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EUROPEAN LIBERALS AND
THEIR ROLE IN ENLARGING THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Doctoral Thesis –

(Summary in English)

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European Liberals and their Role in Enlarging the European Union

Summary

Keywords: European Union, enlargement, liberalism, European parties, European institutions

Introduction

Despite numerous crisis and failures, in over 50 years of the European project, no state has left the EU. On the contrary, over twenty states have acceded and there are others wishing to do so. In fact, this is the vocation of the European project, as it was very clearly stated already in the preamble of the Rome Treaty – building "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe". This expression contains in fact two objectives: integration or deepening ("ever closer union" and enlargement or widening ("among the peoples of Europe", i.e. not only the six founding states). While these are sometimes seen as opposite, they often go hand in hand, allowing the Union to continuously move forward and not "fall over" as in the famous metaphor of the Europe as a bicycle¹.

Each enlargement phase was accompanied by a step towards integration. After the 1973 enlargement, the European Parliament had its first direct elections. The Mediterranean enlargements of 1981-1986, were accompanied by the Single European Act. The fourth enlargement (EFTA states) was preceded by the Maastricht Treaty and followed by the Amsterdam Treaty. Finally, the great 2004-2007 enlargement was prepared by the Nice Treaty and consolidated through the Lisbon Treaty (which took on board the main substantial changes from the defunct Constitution for Europe).

In this thesis, I analysed the European liberal family and in particular its positions and the role of European liberal parties in the achievement of the second track of the evolution of the European project – enlargement. Encompassing half a million people in 28 states in a joint structure, which shares common values, ensures peace, stability, economic and political rights, freedom of movement, especially taking into account the departure point (two World Wars, Cold War, totalitarian regimes, cross-border or ethnic disputes) is the reason why the EU is a model of development for other parts of the world, representing a *European Dream*, akin to the *American Dream* (Rifkin 2004). In the absence of enlargement, especially towards the poorer East and South, a more politically and economically integrated European Union, would no longer be such a model and the term *Fortress Europe* (currently used to criticise EU immigration policy), would probably be even more appropriate and widespread.

¹ Attributed to the first Commission president - Walter Hallstein

Governments and political parties had the main role in the decisions taken regarding enlargements and related referendum campaigns. National political parties have begun to associate at European and international level in particular after the second World War (Liberal International, New International Teams – Christian-democrats, Socialist International). A decisive step was the direct election of the European Parliament in 1979. In preparation for this event, the European associations of parties have strengthened. 1974 saw the formation of the Union of Socialist Parties in the European Community (since 1992 – Party of European Socialists; in 1976, the European Popular Party (Christian-Democrats, later renamed European People's Party) and the Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties were formed. The latter was the only one to start with a holistic joint declaration of principles (Stuttgart Declaration), based on liberal values and on the 1947 Oxford Declaration founding Liberal International. The socialists had several resolutions focusing on the social priorities, while the Christian-Democrats' initial statement focused mainly on organisational matters. These federations of parties had a growing importance, in parallel with the strengthening of the European Parliament. From a consultative institution with some budgetary powers, the EP has become today an essential pillar of EU institutional architecture, with codecision powers in most areas, awarded in the successive European treaties. It is clear that, in this process, the Christian-democrats and socialists, with their political strength have contributed decisively to the European project. That is why most of the academic literature focuses on these two federations. Nevertheless, the role of liberals as a political force in the centre, capable of tilting the balance, should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, in 2002, Belgian professor Pascal Delwit considered that: "to suggest that political liberalism and, in particular, liberal parties in Europe are less studied, is a euphemism [...] Liberal parties are the orphans of scientific literature among the studies of political actors. (Delwit 2002, 7). Political scientists have studied European elections (Eijk și Franklin 1996, Eijk, Franklin și Marsh 1996), the political party systems in the European Parliament or in the EU (Hix și Lord 1997, Hix 1999, Hix, Kreppel și Noury 2003, Kreppel 2002), the positions of national parties regarding European integration (Ray 1999, Marks, Wilson și Ray 2002). With the growing interest in EU affairs, the academic literature has also grown: competition among national parties regarding European issues (Gabel și Hix 2002, Pennings 2002) or analysis of EU Council votes depending on political affiliation (Mattila 2004, Zimmer, Schneider și Dobbins 2004), or the impact of EU enlargement on European parties (Almeida 2012). A major work is the doctoral thesis of Thierry Coosemans (2008), which looks at the ELDR group and its parties, but without the parties of the 5th enlargement (Coosemans 2008).

