



30 years EFA

Eric Defoort, EFA president

For more than one reason I, as president of the European Free Alliance (EFA), am very happy today.

There are many reasons to celebrate. First of all, I am particularly proud to pay tribute to our European political party EFA, which has borne fruit over its 30 years of life. Secondly as a history professor, I feel it is also my duty to bring to your attention the 60 years preceding EFA. During 2011 fifteen of our member parties celebrate important anniversaries. Finally I believe whilst we celebrate our 30th anniversary, holding our breath and reviewing the progress, the steps forward, the acknowledgments of our political family, we also have to look forward to the future.

1920-1980

Our story starts in 1920, the year of the poppy, the year Maurits Coppieters was born. He became the first EFA Member of the European Parliament. This year 1920 is a landmark for peace and for EFA. One of EFA's cornerstone principles has always been peace and peaceful political action. In 1921, our oldest EFA member party the *Partito Sardo d'Azione* (the Sardinian action party) was founded. This year they celebrate their 90th anniversary.

During the period 1920-1980, nearly half of our current members started as political parties, which preceded our European political party. *PLAID Cymru* was founded in 1925; and in 1931 *ERC*, (which celebrates 80 years in 2011) together with the *SNP* in 1934.

Right after the Second World War, these were followed by the German Minority party in Denmark (*Schleswig Partei*) in 1945 and the Danish minority party in Germany (*Südschleswigscher Wählerverband SSW*) in 1946; the *Bayernpartei* was set also up in 1946 and also celebrates 65 years in 2011. All of them have become EFA members in recent years.

In 1951 *Mebyon Kernow* was founded, they celebrate 60 years of political action this year. *Volksunie*, the Flemish nationalist party, was founded in 1954 and was the most important motor and catalysing factor before EFA was created and thus continued for its first two decades of action.

In the sixties it was the turn of the *Fryske Nasjonale party* (FNP) in 1962, *Union Démocratique Bretonne* (UDB) in 1964 and the *Partido Andalucista* (PA) in 1965 to be set up and in the seventies parties like the *Movimento Autonomist Occitano* in 1970 (later *VVAP* and *Partit Occitan - POC*), the *Mouvement Region Savoie* (MRS) in 1971, (it enjoys its 40th anniversary this year), *Enotna Lista* and *Slovenska Skupnost* in 1975, *PSM* (Mallorca) in 1976 (35th Anniversary this year), *UPC* (later *Partitu di a Nazione Corsa - PNC*) in Corsica in 1977.

Together, some of these 18 parties created a discerning group, in the run up to the first direct European elections in 1979 and began forming the European Free Alliance. In 1979, the European Parliament, which for decades had remained a consultative assembly with no legislative powers, became one of the most powerful legislatures in the world. During the following 30 years, EFA would invest in that political space and would become an active part of this crucial European political arena.

1981-2011

EFA fundamentally fights for the freedom of peoples and nations. We also strive for the equality of nations, cultures and languages. EFA has fought for freedom for 30 years, real freedom for all peoples of Europe, and is deeply committed to fight for another 30 years more. Of course, EFA's activity and political involvement did not start in Parliament. One of EFA's driving principles is self-determination. We promote the emergence of truly constructive interactions between Europe's Nations, peoples,

communities and citizens, by claiming collective rights, more autonomy and very often full independence.

This idea began to take shape over 30 years ago and politically crystallized when EFA's fundamental principles were first expressed and synthesized in the 1979 Declaration of Bastia, eloquently stressing its attachment to a Europe of Peoples... not actual States, Peoples! This historic declaration also emphasised the importance of protecting the collective rights and dignity of these hitherto unrecognized, and often to various degrees, repressed Peoples.

This vision and programme for Europe arose from a constant, dynamic and thorough groundwork of militants, on which the EFA of 2011 can still rely. EFA's success is a clear expression of the quality of the work achieved by our European mosaic of militancy. This is constantly fed and updated by dynamic youth movements, who ensure that our vision, aims and work always stay up to date, relevant, accurate, and fully connected to the best vibrations of this fantastic European continent, its immediate surroundings, and the rest of World, to which Europe is and should always be linked to in full solidarity and rich interdependence.

EFA itself is diverse. EFA members interpret a rich manifold of European collective realities, backgrounds, real power, and hopes. It has always been important for every EFA member to ensure internal cohesion among members and partners. **Such cohesion is only possible if such internal diversity is itself governed by the same demands of tolerance, recognition and solidarity that EFA is externally advocating.** EFA's success in doing so has made its lasting and active presence possible in the whole European political arena.

It is also a clear sign of maturity that EFA can now count on the forward looking expertise and analysis provided by the Foundation Centre Maurits Coppieters (CMC). The CMC is a "Political Foundation at European Level" and has been recognized by the European Parliament since 2007. The CMC works in close cooperation with its member organizations and the European Free Alliance as a platform for new ideas. As such, this young and dynamic foundation is ensuring that EFA will always be linked to the best, most groundbreaking and stimulating visions, whose implementation EFA remains responsible for.

To conclude, EFA could not neglect the fact that, while EFA is looking back over its 30 years of life and looking forward to the next 30, other Peoples near to Europe are *literally fighting*, taking on the ultimate danger possible which could mean losing their own lives, to enjoy political and personal freedom, by democratically living together and taking decisions. The ineffectiveness, a tragedy in itself, of repression and regime driven brutality is in effect showing what constant and lasting energy is displayed by people and Peoples fighting for emancipation, rights and true democracy.

The next 30 years in the future will be described as a time, where through powerful basic democratic movements, new states within the current European borders of 2011, emerged and gained independence. EFA promotes this democratic wave and develops what we call Europe's internal enlargement even further, which at the same time is a true strengthening of the European Union.

It would be neither decent nor clever at the end of a turbulent 2011, to mention the journey of our own Peoples' emancipation, without sparing a thought for our Palestinian, Kurdish, Tibetan,... brothers and sisters, who have courageously chosen such a harsh political journey, and an even steeper and much more perilous path towards their emancipation.

Eric Defoort, President of EFA

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