

Step 10 – 11-05-09

This week I want to tell you more about possible alliances when starting up a new party for the animals.

Last week we were paid a visit by representatives of the Spanish party for the animals (<http://www.pacma.es/>) which is trying to collect enough signatures to be able to contest the European elections. They require either 50 signatures from incumbent municipal councillors (from other political parties!) or 150,000 citizens' signatures.

One thing we know for sure is that the political establishment throws up as many barriers as it can in the path of new parties aspiring to enter parliament.

When starting your new party, you must realise that everyone you hope to attract – potential voters, candidates, executive members – are all currently members of other political parties. Even if they are disappointed with their own party's track record on animal rights, they are often hesitant to betray their own party by working to establish a new one whose future success in the political arena is anything but certain.

We experienced the same thing. Niko Koffeman, the deviser of the party worked as a campaign strategist for the Socialist Party (SP) in the Netherlands and, although he helped us in his free time, it was hard for him to bid the SP farewell once we had won seats.

In countries that have electoral thresholds, people will feel even more hesitant to get involved as the new party for the animals may, for example, hamper the country's incumbent green party's ability to achieve that all-important electoral threshold.

In the worst case, participation in the elections may result in neither the new party for the animals nor the incumbent green party achieving the threshold. In the aftermath, many people will reason that animals would actually be better off without a party for the animals contesting elections, their argument being that fragmentation is an obstacle to success.

Traditionally minded animal rights organisations, which have their own contacts within the political establishment, will also react nervously to new initiatives, in part for the reasons listed above.

They may view the new party for the animals as an unwelcome intruder on their own patch that will be competing for funds from the same sponsors and vying for its share of publicity.

The kick-in-the-pants brought about by the advent of the new party (not just for the political establishment but also for established Non-Governmental Organisations) will also not be appreciated by everyone.

You therefore should not expect too much initially from alliances. The birth of the new party will really be up to a small close-knit group of people willing to paddle against the current, without support and possibly even with the active opposition from those existing animal rights organisations and political parties with whom you feel a certain measure of affiliation.

Remember you are a hare running a marathon, rather like Noah Bor in the marathon of Athens in 2001. He started the marathon like a hare (pacesetter) but ended victorious!