



# POLITICS BASED ON CONVICTION

*Taking responsibility for society:*  
A practical guide to Christian-Democratic values

**CDA**

EFF  
Eichard de  
Frel Foundation

## Colophon

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Eduardo Frei Stichting (EFS), affiliated with the Dutch Christian-Democratic Party Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA), was established in July 1990. The organisation is CDA's foundation for international solidarity. One of the founders of the Christian-Democratic Party in Chile (Partido Demócrata Cristiano) and President of Chile from 1964 to 1970, President Frei has become a symbol to many of democracy and of upholding and respecting human rights and justice. CDA is therefore proud that its foundation was named after this Christian Democrat.

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This publication was created with funding from the MATRA political party programme of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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With special thanks to Margriet Keijzer and the CDA Association of Councillors.

December 2012

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# 1 The organization of society

How should a society be organised? Once you ask that question, many other questions soon present themselves. What do we mean by 'society'? Are we referring to individuals or groups, or is it mainly the State that matters? What about companies, the economy, who owns the natural resources, and who should have the right to tax people? To whom are we accountable? What rights and obligations do people have, and are they equal for everyone? Do people and generations that have not yet been born already have rights? Do people in other countries enjoy the same rights as we do?

Suppose you discover that something does not function properly in society, what do you do to change it? By what rules and processes are you bound if you want to change something?

People have given many different answers to these and many other questions that arise when we think about how to organize society. You need only travel to another country or cross the street to talk to your neighbours to know that answers can vary considerably, even if the time and location are almost identical. How do we deal with these differences?

To answer all these questions would be outside the scope of this publication; our main objective is to describe the Christian-Democratic ideas that enable you to answer these questions. We have also included a number of assignments you can complete yourself and that allow you to link the contents of this publication with the current situation in your country.

The Christian Democracy has its own political response to current challenges. Not all the focus is placed on the power of individuals, and not everything is expected from the government as the entity that assumes the responsibilities of its citizens. Christian Democracy is based on individuals who assume responsibility for their families, towards neighbours, in the organisations in which they participate, and who act as responsible residents of a country. We expect people to assume these responsibilities together.

These ideas have evolved in North-West Europe over the past century-and-a-half, based on the (significantly older) Christian tradition, and provide an answer to the rapid social changes that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries and that have continued into this century.

Democracies can learn from each other; the answers people give in one country can be useful elsewhere: they can serve as examples and as sources of inspiration.

This is a publication of CDA, the Christian-Democratic Party in the Netherlands, and we will be discussing the Dutch situation to provide you with an idea of the features of a democratic state such as the Netherlands. We will also examine the role of political parties in a democracy, the organization of a modern state, the relationship between religion and politics, the Christian-Democratic view of society, the main characteristics of a Christian Democracy, and several examples of Christian Democracy at work. The principles and ideas presented in this publication are widespread and do not apply exclusively to the Netherlands; they may also be valuable to international readers.

## Assignment:

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Write down several features of your ideal society and think about to what extent these ideals can be realized in current society.



## 2 Political parties

In every society, ideas about the organization of society are put into practice, which means that every society – from primitive to advanced, from classic to modern, and from small to large – engages in politics. As societies increase in size and complexity, a large number of people are willing and able to participate in political processes and there are greater expectations of the political system, there is a growing need to see these processes organized. People join together in groups or parties with a more or less developed vision of society or ideology, such as political parties. Forms of government are established, and agreements are made about how the legal system works and what constitutes law. As a result of these processes, which are influenced by time and location, every society – and, by extension, every democracy – is different. However, the situation will never be completely satisfactory, and the world continues to change rapidly. Democracies are therefore never ‘finished’; there always remains work to be done in each society. This makes politics a fascinating and necessary process, complete with disappointments and successes.

People join political parties in order to control political processes. These political parties are democratic organisations committed to the public interest. A political party’s main duties include: recruiting representatives of the people and administrators, and creating the election programmes that determine the political direction of the party and its representatives. In addition, they also ensure that voters can elect ideas as well as people.

The first political parties in the Netherlands emerged in the 19th century, although these had been preceded by groups of people who united in order to exercise power. However, in order to achieve their objectives political parties turn to the public through elections, which distinguishes them from earlier organisations. The idea of universal suffrage – that is, the right of every adult man and woman to vote – was spread in the Netherlands at the end of the 19th century and realised in 1917/1919.

## Assignment:

Can you name some political parties in your country, along with their main features? Who do they represent, how do they try to achieve their objectives and what are the main political issues?