Enlargement studies are also not very numerous, although the body of literature has grown after the last enlargement. In 2007, Johnny Laursen considers that "unfortunately, there is currently no significant body of historical literature focused on the enlargements of the European Union. A

large number of general works on EU history contain important references regarding Enlargement negotiations and their results. There is also significant literature regarding the individual accession of countries to the EU [...]. A large part of the literature regarding European enlargements focused on current issues or the potential impact of imminent enlargements. There is no historical analysis of European widening, in which the waves of enlargements to be considered as a definite and complete process in the context of the development of the institution and the policies of the Community" (J. Laursen 2010, 388-389). Geoffrey Pridham looks at the growing body of work and observes that the main aspects studies are – the impact on the EU (deepening / widening dilemma), studies of separate enlargements (in particular the 2004 enlargement, empiric studies of specific candidate countries. (G. Pridham 2008) .

I consider therefore that there is an added value in studying the European liberal family and its influence in transforming the European project from a Community of six states in a Union of 27 Member States.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter I tries to respond to the question – are European liberals a "political family" which is sufficiently strong, which shares common objectives and answers to society's challenges, particularly in relation to the EU? To begin, it was important to look at liberal thinking, in particular after WWII, as this should be the basis of the ideology of liberal parties (chapter I.1). Thereafter, I looked at the formation of European and international liberal organisations, in particular in the European Parliament, and the possible links between these organisations and liberal thinkers (chapter I.2). Taking into account the fact that Member States are those that determine the direction of the European project, particularly for major questions such as enlargement, and that the governments of candidate countries have the main role in engaging on the path towards accession, chapter I.3 looks at national liberal parties, their role and influence on the national political scene, their economic and social orientation, as well as their views on Europe. These characteristics are essential elements in determining the existence and the degree of cohesion of the liberal political family.

Chapter II looks at EU enlargement, in particular the role and position of liberal parties at European and national level. It is difficult to identify what exactly is the role of a party or of a personality in history. One could ask what would be the outcome, in the absence of that party. In the particular case of liberal parties, smaller than their socialist or Christian-democrat counterparts, we focused, in the context of each enlargement, on whether they occupied influential positions at EU level, in the Member States or in the candidate countries and what were their actions and

positions, in relation to those of other parties. In the case of candidate countries, I have looked at whether liberal parties have influenced the political decisions regarding enlargement and, in the case of East-European or Mediterranean countries, at their role in the transition towards democracy and market economy, process which was required before being able to accede to the EU.

Chapter I - Liberal thinkers and Liberal Political Structures in Europe

In chapter I.1, we look at the main liberal schools of thought in continental Europe after the Second World War – the German Ordoliberals (Eucken, Bohm, Erhard, Muller Armack,), the Austrians (Mises, von Hayek), the Italians (Luigi Einaudi, Benedetto Croce, Bruno Leoni), the French (Rueff, Aron,), the Spanish (de Madariaga). I conclude that, while there are a variety of views and approaches (from Mises' intransigence regarding the role of the state, to the social market economy of the ordoliberals and the social liberalism in Italy and France), the founding principles are the same, with different nuances and degree of involvement of the state, or with different focus. All of them focus on the free actions of the individual, as the basis for studying the economy, an approach put forward mainly by the Austrians. The focus of the German school on the economic constitution, comes also from the acknowledgement of the importance of individual action – the legal framework established by the state, must allow that, by following their own interests, individuals contribute to the achievement of common goals. Einaudi and Rueff link political liberty to economic liberty to political liberty, the first being a prerequisite of the second. Rueff focuses also on the importance of the freedom of setting prices, particularly in the context of price controls following second world war. This is shared by all liberal thinkers. Erhard was one of the first to liberalise prices in Germany in 1948. Hayek considers that prices allow the transmission in a codified form of information related to cost, supply and demand throughout the market. When the state or private agents (through monopolies or cartels) intervene on prices, the information is no longer correct and the mechanism no longer works properly. That is why, the Ordoliberals of the Freiburg school also insist on the "economic constitution". This legal order, the rule of law, is the other essential element of a free market economy. This order must ensure the respect for the freedom of prices, fair competition, freedom of commerce, private property, freedom of contract. All agree that it is the role of the state to establish this order, but while Hayek or Leoni focus on setting principles, with a strong role for the courts, ordoliberals consider this is not sufficient and a more detailed framework must be set by the state. Where the differences are more important, is the intervention of the state in the economy in view of solving the "social question". There is a continuum between Hayek and Mises, for whom the concept of "social

