From the outset, much of the political activity of the European People’s Party (EPP) has been closely linked to its programmatic development. The co-founders of the party, Hans August Lücker and Wilfried Martens, were convinced that solid foundations were needed so that the process of building Europe would not be completely dominated by the preoccupations of day-to-day politics. This idea has lasted, thanks to many inside the EPP who have never ceased to focus on the essentials and on the long term. Since the 1970s, in the wider context of political dealignment or, later on, with the so-called end of ideologies, these efforts have not lost their significance. On the contrary, they continue to play an important part in the development of the party.

Making the party’s basic ideas and values explicit has also proven to be important whenever the EPP wants to properly distinguish itself from other political parties and families. This seems particularly true at the European level, since European parties, unlike those at the national level, cannot rely as much as they might want on people – the politicians who are the figureheads of the party, especially during electoral campaigns – or on policies, which in the European context are first of all attributed to the groups in the European Parliament (EP).

Wilfried Martens, *Europe: I Struggle, I Overcome* (Brussels, 2009), 36–7. See also, for instance, the opinion of Hanns Seidel in his *Weltanschauung und Politik*, cited in H. Möller, ‘Hanns Seidels christliches Menschenbild, H. Zehetmair (Hrsg.)’, *Politik aus christlicher Verantwortung*, (Wiesbaden, 2007), 91: ‘It is in the parties as well as in the interest of the whole more valuable to have a philosophical guideline rather than the pure technical control of power, free from any philosophy [Weltanschauung], which is then seen as ‘statesmanship’ [Staatskunst].’ (author’s translation from German).
The enlargement to include Conservative parties and other like-minded forces made it urgent for the EPP to invest a lot of energy in defining what the political family, currently representing the centre-right in Europe, stands for, especially vis-à-vis the outside world: journalists, competitors and other voices in the political arena. It was also necessary for internal reasons, especially to assist both the new and the old member parties. Having a well thought-out vision of EPP fundamentals allows existing member parties to recognise clearly which political family they belong to and allows candidate parties to understand what they are expected to subscribe to.

Equally important, referring to basic ideas and values when policy proposals have to be drafted – for instance, in the framework of new legislation for the EP – also generates a process of consensus-seeking inside the EPP. Given the diversity of its member parties and the complexity of present-day politics, especially at the level of the European Union (EU), it is, after all, the political programme that unites the party.

The Meaning of Christian Democracy

What specifically distinguishes Christian Democracy from other non-socialist political movements, especially from the Conservatism of the British or Scandinavian type? The question is not just theoretical. It played a prominent role in the discussions surrounding the founding of the EPP, and remained a live issue throughout the party’s development because of the recurrent problem of whether or not Conservative parties were to be included or excluded from European Christian Democratic organisations. The question merits attention, since the EPP defines itself as ‘Christian Democratic’.290

Indeed, if one ignores the way the party is rooted in the Christian Democratic movement, the birth and development of the EPP makes little or no sense. The resistance and doubts that attended the ‘strategy of openness’, begun in the late 1980s, which brought in Conservative and other parties of the centre-right, make no sense without an understanding of this background. The profound significance of the enlargement process for

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290 See ‘We, Christian Democrats’ in the Basic Programme adopted at the 1992 Athens Congress, and the preamble of the Statutes, in the version approved by the 2009 Bonn Congress.