Political parties fight to gain control over government bodies in order to implement their principles and ideals. A key aspect is that the power of a political party is always considered temporary: just like the foods you find at the supermarket, their power has a 'shelf life', and the next election date is their sell-by date. Based on the election results, the incumbent party may need to make way for others. This is what makes the role of political parties so hard: they must translate the needs of voters into what is socially desirable. In order to achieve this, they must listen to what people have to say, recruit new members and voters, and then create the policy to facilitate their plans. This is the challenge all political parties face all the time.



# 3 The modern State

In order to be able to describe the workings of political parties and their views on the political process, it is important to know within what context these parties operate. There are two key elements to this context:

- » A democratic society, developed within the boundaries of a country or state.
- » A State that is organized in a specific way, including public bodies, laws, and regulations. This ensures that the ideas present within the democratic society can be converted into decisions that can be implemented.

## 3.1 Principle of equality

We assume that in a democratic society people are free, with specific rights and obligations. The main principle is the principle of equality: all individuals in a society have equal rights and are all entitled to participate in the social and political process. This extends into freedom of speech, equality between the sexes, and freedom of religion. Democratic societies are based on the principles of tolerance and diversity. This means that people acknowledge that there are differences, especially in their values and ideas. These ideas and values may conflict with those of other people, and in some cases they may even fight over them. This is done through democratic means, such as debate, where the parties challenge each other's opinions rather than engage in personal attacks. The power of democracy is that we can find effective, common solutions to current social issues by discussing our differences and overcoming them.

Diversity is therefore about much more than simply acknowledging that there are differences. A diverse society is one in which everyone is free to participate in equal measure while enjoying maximum freedom. Diversity makes society stronger; differences between people increase our options. Diversity also inspires debate, creates the opportunity to learn from each other and overcome differences, and choose the best solution. Diversity and tolerance also mean that minorities are treated with respect (*see the box*).



## Minorities

Another issue we face in a democracy is how to treat minorities, since their rights, too, must be guaranteed. One of our democratic principles is that individuals and groups have the right – within reason – to organise their lives as they see fit. Obviously, in so doing they must not hurt others (or each other).

Many minority members of society – based on their ethnic or cultural background or their different faith or sexual orientation – become the victims of discrimination, have more difficulty finding jobs, or are even physically threatened. Some of the prejudices held against them are well established. It is important that we regard each other first and foremost as citizens of a country, with all the associated rights and responsibilities we have towards each other. In Western nations, government policies are aimed primarily at improving people's conditions. However, especially in countries where the government has a smaller role, it is the duty of social organisations to eliminate distrust on all sides. This can be achieved through mutual dialogue and interaction. As part of the view of society that focuses on the organisations founded by the people themselves, it is also important that individuals and groups are all assigned a role in the political process.

### Assignment:

What minorities can you identify in your community, and what is their status? Do you belong to a minority yourself?

## 3.2 The State and its organization

In order to realise these ideals, the organization of the State must meet a number of conditions. The three most important of these conditions are:

- » The State is neutral. Rules and practice are the same for everyone. No single group, institution or organization receives preferential treatment or is disadvantaged. The State and its entities consider individuals and institutions to be equal;

- » The State is based on rules and laws that have been adopted by democratically elected bodies;
- » The State is based on the 'separation of powers':
  - » The democratically elected parliament adopts laws and approves in advance what resolutions the government is permitted to implement;
  - » The government complies with the law and the police enforce compliance with the law;
  - » Independent courts rule on infringements and violations of the law – regardless of the individuals involved;
  - » There is rule of law.

The above means that people living in a democracy must be able to both trust each other and have faith in the State, in rules and in government servants. This means that the government must be monitored in the performance of its duties and must openly inform the public of its activities. The supervisory role is vested mainly in the democratically elected (through universal suffrage) parliaments, which must be provided with all the information they require for the purpose. Parliaments therefore have important duties:

- » They supervise the government bodies and the people managing these bodies: that is, a country's government;
- » They set the rules that are subsequently enforced by independent courts;
- » They represent the country's people.

### 3.3 Separation of powers within a state

In order to ensure the freedom and equality of its citizens, a State must organise its functions in a specific way. This organisation must be such that individuals can truly exert influence and that the various functions can strengthen and correct each other. The principle of the separation of powers has been developed for this purpose. Along with the principle of equality, this principle is one of the main principles of the democratic state under the rule of law. The three powers in a democratic state are listed above: the government, the parliament, and the courts. Read the box text if you would like to know more about the separation of powers.