justice" makes no sense in the context of a free market economy and the German and Italian schools. The latter underline that the state must intervene, otherwise the "levels on income depends on market conditions, which could lead to grave injustice" (Eucken 1952, 63). For Hayek, justice means equality before the law (regardless of social, national, racial, religion or sex), as there can be no person responsible for the social question. It is only possible to judge whether the rules of the economic system are just, but even this cannot have universal value (von Hayek 1976, 27). However, Hayek does not exclude setting a minimum income for those who, in the context of the free market, are not able to obtain sufficient income to be able to live. Despite these differences, all agree that the state should not influence the economic processes through direct interventions, even if based on economic calculations, since any such statistics can only represent a "photograph" of a moment in the continuously changing economy and because public management cannot be effective, as it is not focused on satisfying the needs of the consumers. They also agree that such interventions, even if well intended, can have negative effects.

In hindsight, these differences may seem important, but in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War, the liberal schools are clearly distinguishable from the other ideologies and the thinking of politicians of the time. It is one reason why many of these thinkers, as well as other from around the world, have joined in the Mont Pelerin Society, established at the initiative of Hayek, in 1947. Its "object is solely, by facilitating the exchange of views among minds inspired by certain ideals and broad conceptions held in common, to contribute to the preservation and improvement of the free society", without aligning to a particular party nor establishing a "meticulous and hampering orthodoxy".

It was clear then, from the outset, that the liberal thinkers did not necessarily associate themselves with liberal parties, although most did (in Italy in particular). Ludwig Erhard, however, was Germany's chancellor on behalf of CDU (in coalition with liberals in the FDP). Many liberal ideas have been taken on board by social-democrat parties.

As it happened, the constituent meetings of the Liberal International and Mont-Pelerin society took place almost at the same time, with similar guest lists. However, the cooperation between the two was "friendly, but somewhat distant" (McCallum 1967, 50). In chapter I.2 we further see that the first Secretary General of the organisation also considered that "pure doctrine" does not take into account "the pressures surrounding the politician" and that "in order for the thinker to influence the politician, it must be able to understand these difficulties, which are, at the end of the day, part of the problem on which it should base his conclusions. Otherwise, such blueprints for a society can be like the plans of an architect which does not take into account the nature of the soil".

In chapter I.3, we see that, despite the initial enthusiasm of the Liberal International, the association of liberals at European level was a slow process, behind the socialists and Christian-democrats. The establishment of political groups in the Common Assembly allowed the formation of the group "Liberals and Allies" (*apparentes*), aside from the socialists and Christian-democrats. Its composition was quite heterogeneous, with a weak degree of cohesion. Temporarily, when the French Gaullists joined, the group becomes second largest in the European Parliament of the EEC. Their departure allows the group to give full support to the first enlargement.

In 1976, the Stuttgart declaration becomes the founding document of the European Liberals and Democrats (ELD). In the 1980s the liberal group occupies the fourth or the fifth place and its cohesion is even weaker, including through the accession of the Portuguese PSD, which also leads to the addition of the word Reformists (ELDR). In the 1990s there is a revival, with the accession of Scandinavian countries from EFTA and the alliance between the European democrats (mainly British conservatives) and the EPP. We saw that the ELDR group strongly supports the Eastern enlargements and actively seeks new members. It has a Visitors program from national parliamentarians from sister parties and, after the signing of the Accession treaties, it gives full voting rights in the group for observer MEPs from candidate countries. The difficulty was to attract truly liberal parties and to avoid those that falsely used this label.

In 2004, with the accession of MEPs from the ten new Member States and the parties members of the European Democratic Party (mainly Italians, French and Lithuanians), the new Alliance for Liberals and Democrats in Europe group, strengthens its influence and reaches 11-12% of the European Parliament until 2014.

Chapter I.4 looks at liberal parties in the states of the EU, focusing on the periods linked to enlargement - their role and influence at national level, their economic and social orientation, their views on Europe. Since there was no direct link between liberal thinkers and the liberal organisations at international or European level, in our analysis we focused on those parties that were members of the ELDR party or that took part in the activities of the ELDR /ALDE group in the European Parliament.

