

The European Party Financing Regulation, by H.H. von Armin and M. Schurig (Munster: Lit Verlag 2004, ISBN 3 8258 8097 4); 132pp., €9.90 pb.

This is a detailed book taking a very critical line on the recently implemented (July 2004) regulation on the financing of the European political parties (commonly referred to as the Euro-parties). The authors seek to analyse the regulation line by line, and provide some comparative insights where they draw heavily on the way German law treats political parties. The appendix provides useful tabular information on national party funding across the EU and the structures of the transnational Euro-parties. The book also contains an extensive list of references.

The authors' goal is set out at the beginning when they express their desire to demonstrate 'the incompatibility of the regulation in its present form with principles of national and European law ... '(p. 18). They are critical of the way the regulation was finally promulgated 'long after the copy deadline for the newspaper editorial conferences, and virtually in closed session' (p. 14). They also have a problem with the 'construct called political parties at European level' (p. 10) claiming that they 'lack everything that makes up a party' (p. 29). This is a line of argument that is pursued constantly throughout the book (e.g. pp. 39, 53 and 64) and leads to the assertion that

'whether these parties can be subsumed under the notion of political parties in Art. 191 EC is very doubtful' (p. 30).

Whether or not their line of thinking and use of the Euro-party/German comparison is a fair one is very much an issue for debate, but it does tend to provide an easy route via which to criticize the Euro-parties. Such a pathway also obscures the possibility of treating the Euro-parties as *sui generis* entities and therefore questioning the relevance of Euro-party/national party comparisons. This raises further questions: what are the Euro-parties (on their own terms)? What purposes do they exist to serve? Why do they invite this sort of comparison by using the label 'party'?

Overall, I feel that this book raises a series of important issues that need to be addressed, not least by those seeking to extend the reach of supranational governance. At times, however, the critical tone tends to obscure this message (for this reader at least). Of course, the regulation reveals many potential pitfalls, as the authors show, but it also provides opportunities such as a greater sense of openness and transparency which is something the authors tend to lose sight of. Nonetheless, as an important reference tool, the book will be useful for anyone interested in the wider political system of the EU.

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