There are three branches of government:

- » The executive branch (the national government),
- » The legislative branch (the democratically elected parliament), and
- » The judicial branch.

The executive branch is responsible for daily administration, while the legislative branch provides the legal framework required. One of the main powers of the executive branch is to adopt budgets with items for the various duties of the State, including infrastructure, law enforcement, and social and medical care. In performing its duties, the executive power must remain within the budget set.

If the executive branch has a deficit, it must request the legislative branch for additional funds. The executive branch is also not authorised to change its plans without permission: funds must be spent as allocated by the legislative branch and may not be used for any other purpose. Modern governments therefore provide for a court of auditors, which assists parliament in its monitoring role.

This shows that the legislative branch of government has an important supervisory role in relation to the executive branch, as well as revealing its representative role. For example, the court must be able to enforce its own rules on the government. The separation of powers was established in order to prevent any one branch from having too much power, to prevent unfair treatment and to grant government entities their own powers. Naturally, the separation cannot and should not be absolute. The various branches influence each other: the members of the cabinet influence members of parliament and the central government influences judges. This requires a system of checks and balances that regulates these relationships.

Besides the separation of powers, many countries also provide for a geographic separation. In the Netherlands, government is divided into a municipal, provincial and national level. Each of these levels has its own duties, and there are representative bodies at each level.

The judicial branch also has regional representatives, but they form part of a single entity.

## 3.4 Integrity and corruption

The citizens of a country must be certain that all participants in the democratic process – members of government, members of parliament, judges and civil servants – perform their duties with integrity. Judges should never be permitted to rule in cases where they have a personal interest (financial or otherwise) in the case. Members of parliament have an obligation to represent their constituents and are not permitted to accept payment to engage in activities that undermine the public interest and – by extension – the interests of their constituents. Fighting corruption is therefore very important in any democratic system. Corruption, which looms in any society, makes people lose faith in the democratic process. Corruption is punishable by law and must be prosecuted and brought before the court.

Corruption represents an abuse of the power entrusted to an individual, group or organisation for personal gain. It hinders development and progress in a society, as it is covert, undermines the principle of equality, and damages trust in social processes.

Corruption occurs in many different forms: there is corruption at the highest level of the democratic process, for example because election results are forged or judges are bribed. Corruption may also affect access to services: more or less voluntary – or enforced – payments made to a civil servant to get something done; it may involve fraud, or charging too much or too little for contracts in order to enrich yourself, or doing favours to friends, family and acquaintances. You may also find corruption in the private sector, for example through price-fixing between competitors.

Corruption always damages the trust people have in their politicians and the government and negatively affects the way the society, including the economy, functions. It also violates the rule of law and the functioning of democratic bodies, and it reduces options to supervise these bodies. It can result in an accumulation of natural resources in the hands of a small group, to depletion of those natural resources, to income inequalities, poverty, and the exclusion of specific groups.

Corruption can only be controlled by implementing a functioning system of rules and controls. In addition, people must be made aware of their own responsibility and attitude towards corruption. *For more information, see the appendix at the back of this publication.*

### 3.5 A free press and free media

There is one particular social force that is very important to how a democracy functions, and that is the media, including newspapers and magazines, radio and television, the internet and social media. In a passage above, we cited freedom of speech as one of the main features of a democratic society. As part of this freedom of speech, people must have access to the media, be free to publish what they want, and should definitely not be subject to government censorship. Due to their public nature and their power to expose issues that might otherwise be overlooked, the media play a role in monitoring social processes and making them easier to supervise, including the functioning of government bodies. However, the media also provide a platform for debate, allowing people to discuss what is wrong and propose solutions, by addressing corruption and other forms of abuse.



## 4 The relationship between Church and State, religion and politics

We stated above that the State must be neutral, and that the principle of equality means that people should be free to practise their religion or, more generally, have their own beliefs. In the Christian-Democratic tradition, churches play a vital role in public life. What is the relationship between religion and politics, the State and the Church?

When referring to churches in the Netherlands, we traditionally refer to the Roman Catholic Church, along with the more locally organised Protestant churches. In the Netherlands, they have been joined more recently by Islamic and other religious communities. By 'churches', we mean all these religious organisations: the people, the leaders, and – especially – the organisations as they function in local communities. We also refer to the ideas that exist within the church about how to lead a good life, i.e., their moral judgments regarding life issues.

As in the majority of Western countries, the Church and the State are separate in the Netherlands. What does the principle of the separation of Church and State involve?