Liberal parties are (or were) quite strong in smaller states (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Portugal, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia), but rarely as leading coalition parties. Germany's FDP is secondary, but it had an important role as part of coalitions both with SPD and CDU/CSU and it occupied the foreign affairs portfolio for a long time through Hans Dietrich Genscher and Klaus Kinkel. In France, the situation is very variable, with many parties having been member of the Liberal group in the Parliament, including holding the presidency of the group for 32 out of the first 40 years of its existence. However, the French always had a more *etatist* approach to the economy, which differentiated them from the other

parties. In Italy, there were some authentic liberal parties, which disappeared after the *mani pulite* scandal and were followed by others who either did not last very long (*Italia dei Valori*) or moved to the socialists (*I Democratici*). In Great Britain, the Liberals (LibDems after 1988) occupied a relatively minor role at national level, particularly because of the electoral system. In Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, liberal parties had a fluctuating role and, in the end, most of them either disappeared or migrated to the EPP. The liberal parties occupied a secondary role in Spain, Hungary, Cyprus and Ireland (but eventually disappeared almost completely) and had a very small influence in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The only member state without a viable liberal party is Malta.

There are quite important divergences between the liberal parties regarding their economic orientation, from centre-left to centre-right, which explained the variable cohesion of the votes in the European Parliament. In countries with two liberal parties, one tends to be centre-right, while the other – centre-left. There is slightly more cohesion in terms of views on the society (conservative – liberal), but with the note that, in Eastern Europe, the role of religion meant that, while being more "liberal" than other national parties, they were still more traditionalist than their western counterparts.

The area where there is the strongest convergence of views is in terms of pro-European orientation (Hix și Lord 1997, 30-36). With some exceptions, liberal parties in Europe are supporters of European integration and were favourable to their countries' accession to the EU, particularly when comparing to the other national parties. The exceptions are the *Suomen Keskusta* in Finland and the *VVD* in the Netherlands (particularly after the 1990s), which are more reserved, without being euro-sceptic. National characteristics (in France, Denmark, Sweden) also influence the pro-European views of the liberal parties. The position was also variable over time (Almeida 2008, 13).

The chapter ends with a table with each country and its liberal party reflecting the observations mentioned above and concluding that, with time, the European liberals have proved a sufficiently strong resilience and degree of convergence to be considered a political family.

Chapter II – The EU Enlargements and the Role of the Liberal Parties

Chapter II looks at each of the five waves of enlargement and at the role and influence of liberal parties in the candidate countries, in the Member States as well as in the EU institutions. In particular, I have tried to identify any moments in which the role of the liberals was decisive, i.e. if, in their absence or if they had taken another position, the outcome could have been a failure or a

delay in the enlargement process. Where referendums took place, we looked at the position of liberal parties and of their electorate, as well as the degree of involvement in the campaigns.

The first enlargement (chapter II.2) was very difficult, in particular because of the opposition of Charles de Gaulle to the accession of France. The insistence of Member States on a strong intergovernmental approach to the accession process also played a role. The liberal president of the European Commission between 1967 and 1970 (Jean Rey) played a major role in pushing for a stronger role of this institution and a more Community-like approach to enlargement, in line with the EEC competences. This was an important move, which paved the way for a strong Commission involvement in all successive enlargements. In all Member States, the liberal parties supported the enlargement, but they were mostly in opposition. As regards the accession countries, liberals were strongly in favour of enlargement in Great Britain, where they played a decisive role in a key vote on the European Communities Bill, despite their otherwise minor political influence. The Danish Venstre also supported enlargement. While in Ireland there were no liberal parties, it is to be noted that the only country where liberals (*Venstre*) opposed enlargement, the referendum result was negative. The European Parliament played virtually no role in the process, but the Liberal group was in favour of enlargement.

The Mediterranean enlargement (chapter II.3) was necessary in order to stabilise Southern Europe and consolidate the economic and democratic reforms. It was supported by most mainstream parties, both in Member States and in the candidate countries (with a partial exception of Greek socialists). Liberals played an important role in the democratic transition process in Spain (through Adolfo Suarez) and also in Portugal. The Commission (led by Roy Jenkins and Gaston Thorn) played an important role in ensuring that the supportive political statements of the Member States were supported with sufficient flexibility in terms of negotiating the economic conditions of accession (structural funds, agriculture, fishing, etc.). The Liberal Group and the liberal president of the European Parliament (Simone Veil) supported enlargement, just like the other mainstream groups.

