globally, act locally. And when acting globally, always bear the local consequences in mind.* The global ambitions slowly take shape within the loose ties of the *Global Greens*. In this 'federation of federations' the European Greens have an important role, as do the Green parties of Australia and, to a lesser extent, the USA - the African greens being too divided and the other parties from Asia and the Pacific in majority being too 'young'.

Although the Green parties of Europe have the strongest political experience and cooperation structure by far, other parties are worth mentioning. The Tasmania Greens are the first ever to establish a party, in 1972, after a campaign against a project that would damage the ecology of a lake. Almost thirty years later the Australian Greens have a first too: they organise the first Global Green Congress, in Canberra in 2001.

The event, in which 70 parties participate, is the result of nine years of more or less loose contacts that started during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its main outcome is an inspiring Charter that advocates strong principles, like non-violence and participative democracy, whilst promising to restore *'the integrity of the Earth's ecosystem'*. To guarantee continuity, a Global Green Coordination is installed, consisting of volunteers from the four continental federations.

The second Green Congress, in Sao Paolo in May 2008, introduces political debate – although mainly between Europeans - and results in declarations on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable cities. And after a three day struggle between those who favour a stronger global presence and those fearing that presence might harm their position back home, cautious promises are made to install a secretariat that will give the coordination team some administrative support.

The global Green presence may still be modest for a political movement with a global agenda, but at the global level a platform like the European Parliament doesn't exist, so the need to overcome national differences and join hands is felt less strongly. However, the mere existence of a global family of some 80 parties is a strong symbol, especially for small, upcoming parties in parts of the world where the Greens are still weak. And the Global Green Charter already has proven its value: it has served as a source of inspiration for many, including the Japanese Greens who have based their programme on it and recently won their first seat in Parliament.

www.globalgreens.org

4. CROSS BORDER INITIATIVES

Within the European Green Party several forms of cooperation exist. Every two years local councillors meet, and the Greens in Big Cities have a yearly conference in which they exchange experiences and share best practices. Underneath you find some a list of more specialised and sectoral groups.

Regional networks

Several regional networks operate within the EGP: the Baltic Sea Network, the Green Islands Network, the Mediterranean Network, The Adriatic Sea Network, and the North Sea Greens. Particularly active is the Green East-West Dialogue. Their aim is to strengthen contacts between the member parties, to discuss common problems and, in the case of the East West Dialogue, to give weaker and beginning parties active support. Only official party delegates participate in them.

Thematic working groups

Whenever they see a need for a common vision, the EGP member parties establish thematic working groups, usually on a temporary basis, in which specialists participate. For examples see above. The result of their work is usually voted during a council or congress. The European Green Gender Observatory operates on a more permanent basis.

Seniors

In 2006 active seniors from Groen! invited older members of other parties to form the European Network of Green Seniors (ENGS). Its aim is to table issues that touch the elderly, like reductions on international public transport, a more positive attitude towards the ageing of the population and putting more seniors on elections lists. In 2008 the ENGS obtained an *observer* status in the EGP. Read more on <http://huizekeytsman.telenet.be/ENGS/engs.htm>

FYEG – Federation of European Young Greens

The young have joined forces also, in the Federation of European Young Greens. Founded in 1988 as a cooperation of youth wings of Green parties and ecological youth organisations, the FYEG currently has 33 members. It organises seminars, summer camps, debates and training sessions. It also goes out into the streets, like recently for the campaign 'Tell me what I eat' about genetically manipulated food. The FYEG participates in the EGP-committee and has coordinated a working group on migration. The monthly Ecosprinter reports about recent events and announces upcoming activities, the bi-annual magazine Ecoplasma contains more in-depth views.

Because active members rarely stay on long – '*young people lead a dynamic life*' - and the budget is small, the organisation doesn't '*live up to its ambitions*'. Individuals can join the FYEG: in fact all members of the participating youth wings are considered members of the FYEG.

Read more on www.fyeg.org

5. INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERSHIP: A POLITICAL FIRST.

A special form of cross border cooperation is the Individual Supportership. Introduced in 2004, it is the only initiative open to all grassroots members. It enables them to participate at a transnational and European level. And it is unique. The Liberals too have launched cross border projects, but they hardly go beyond electronic debating lists. And the European socialists are busy recruiting campaigners for 2009, and have launched an online public consultation in 2007. But only the European Greens have given individuals a place in their statutes, allowing them to add their own creativity to the common cause.