- 1 It means that there must be no *institutional* control in the relationship between religious and political entities. That is to say, the government is authorised to organise the State as it sees fit, without any influence on the part of the churches. The churches, for their part, are free from government interference in establishing their clerical organisation and appointing their clerics.
- 2 The Church and the State are also not authorized to directly decide on each other's policies. The churches are free from government interference in their religious doctrine. Vice versa, churches also have no formal role in the public decision-making process and the government's actions cannot be assessed solely by religious criteria.

Dutch churches and other religious institutions maintain extensive networks of organisations, including charities, schools and associations. The separation of Church and State allows the government to work with organisations on an ideological basis. However, it is never the clerical work that receives support, but rather the duties these organisations perform on behalf of society, such as medical and other care, education, and support to people in distress. So does the connection between religion and politics that exists in a Christian Democracy not conflict with the separation of Church and State and the principle discussed above that the State must be neutral? No, because it is not religion and politics that must be separated, but Church and State, since for many politicians religious faith is the main source of inspiration for their actions.

The separation of Church and State is interpreted differently in each country. In France, adherence to the principle is much stricter than in the Netherlands, for example, while the German Constitution expressly provides for the freedom of churches to manage institutions. However, the basic principles as outlined above are observed in each of these countries.

There is another very important point we can make about the separation of Church and State and the relationship between religion and politics. Could the democratic principle that the majority decides cause a religion that makes up the majority to impose its ideas on other religions or groups? This must never happen, as it would clash with the principle of freedom of conscience and religion that is essential to a democracy, as well as hurting the rights of minorities. These are such fundamental principles of any democracy, which should never be violated. This also expresses the idea that democracy is much more than simply the will of the majority; it is also about how minorities are treated from a religious perspective.

# 5 The Christian-Democratic view of society

We need to ask another important question that we have not yet addressed: what do we aim to achieve by engaging in politics and organising and regulating society? What drives people who become involved in politics and what drives Christian Democrats? What would motivate you if you were a politician?

## 5.1 Ideology

Some political parties focus on a single issue or interest – they are more like interest groups that represent only a specific group of individuals, which may already have a lot of power to begin with. Most political parties have longer-term goals and more comprehensive objectives; they attempt to represent both the public interest and society as a whole. These political parties have an ideology, which we define as a collection of ideas about how society should function and how it must be changed. Ideologies answer the questions we asked in the introduction.

Some ideologies go beyond merely thinking about how society should function: they offer a fully developed view of humanity, i.e., what is humankind, and how can people function as effectively as possible in society as a whole? The Christian Democracy is one of these visions of society.

Christian Democrats are affected by the world around them; they aim to contribute to a better world, both from a human perspective and in terms of nature and the environment. They care about the world and the Earth, which extends well beyond concern about their immediate environment or their own social group.



## 5.2 Christian-Democratic ideology

Christian Democrats find permanent sources of purpose, inspiration and spirituality in the Christian-Social tradition. This source is as relevant as ever, both now and in the future. In our times of economic uncertainty, technological innovation and fast – and sometimes superficial – communications, it leads us to simple but powerful principles such as charity and justice. The principle that we are all children of God is of great significance. It means that each person has value, counts, and is unique. It also means that people are social beings who find fulfilment in relationships with others. People are part of a greater whole that is more than the sum of its parts. This principle affects political styles: Christian Democrats are averse to polarisation and highlighting differences between people, and believe that moderate opinions provide room for diversity. Many religious and spiritual people are aware that we are all part of the human family. Christian Democrats are interested in uniting people; they are committed to overcoming differences and finding common ground. When something does not function, this must be honestly acknowledged and weaknesses must be identified and addressed rather than covered up.

In the three decades of its existence, CDA has continuously developed its ideology. A guiding principle for CDA is the biblical notion that the value of human life ultimately does not depend on money, status or power: human beings are inherently valuable irrespective of these qualities. The government must create the conditions to let each individual discover their personal value. CDA is committed to building a responsible society; it appeals to people to work on building better communities, both individually and with others. The party puts people and their relationships first, rather than the market or the State. The main principle is: allow freedom for people and their organisations. CDA firmly believes that people can reach their full potential if they can develop their talents and learn to take initiative. The government must perform its core duties – ensuring a safe society and providing a social safety net to vulnerable groups – with great commitment, but it must also create room for people, for private initiative, innovation and involvement with others.