The EFTA enlargement (chapter II.4) was facilitated by the demise of Soviet Union and confirmed the superiority of the supranational model of integration. While the socialist Commission president Jacques Delors seemed to prefer a strong association model (the European Economic Area), he was superseded by events and in the end supported full accession. All Member States and mainstream parties supported this enlargement, but the institutional adaptation was more difficult (Ioannina compromise). The difficulty with this enlargement resided mostly in convincing the populations of the candidate countries of the usefulness of European integration. There were tight referendums in all countries and liberals played an important role. In Sweden, the *Folkpartiet* was one of the strongest supporters of accession, while the *Centerpartiet* (with its

agrarian electoral base) was rather split. With socialists also divided and the left and the greens opposed, the influence of liberal parties was significant in the final outcome. In Finland, *Suomen Keskusta* was deeply divided on the issue, all the more reason to underline the role of the liberal prime-minister Esko Aho, who pushed for accession. The liberal Swedish minority party strongly supported accession. In Austria, the liberal party had few MPs. However, the governing *Grosse Koalition* lacked four votes to reach the required two thirds majority for the ratification of the Accession Treaty and the greens and FPO campaigned against accession during the referendum. Therefore the vote and support of the *Liberales Forum* for accession was not negligible. As in 1973, the Norwegian liberals, with their strong rural / agrarian base, opposed accession and led to a negative referendum result. Following the Single European Act, the European Parliament had to give its assent for the first time. It was pushed to do so quickly, before the 1994 European elections and it did so but with some reluctance, including in the liberal ranks.

The 2004-2007 enlargement (chapter II.5) is undoubtedly the most important in the history of the European Union. And it is on this occasion where liberals played a strong positive role, in particular relative to their political weight in Member States and candidate countries. In the accession countries, liberal parties were often strongly involved in the economic and democratic transition phase (Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Bulgaria) and in the negotiation process, by occupying chief negotiator or foreign minister positions (Poland – at the beginning of the process, Slovenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Romania – after the closure of the negotiations). Several particular situations deserve to be highlighted. Liberals played a major role in economic reforms in Poland. They led many governing coalitions in Slovenia and Estonia – two countries which were always considered very well prepared for accession. They occupied key positions exactly during the accession period in Latvia, Lithuania and in Cyprus. In Bulgaria, Simeon Movement and its liberal allies from the Turkish minority practically led the country in the European Union. In Romania, the liberal party held a steady position and pursued reforms in order to ensure timely accession, despite a difficult political governing partner. It is to be noted that those countries without a strong liberal presence had either a relatively more eurosceptic stance (Czech Republic, Malta) or had a slower start being part of the 1999 Helsinki group (Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria). Accession referendums were not really a problem in these countries and in almost all cases the liberals campaigned actively for a "yes". One important aspect, which should not escape the analysis is that many liberal parties either disappeared or migrated to other parties after accession to the European Union.

In the Member States, there was political support for accession from most mainstream parties, although in some countries the electorate was opposed. In the context of the Eastern enlargement, the role of the presidency was more important than in previous enlargement, because

of the larger number of both member states and candidate countries, and therefore the need for compromise across countries and negotiation chapters. Therefore, the role of the Danish Presidency, in the second half of 2002 was decisive. In particular, liberal prime-minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen travelled across Europe to negotiate the deals that allowed for the conclusion of negotiations with ten candidate countries. The Belgian presidency of 2001, led by Guy Verhofstadt was also very important both in terms of enlargement, but also in terms of launching the European Convention for the Future of Europe. Two liberal parties played a more reserved role, but without negatively influencing the process. The VVD in the Netherlands asked for CAP reform before Eastern Enlargement, while the Finnish *Suomen Keskusta* played a key role in both the introduction of the possible postponement of accession (safeguard clause) and in the introduction of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Romania and Bulgaria (but held the presidency of the EU in the second half of 2006, when the accession of the two countries was confirmed).

