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La France à la loupe

Political parties in France

Political parties have the status of an **association** under the Act of 1 July 1901 on association contracts. They are organised **on a long-term basis** and established throughout France. They **aim to exercise power** or at least take part in it. **Pluralism and competition of various political groups** are among the foundations of democracy and freedom of opinion. This is embodied in Article 4 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, as is the freedom to join a party or not.

ORGANISATION

The internal organisation of a party is set out in an **enactment**. Parties need **structures** so that they can be introduced into the electorate and endure:

- **At national level**, a national office or council, led by a **chairman** or national **secretary**, most often elected by all its members;
- At local level, branches or cells **organised into Departmental federations. Their bodies are elected by the members.**

ROLE

Political Parties shall “contribute to the exercise of suffrage” under Article 4 of the Constitution. They take an active part in conducting political life:

- They serve as **intermediaries between the people and those in power**: they compile the people’s demands and needs and convert them into a political programme.
- They play a leadership role: They aim to exercise power with a view to implementing the political programme they announce.
- They have taken on the **role of shaping and selecting political leaders.**

THE DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties that have elected representatives in the National Assembly, Senate or European Parliament are as follows:

- The Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) <http://www.u-m-p.org/>
- The Union for French Democracy (UDF) <http://www.udf.org/>
- The Socialist Party (PS) <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/>
- The French Communist Party (PCF) <http://www.pcf.fr/>
- The Greens <http://lesverts.fr/>
- The National Front (FN) <http://www.frontnational.com/>
- The Movement for France (MPF) <http://www.pourlafrance.fr/>
- The Left Radical Party (PRG) <http://www.planeteradicale.org/>

FUNDING

The funding of political parties has been regulated as of 1988 ([loi n° 88-227 du 11 mars 1988](#)). Four major principles currently govern funding: Funds essentially are **from public sources**; political parties' **accounts are more transparent**; businesses are **not allowed** to make contributions and **campaign spending is restricted**.

• Private funding

Only private individuals are allowed to make contributions. In effect, the Act of 95-65 of 19 January 1995 ([loi n° 95-65 du 19 janvier 1995](#)) on political party funding prohibits businesses from funding political parties (Article 16) and from taking part in the election campaign of one or more candidates through direct or indirect contributions (Article 4). Moreover, since this Act, political party membership fees are in the same category as contributions, and tax breaks are on a par with those for contributions to public interest bodies and works.

• Contributions from the public purse

The most important change the Acts on political party funding has brought about is that the public purse has become political parties' main source of funding.

Contributions from the public purse adhere to a **two-part distribution system based on the representation of political parties in elections and Parliament**. For political parties who have candidates running in a set number of constituencies, the initial part of the contribution from the public purse is distributed on the basis of the outcome of legislative elections. Set at 75 constituencies in 1990, this number was lowered to 50 by the Act of 20 January 1993. The second part of the contribution is **proportional to the number of Parliament members** who are **registered members** of the political party concerned. To avoid abuse, the Act no. 93-122 of 29 January 1993 on the prevention of corruption and on transparency of public economic affairs and procedures ([loi n°93-122 du 29 janvier 1993](#)) stipulates that this second part of the contribution can only be granted to political groups who receive the first, i.e. who have a set number of candidates running in the legislative elections.

The Act of 19 January 1995 makes it possible for political parties who emerge after the legislative elections to receive a lump sum contribution from the public purse. To benefit from the contribution, political parties must receive, during a twelve-month period, contributions from at least 10,000 people (including a minimum of 500 elected representatives) totalling at least €150,000.

However, contributions from the public purse are reduced since political parties do not comply with Act no. 2000-493 of 6 June 2000 (**loi n°2000-493 du 6 juin 2000**) **which furthers equal access of women and men to elected offices and positions. Moreover, spending has been capped to improve parity among candidates. Spending, like contributions, is recorded in campaign accounts.**

- **Greater transparency**

Two commissions were established to enhance the transparency of the funding of political parties:

- The National Campaign Accounts and Political Funding Commission (CNCCFP) (<http://www.cnccfp.fr>), by the Act of 15 January 1990. It is responsible for monitoring political party accounts and for publishing them in the *Journal Officiel*.
- The Commission for Financial Transparency in Political Life (<http://www.commission-transparence.fr>), by the Act of 11 March 1998. It checks that elected representatives have not gained wealth in an irregular way as a result of their political offices.

To find out more

WEBSITES AND DOSSIERS

- **Joining a political party** / Public life

<http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/citoyen/participation/parti-politique/>

- **Political party funding in France** / French Embassy in the United Kingdom

- French: <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Le-financement-de-la-vie-politique.html>

- English: <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Politics-Political-party-funding.html>

PUBLICATIONS

- **Les partis politiques français (French political parties)** / under the supervision of P. Bréchon. – La Documentation française, *Les Etudes*, n°5208-09, février 2005.

- **Institutions et vie politique (Institutions and public life)**. – La Documentation française, *Les Notices*, March 2003. *See fact sheets 13 and 14.*

- **Les partis politiques en France (Political parties in France)** / F. Platone. – *Les Essentiels*, Milan, 2003.