CDA politicians show commitment and leadership. Truly caring about people means knowing what concerns them, engaging in a dialogue with them, putting their concerns and interests first, and showing compassion. Leadership means tackling problems based on a careful analysis and vision. It means showing action, but based on the awareness that action requires support, which, in turn, is created by persuading people and involving them in the decision-making process.

This view of humanity exists virtually everywhere, and in each country there are a variety of ways to discover and develop this view. However, not every country is home to political parties that regard politics, humans and society in this manner. We therefore believe that the principles formulated by Christian Democrats can also be relevant to organisations and parties in countries with different cultures that are searching for a political culture that expresses their own views of community, tradition and religion.

## Exercises:

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In groups of 3 or 4 students, write down what you expect from a political party – what should and should not be its duties?

### The Christian-Democratic view of humanity:

When taking political action, politicians must not lose sight of the human dimension. While this may seem difficult in these times of globalization, individualization and increasingly advanced technologies, it is possible. Indeed, the Christian-Democratic tradition highlights the importance of vital social institutions, including local communities, associations, and families. People feel a need to organise their societies in freedom, based on their own responsibility. A human-based society can only exist if public institutions and communities provide people with the appropriate tools, assistance, incentives and support, especially when things go wrong. This view of humanity has important implications for the role of the State. The government has its own role, even if it is restricted: it is responsible for protecting the rule of law and for developing the legal system; it safeguards people's communities and provides a social safety net.

The Christian-Democratic view of humanity differs from liberal conservatism: people are not separate individuals, but rather persons who are integral parts of their communities. The government therefore does not appeal to people based on their individual autonomy, but regards them as relational, social beings. The Christian-Democratic view of humanity is also distinct from social democracy in that it is based on the premise that people are themselves the main instigators in building a decent existence,

within a community, and this is not imposed from above by the State, as though society could be controlled to such an extent.

Christian Democrats believe that people must assume responsibility – either individually or as a group – for the organisation of society, while the government, for its part, must ensure legal certainty and equality before the law. Individuals must be able to rely on legal certainty when dealing with the government and have access to independent courts and judges.

In the Christian-Democratic belief system, each person is unique and all people are equal to each other, regardless of their status in life (in other words, it makes no difference if you are a retail manager, football player, or have a disability). The equality and uniqueness of people, and their freedom and responsibility as creatures called by God to live a meaningful life, constitutes the basis of human dignity, as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every person on this Earth has a right to dignity, irrespective of sex, race, age, circumstances, social status or sexual orientation. In the constant conflict of interest between human dignity as an absolute prerequisite and actual experience, where human dignity is all too often violated, it is our duty to regard human dignity as both a (political) mission and a moral responsibility.

The Christian-Democratic belief system provides guidelines and aids for the organisation of society, now and in the future. It represents a view of society rather than a doctrine that tells people how to live their lives. The latter would be the domain of faith, religion or conviction, although the various domains are related, through tradition and other sources. This is because religious faith has played an important role in shaping the Western world and ideas about what is considered 'good' from the point of view of society. Politics and faith are also related because people, based on their convictions (religious or otherwise), participate in society and assume responsibility, particularly within a Christian Democracy.

In other words, Christian Democrats believe there is a strong correlation between faith and politics.

# 6 The main principles of Christian Democracy

Christian Democrats choose to place the responsibility for society first and foremost on society itself, more specifically on institutions where people look after each other, such as families, associations, schools, companies, and the Church. The collective name we sometimes give to these organisations is 'civil society'.

## 6.1 Civil society

The significance of society and its institutions plays a key role in the Christian-Democratic belief system. According to this view, society is not just a collection of individuals, but these people are part of communities, including schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and associations. "No man is an island"; we all need social interaction. In these communities, people unite to fulfil their responsibilities together and share and communicate standards and values. This has resulted in a rich collection of social organisations, which play a key role in many different social areas and teach people about citizenship. These social organisations are often collectively referred to as 'civil society': this includes all organisations and communities in which people – often on a voluntary basis – assume responsibility for the community at large. They are also known as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which include environmental organisations and trade unions.

However, the majority of these initiatives are organised by individuals who take responsibility for one another, for example by helping their neighbours or launching community improvement initiatives. By becoming involved in NGOs, people learn to become responsible members of society who look out for others. This may occur in families and extended families, where parents invest a great deal of energy in raising their children and children, in turn, help their infirm or elderly parents, but you'll find the same phenomenon in schools, sports clubs and healthcare organisations. These institutions are not driven by money or power, as is the case in the private sector and in government.