2004 Rome: more than a name-change.

The Individual Supportership is introduced in 2004, when the Green federation is transformed into a party. It is the first statutory proof that the transformation is more than a name change. It is what the pro-European parties that have campaigned for it, have in mind: a recognition that in a true European party like the EGP, individuals have their place and can participate at the European level without needing to go through national structures. For a start, supporters receive regular information about EGP matters and the proceedings of the Green Group in the European Parliament. They may form

working groups however and attend EGP meetings, where they even have a limited right to speak. Because some parties are afraid of dissidents and political enemies infiltrating the Greens through the European level, individual supporters have to join through the party in their country of residence, which is entitled to deciding on admittance. Supporters pay a minimum fee of € 12, - euros per year (some parties ask more), which should be transferred to the EGP office in Brussels and used for supporters' activities.

Fears, challenges and a breakthrough

The individual supportership is something in between full membership and no organised direct individual involvement at all, because supporters are not allowed to vote; only member parties and a limited number of Members of the European Parliament have that right. Still, quite a few parties have objections because it might, they fear, lead to full membership. And to that they are opposed, either because they don't believe in supra-national democracy or because they are afraid that a direct members' mandate would make the EGP too powerful at the cost of their autonomy and might even harm their position back home.

Still others don't want to open Pandora's box and start splitting hairs about what would be a fair division of votes. And indeed: if they would vote as country blocks, the 48.000 members of the German Grünen might easily overrule the Greens of the British Isles. Or, as quite a few French Greens fear, the 20.000 Dutch Greens could pull the 6000 Verts to the right. However, if you want to engage in cross border politics, you don't always need voting rights. If you like to exchange experiences or discuss views across borders or participate in joint actions, voting rights are not indispensable. And those kind of activities are of crucial importance in creating a European public space. Without that space, European democracy will never come to life and Europe will never become the community the many Greens dream of, in which national rivalries no longer count.

The Individual Supportership has had a slow start. In the European elections year 2004 only GroenLinks and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen opened subscription. By the end of 2006, three more had followed: Écolo (Wallonia) and the Irish Green Party/Comhaontas Glas, and the Green Party of England and Wales (in which one of the members administers the registration because of lack of staff capacity). But by mid-2008, the European elections only one year away, the Scottish Green Party and Déi Grèng had joined, and the number of supporters started to grow.

Currently over 1500 supporters are registered. The numbers vary considerably per party. GroenLinks still is at the top of the list, with over a thousand. The party has widely advertised the supportership during the run-up to the last European elections, supplies supporters with introductory information, and offers them additional European events, largely organised by the supporters themselves. But other parties are rapidly making up. Écolo has registered some 150 after starting to advertise early in 2008. Déi Grèng now have some 400, because the party conference decided to register all members at once.

The German Greens still have less than 50 supporters, because the party hardly advertises and demands a rather high fee of € 48,- (and for non-members even more). But the tide might turn; both the German party leader Büttikofer and the EGP Committee have at some point claimed that the individual supporters can play an important role in the European elections campaign.

Participation: six years of experiments

For some, registering as an individual supporter is just a symbolic act of support to the European ideals. For others it is a way to keep updated on what's going on in the Green parties of Europe. And for still others it is a way to get involved in cross border political activities other than standing for the European Parliament or voting for it once every five years.

If you wish to participate, you don't have to start from scrap. More than six years ago, just a few days after the introduction of the Euro, Greens from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands met in the border town of Heerlen, only 10 miles off the point where their country borders meet. They wondered why 23 years after the first direct elections of the European Parliament, European politics still were a national affair and opportunities to discuss or campaign with Europeans from other member states hardly existed. And they decided to join forces and create such opportunities, starting within their parties and the EFGP, and to narrow the gap between grassroots Greens from different EU member states.

