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## Think tank threatens to sue Libertas over name

JAMIE SMYTH in Strasbourg

A GERMAN pro-European think tank, the Libertas European Institute, is threatening to sue Declan Ganley's Libertas for usurping its name to campaign against the Lisbon Treaty. It has also complained to European Parliament president Hans-Gert Pöttering yesterday about a decision to grant Libertas official recognition and EU funds worth €202,823.

"I'm not happy that this 'Libertas' is acting in a diametrically opposed manner to our institute, which strongly supports the EU. We have already received many requests about them from our contacts," said Hans-Jürgen Zahorka, director of the institute, who added that as a lawyer he was studying legal options open to him.

The Libertas European Institute was formally registered under German law in 1992, although it existed previously as a journal published by Mr Zahorka, a former German MEP. It provides vocational training, consulting advice and publishes material on EU matters. It is worried that confusion about its name could hurt its business and yesterday wrote to Mr Pöttering to complain about Libertas's bid for official sanction.

The complaint did not stop the bureau of the parliament from approving Libertas's application to become a European political party and funds of €202,823 to help it campaign in the upcoming elections. But the bureau did decide to postpone a decision on whether to grant an extra €100,000 to support a Libertas political foundation. An official said the party "had not met the criteria for a foundation" because not enough non-Libertas party directors were on the application.

Libertas is one of 10 European political parties that will now share a €10 million annual EU fund distributed by the parliament to help create a pan-European political culture. The centre right EPP gets the biggest allocation of €3.4 million. This cash will be disbursed before the European elections and can be used to finance "campaigns conducted by the political parties at EU level in the context of the European Parliament".

Mr Ganley said last night Libertas wouldn't use the money for its election campaign. "Not before we have the voters' mandate to spend taxpayers' money," he said.

Libertas's funding application required the signature of seven politicians represented in either the European parliament or national or regional parliaments or assemblies. The supporters include three Eurosceptic MEPs: Philippe de Villiers and Paul Marie Coûteaux, both members of the Movement for France, and Greek MEP Georgios Georgiou. The national politicians backing Libertas – Lord Alton, a life peer in the British House of Lords; Finnish MP Timo Soini, Estonian MP Igor Grazin; Bulgarian MP Mincho Kuminev; and Polish regional assemblyman Cyprian Gutkowski – either hold Eurosceptic or staunchly conservative views, particularly on ethical issues.

Mr Georgiou, who is a member of a Greek nationalist party called Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos, said last night he was "very, very Eurosceptic" and hadn't yet finalised with Mr Ganley whether his party would run with Libertas in the elections.

"We need a bit more information from Libertas before we decide what to do," he said.

Lord Alton of Liverpool, who holds both a British and Irish passport, is a well-known campaigner for the pro-life movement. He was also the author of a chain letter recently distributed by independent MEP Kathy Sinnott, which urged an anti-abortion novena.

Mr Gutkowski is deputy chief of All-Polish Youth, a radical group attached to the far right League of Polish Families, famous for attacking gay rights marches in Poland. Mr Soini is founder of the anti-immigrant True Finns party, which has five seats in the Finnish parliament.



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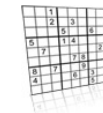
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