This makes them more flexible, more focused on human needs, and easier to relate to in the eyes of the public. In the Christian-Democratic ideal, these institutions must be strengthened and cherished. This is what makes Christian Democracy unique: it acknowledges that the government cannot, and should not, be responsible for everything, but also should not leave everything at the mercy of market forces.

## Assignment

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Can you name any civil-society organisations in your country?  
How are they organised?

Christian Democracy believes in the dignity of all people, irrespective of their talents, deficiencies and shortcomings. Drawing on biblical sources, we might say that while some people might be skilled with their hands, others are good at interpreting people, or have great physical strength and can perform heavy labour, have a gift for taking care of others, excel in mathematics or display exceptional linguistic ability, or they might have a knack for organising and be natural leaders, while others have disabilities that make them strongly dependent on the care of others. We all have our dignity and we can (and shall) use our talents for the good of society, to the best of our ability. If people fall short in this regard, society is deprived of their contribution and cooperation, which has a negative impact on the economy and creates inequality. Both individualistic societies and socialist societies disregard the individual talents and responsibilities of large groups of people. The Christian-Democratic approach differs greatly from the way, say, liberal conservatism on one side of the spectrum and social democracy on the other regard the social process. Liberal conservatives highlight the importance of individual freedom and the free market, while socialists are concerned with economic solidarity and the role of the State.

## 6.2 Four core principles

CDA has summarised its ideas about people and how they relate to others in four key principles, namely:

### **1 Responsibility:**

The State should only take responsibility for what others are unable to accomplish. CDA believes that politics starts with recognising public initiative. People, neighbourhoods, sports clubs, schools, churches, mosques, health institutions and companies: they all make a unique contribution to society. The government instils in all these different individuals and organisations the confidence that they are doing what they can; citizens, for their part, grant their government the freedom to fulfil its duties. This type of trust fosters closeness and community spirit and gives people confidence in their own professional abilities.

### **2 Justice:**

The government must be fair, and in its actions it must respect all aspects of humanity and must be accountable for this responsibility. The government has a special duty when it comes to caring for those who are vulnerable and dependent. Democracy under the rule of law is vital to protecting human dignity. The government's role is to make it possible for all of us to live together. A strict and reliable government that sets boundaries and fights injustice is required in order to enable all the good that people can achieve in society.

### **3 Solidarity:**

People depend on each other; it takes concerned and committed citizens to strengthen community ties. The willingness to help others – financially or otherwise – begins with personal concern. In state-organised support, this personal factor must also be made explicit and tangible. Recognising the importance of connectedness, Christian Democrats value the family and extended family as the institutions where we first learn about moral conduct. The Christian-Democratic tradition therefore extends beyond the principle of solidarity alone, as applied in the socialist tradition.

#### 4 Sustainability:

Based on their awareness of the bond between the generations, Christian Democrats feel responsible for protecting our natural and cultural heritage. They feel that, since we inherited the natural environment and our culture from our ancestors and are borrowing it from future generations, we must look beyond our own interests and our own era in how we treat nature and culture. Management and governance are not enough: in order to leave behind a better society, we also need creativity and innovation.

This awareness is also important when it comes to caring for the Earth. Our increasingly scarce natural resources may compel us to make painful decisions in the immediate future, since we need to make sure that future generations do not inherit a polluted world and that they, too, will have access to sufficient raw materials.



# 7 Christian-Democratic politics in practice

**Simply being familiar with these concepts does not guarantee a recognisable, distinctive Christian-Democratic position: it is therefore important that we are not only familiar with these principles but actually put them into practice. For this chapter, we gave a number of Christian Democrats a chance to explain what the concepts 'responsibility', 'justice', 'solidarity' and 'sustainability' mean to them in day-to-day life.**

## 7.1 Economics

'The economy is one area where the government should not intervene too much. When making choices, there is one principle that immediately stands out: the responsibility of the various parties involved. Politicians should be partners to businesses more than anything else. They should help provide solutions, depending on the economic situation, set the terms together, and possibly provide some incentives where necessary. For Christian Democrats, politics mostly has a unifying role; it brings the various players together so they can be stronger. Business owners focus on business continuity: they invest a lot of energy in developing their products and services. The government must be a reliable partner to businesses, which means that business owners must be able to rely on the conditions created by the government, also in the long term. The government should not be led by the hot-button issues of the day.'

'To Christian Democrats, economic growth focuses not only on increasing prosperity, but it also has a social aspect. Work and income allow people to assume responsibility for themselves and each other. If certain groups in the labour market are in danger of being excluded, the government should encourage them to participate. We can't achieve that by ourselves, but if we work together with others, we can do so much better.'