The Heerlen Group, as it was called, has acted as a pilot project for the *Individual* Supportership from

the moment it was introduced in 2004. Using the new formal link between the grassroots and Brussels, it has participated in cross border actions, anti nuclear demonstrations and EGP campaigns, and organised its own contribution to it: the Cross border Relay Tour 2004, which will be repeated on a Europe wide scale in 2009. It has been furthering cross border cooperation between local and regional Green groups, organised conferences open to all grassroots Greens, and developed a newsletter, a mail list and an interactive website. And it has lobbied with party boards to implement the individual supportership and visited party events to encourage grassroots Greens to register.

6. Supporters' Activities

• SUPPORTERS ON TOUR

Every year around summer time, network members visit individual party meetings to exchange views with local members, to participate in workshops and to invite people to participate in cross border initiatives, Parties visited so far are Les Verts, Ecolo, Groen!, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, GroenLinks, and the Green Party of England and Wales.

• ANNUAL HEERLEN MEETINGS

Held in November or December, these plenary meetings open to all are the opportunity to discuss European citizenship and other issues with fellow Greens from all over Europe, to sharpen your views in the presence of experts and politicians and to exchange experiences. Among the themes discussed are populism, identities, *'Belgium as a test tube for Europe'*, towards a European members' party and greening cross border transport'.

• CROSS BORDER CAMPAIGNING

As pro-Europeans, supporters have a special role during common campaigns. They can act as 'ambassadors', telling local friends about the European challenge and inviting them to participate. The Supporters' Network adds its own dimension to EU elections campaigns: the Cross Border Relay Tour, a chain of events co-organised by local groups from different countries, linking local issues to the common green cause and showing people that Europe is about everyday life.

• CROSS BORDER TWINNING

Fighting for better cross border public transport, greener harbours, health care systems that match or exchanging best zero emissions practices: local and regional branches may have numerous reasons to join forces across borders on a more permanent basis. The Supporters' Network tries to spot experiences and opportunities and to make the experiences available to others.

• COMMUNICATION

An interactive website www.greenyourope.eu offers both information about the Network's activities and a platform to report experiences and exchange views. A regular Newsletter gives a survey of what's new on the site – and sometimes more – and a mail list offers additional opportunity for short announcements and reactions.

JOIN THE EGP AS AN INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTER:

Write to Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Écolo, GroenLinks, Comhaontas Glas, the Scottish Green Party or Déi Gréngif you live in one of the corresponding countries, because those parties have opened registration. Mail to m.stimson1@ntlworld.com when you live in England. If you live elsewhere, mail to the local Green party or, if it doesn't respond, to egpsupportersnetwork@europeangreens.org

Join & participate

If you would like to

- Receive the Newsletter and join the mail group: mail to Jos van Dijk josvd@wxs.nl
- Contribute to the site www.greenyourope.eu : mail to Lin Tabak lin@ision.nl
- Join the GPEW Twinning Scheme: Michael Stimson m.stimson1@ntlworld.com
- Participate in other activities: Mieke Fleurackers mieke_fleurackers@hotmail.com or If you want to be part of it all, mail to EGPsupportersnetwork@europeangreens.org.
- Want to know more, go to www.greenyourope.eu

Supporters' team (till October 2008): Lin Tabak (GroenLinks, NL), Peter Alberts, Friedrich Foerster &

Georg Schedereit ([Bündnis 90/Die Grünen](#), D), Luc Lamote and Mieke Fleurackers ([Groen!](#), B); Marianne Saenen ([Ecolo](#), B), Michael Stimson ([Green Party of England and Wales](#)), Michael Leibman ([Les Verts](#), F), Adam Fularz ([Zieloni 2004](#), PL), Monia Franceschini ([Federazione dei Verdi](#), I).

Greens increasingly reach out across the borders at the local level in order to campaign for common challenges. Long-term structural cooperation however still is rare. An example is *Borderless Green and Social*, in which seven district branches in Nordrhein-Westfalen cooperate with the GroenLinks provincial branches of Groningen and Drenthe. This initiative was launched in 2004, during the common election conference of GroenLinks and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen Niedersachsen. One of their successes is a through train service between Oldenburg and Groningen. They are working on a crossborder network of cycling paths and campaign against the construction of coal-fuelled electricity plants in the Eems-Dollard area.