The role of the Commission president Romano Prodi (in the ELDR at that time, with his party *I Democratici*) was extremely important. In comparison to its predecessor, he fully prioritised enlargement in his term. He nominated a Gunter Verheugen (an SPD member, but who had been Secretary General of the FDP between 1978-1982) in the role of Commissioner for Enlargement. The Prodi Commission played a major role in the enlargement process. The Barroso commission (with the liberal enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn) was also important in the conclusion of negotiations and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

The European Parliament was actively involved in the enlargement process, all mainstream political groups being in favour. The liberal president of the institution between 2002-2004 (Pat Cox) used his communication skills to promote enlargement in the European Council, in Member States and in candidate countries, speaking to the press, to national parliaments and to governments throughout Europe. He was the first president to organise a special session of the European Parliament with MPs from all candidate countries (including Turkey) in 2003. In his own country, he actively campaigned in favour of the ratification of the Nice Treaty, in 2002. In terms of political groups, including at the insistence of its leader, Graham Watson, the ELDR group was the only one that voted in unanimity in favour of the accession treaty with all the ten states that acceded in 2004. With 89% in favour for Romania and 97% in favour of Bulgaria, the ALDE group was also the strongest support of these two countries' accession treaties.

I have concluded on this section, that, while in most member states, and certainly in the key ones (Germany, France) the main role was held by the Christian-democratic and socialist parties, the liberal parties "punched above their weight" and positively influenced the result, in candidate countries, in the European institutions and in decisive presidencies of the Council. In the decisive

second semester of 2002, all the presidents of the key EU institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council) belonged to the European Liberal Democrat and Reformist party.

Main Conclusions

Overall, there are eight succinct conclusions that can be drawn from the research:

1. The liberal schools of thought in Western Europe after the Second World War have many things in common, with some differences of approach linked to the role of the state in ensuring the functioning of the free market and, especially, the achievement of "social justice"
2. The ideas and principles of these schools penetrate in the mainstream political parties, in particular liberals, but also Christian-democrats and social-democrats, but the Mont-Pelerin Society (liberal intellectuals) and Liberal International (political organisation) did not have a structured cooperation
3. The organisation of liberal parties at European and International level is slow and sometimes incoherent in terms of member parties, but through the establishment of the European federation and party (ELDR / ALDE), a true European political family has been formed
4. The cohesion of the liberal group in the European Parliament is often weaker than that of Christian-democrats and socialist, main differences being on the left-right economic spectrum, but also from the societal point of view (particularly after the Southern and Eastern enlargements)
5. Liberal parties strongly share a pro-European orientation (both deepening and widening), which is stronger than for the other European parties, with the observation that there are also more reserved liberals, in particular after the 1990s
6. At national level, liberal parties generally play a secondary role, being stronger in smaller countries, which leads to a weaker representation and political force at European level
7. Liberal parties from candidate countries (in particular the Mediterranean and Eastern enlargements), often played an important role in the transition and in the EU accession phase, but suffer electoral losses and tend to migrate especially towards the EPP (both on ground of ideological differences, but also in order to be part of a stronger political force)
8. European liberals had a significant influence throughout the enlargements of the European Union, stronger than their political power resulting from elections, due to:
 - their pro-European views and therefore active involvement in European debates and policies

- the role played during the economic and democratic transitions and during the accession negotiations in southern and eastern enlargement countries
- holding the foreign affairs (or European affairs) portfolios in many coalition governments in countries from Western and Northern Europe
- electoral success in small pro-European countries, which are overrepresented in the European Commission and which work closely with it when they hold the EU presidency
- occupying the centre of the political spectrum in many countries and, therefore, being able to tilt the balance of political debates regarding the European Union.

The liberals' view of enlargement, is eloquently presented by Jean Rey in 1970:

„It is not only about eliminating certain customs or fiscal barriers, or organising a market. It is in reality about the building of a continent. This is what Europeans did twenty years ago, following the call of Robert Schuman – a unified and reconciled continent, with its own institutions and laws, strong on the inside, generous to the outside, a force of equilibrium, peace and progress in the world. Beyond the real difficulties of negotiations and the different interests, the magnitude of the objective and the political will to succeed will bring to fruition the process that we start today” (Rey 1970).

The paper closes with a rhetorical question, taking into account the fact that after the 2014 European elections, the liberals fell to the fourth place in the European Parliament and the EPP President of the Commission clearly stated that there will be no enlargements in his 5 year mandate (and aligning the Commission enlargement structure, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Santer Commission). Will a new Enlargement require the revival of European liberals?

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