‘Christian Democrats unite economy and ecology, based on the principles of sustainability. We no longer live in a time where the economy and the environment are hostile to each other. People are working steadily and consistently on building sustainable prosperity; they are continuously trying to find a balance and interplay between the economy and the environment.’

## 7.2 Agriculture / organization of rural areas

‘Two of the four CDA principles are very relevant when it comes to organising the agricultural sector, the first of which is sustainability. The Bible speaks of our mission to cultivate and preserve the Earth. We do this by creating room for agriculture, as well as through our commitment to the natural world. The second principle is responsibility. There must be awareness that we – the government, individuals, businesses and NGOs – all share a responsibility. In fact, everyone should want to be responsible based on the biblical mission I mentioned. Since nature itself has no voice, we must, as Christian Democrats, feel responsible for nature, making sure it is preserved and that our descendants will also be able to enjoy it. Green values are essential to people’s wellbeing, which is why nature must be accessible, since people remain our first priority. The natural environment is also very important to prosperity and the economy (for tourism and recreation, for example.)’

## 7.3 Transport

‘Transport ensures that people can live, work, relax, and visit their families. By investing in good roads and high-quality and affordable public transport facilities you create the conditions for a vital economy, social cohesion and a sustainable living environment. Everyone essentially has a right to mobility, regardless of where they live – the city or the countryside, in densely populated or scarcely populated areas. Our party has a special commitment to vulnerable groups. No one should be excluded due to reduced physical mobility or the fact that they need assistance.’

‘Mobility is a prerequisite for economic growth and public welfare; it helps create businesses and therefore ensures job preservation. In improving accessibility, we search for solutions that are endorsed by the public. Christian Democrats are committed to ensuring that their living environment remains liveable. They are always trying to find a balance between new roads, more public transport facilities, and alternative modes of transport.’

## 7.4 Public space

'We agree that people should behave properly when using public space: that means no littering, refraining from aggressive behaviour in traffic, not walking your dog in a children's play area, and so on. Political parties diverge in the way they handle people who deliberately flout these types of rules. Social Democrats still expect the central government to take charge, and present an action plan where municipal governments must organise all kinds of activities: meeting with residents, hanging up posters, establishing traffic rules, and so on. Whereas liberal conservatives aim to appeal to people's innate sense of decency, Christian Democrats actually go into the communities affected by these problems. They also appeal to the residents of the neighbourhood. This results in a package of measures, where the residents and the housing corporation, the police and the municipal government all take their responsibility in order to control the problem. CDA constantly reminds people that associations, schools, community centres, churches and so on are all independent organisations that are of great value when it comes to solving specific issues. That belief is typical of the party's value system.'

'You see the same thing in community improvement projects. The question is always the same: do you assign social institutions such as community centres, housing corporations, sports clubs and the like, their own roles and responsibilities, or do you still think you can run society from the town hall? Are you going to listen to residents and their organisations first and then come up with an action plan, or are you going to create an action plan first at the town hall and then try to impose it on the residents? A true Christian-Democratic approach is about working on the basis of the plan conceived by the public and the social institutions they created, and subsequently assigning specific roles to those residents and their associations and institutions in implementing their policy.'

## 7.5 Environment

'Sustainability and solidarity are CDA's main principles when it comes to the environment. We realise that we have merely borrowed the Earth, and we must use our talents to make sure it is in the best possible condition when we pass it along again to future generations. Sustainability is also important for the present, since it makes places more liveable. Being energy-efficient will also save you money, and particularly for those with limited budgets it's good to see that municipal governments are making progress with energy-saving

measures for both new and existing homes. As a Christian Democrat, I'm glad that the time was ripe for sustainability. People are fortunately becoming aware that sustainable need not necessarily mean expensive, and that, overall, it actually improves the economy and makes our planet a more liveable place. Still, my approach does differ from that of other political parties, and I would like to tackle the issues based on that Christian-Democratic perspective. What's important now is doing what is possible, taking into account the importance of involving as many people as possible. We can't do it alone as a municipality, so each organisation and individual has its own responsibility.'

## 7.6 Social security

'Social issues are mainly about solidarity, about looking out for each other. In cases where this does not work, the government provides a safety net. Christian Democrats feel work is the best form of social security: it makes people financially independent, brings them into contact with others, and makes them feel they are making a useful contribution to society.'

'It also allows them to develop their talents. That's one area where people have their own responsibility, and when it fails, the government creates the conditions that enable people to improve their position in the long term and regain their independence. They must start believing in the future again and continue living their lives. This is always based on individual solutions, but we also need to acknowledge that not everyone can actually find paid employment. The government bears an additional responsibility for those people.'

'It is sometimes difficult to find people who are entitled to benefits. It's typical of Christian Democracy to use civil-society organisations when it comes to welfare, including churches, church charities, and associations. They are often more aware of what's going on in people's lives than the government.'

'We also try to improve the prospects of people in debt. We have something called the "buddy project", where volunteers support people with debt in making purchases and teaching them to budget. This provides them with an opportunity to start repaying their debt and start believing in the future again.'

## 7.7 Sports

'CDA is at the centre of society, which is especially evident when it comes to sports. The party is very well connected, as well as being well represented in a large number of associations and all kinds of social institutions. People are attracted to these types of organisations for a reason: Christian Democrats believe there's more to life than work alone, which is why they want to invest in all kinds of social institutions, including leisure activities.'

'Playing sports teaches people to be part of a team and "have each other's backs". It's very inclusive: you'll find people with different characters, of different ages, and from a variety of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. That makes it very educational for young people. Sports should therefore be a prime focus. Cities that invest in sports (and culture) benefit economically and will ultimately also be safer places to live.'

'I'm glad that CDA is a party that focuses on the infrastructure required for sports. Providing people with opportunities to develop their talents and skills is right in line with the Christian-Democratic belief that everyone deserves a chance to better themselves. It has also been demonstrated that sports are an antidote to boredom and vandalism. That's why it's so important in low-income neighbourhoods, where sports need to be promoted in order to fight problems and make children stronger, so that they will have better opportunities than their parents.'



## 7.8 Welfare

'It's no longer self-evident that the government should solve all of people's problems; people should determine themselves what care and services they need to be able to manage their limitations as well as they can. One difference with the past is that this is not limited to physical and material needs, but also includes needs with regard to social relationships, work and performance, values, and sources of inspiration. When considering these issues, Christian Democrats first look at what a person can do independently, sometimes supported by social institutions. This involves support in people's own communities, such as informal care or volunteer care, supplemented with professional care if necessary.'

'The basic concept of responsibility, in particular, is a cornerstone of the policy pursued by the government. People themselves and their social networks are mainly responsible for their own situation, and municipal governments have a managing role, particularly managing networks in civil society in order to support people.'



# Appendix: Integrity

Corruption can only be controlled by implementing a functioning system of rules and controls. In addition, people must be made aware of their own responsibility and attitude towards corruption. You can use the appendix as a reference. Politicians and other authorities have the following duties:

- » Respecting and promoting the basic values and rules of democracy and the legal system;
- » Working on building a reliable government that delivers on its promises;
- » Making realistic promises and not giving the impression that the government can solve all problems;
- » Considering the interests of all parties involved, as well as those of future generations, independently in decisions without being susceptible to favours and threats;
- » Helping to promote, and being a paragon of, an accessible government;
- » Strongly promoting compliance with integrity standards within their own professional field;
- » Being sensitive to society's moral support and, on that basis, entering into a dialogue with churches and other organisations that develop and communicate values and awareness of values;
- » Encouraging individual organisational initiatives, obviously based on the assumption that these will remain within the law;
- » Treating public funds carefully and transparently and not incurring any unnecessary debts that will burden future generations;
- » Not being intimidated by social pressure or pressure from the media;
- » Never appearing to be susceptible to favours of any kind;
- » Daring to make tough decisions even when these are unpopular with certain groups;

- » Not tolerating unacceptable conduct from peers or the public (e.g. aggression or threats) and not downplaying it, which means reporting it to the police if necessary;
- » Finding it self-evident to present their proposed decisions to the public, engaging in debate with them or convincing them why a specific decision is in the public interest;
- » Listening carefully to people, both to those who are vocal and outspoken and those who have more trouble getting their voices heard;
- » When making key decisions, explaining the underlying values that led them to the decision (and therefore not limiting themselves to, or hiding behind, technocratic arguments);
- » Ensuring that their personal behaviour, including in their personal lives, always stands up to scrutiny;
- » Disclosing as much information as possible when being confronted with alleged mistakes, either political or personal, so that they can adequately render account;
- » Reflecting on the basic values underlying a decision;
- » Treating everyone with respect, even if their political beliefs or social and/or cultural background differ greatly from one's own.