

UDO BULLMANN

One of our finest. In memory of Michael Hoppe

When you come to a city like Brussels as a newly elected member of the European Parliament, you are initially overwhelmed. That is what happened to me in 1999, of course, when I was elected for the first time. So many languages, people, and processes I hadn't seen before. In this chaos, you look for people you can rely on, people to trust. One of the first people I met in Brussels was Michael Hoppe. And I knew right away that I could trust him. From the same region as me, a football fanatic (although he supported the wrong club), we bonded quickly and went on to share many political experiences over the next 20 years or so.

When I first met Michael, he was close to Willi Görlach, who back then was head of the German SPD delegation in the PES Group, known today as the S&D. Some of these Görlach Guys are still around in Brussels today – Armin Machmer and Michael Manz, for example. They all rose through the ranks and took key positions in the European Parliament as well as in the Socialist Group.

Each of them being equipped with a very specific and individual temperament and talent, they soon impressed me as a 'crew'. Young SPD activists, fully committed to the idea of a bright future from the European project, investing all their energy and hopes in the work of the European Parliament and our political family, which they regarded as crucial for their endeavour.

They were, and still are, extremely hard-working people, but nonetheless it was always great fun to hang out with them. Long before we postulated the 'well-being for all' concept as our political leitmotiv, they fully lived up to it in practice: doing an extraordinary job in the workplace, running, cycling, skiing and playing football during their leisure time, and socialising in the pubs of this world, always eager to exchange good stories and to make new friends. I was told that this led to Strasbourg weeks in which they worked long hours, went to a bar with friends, had fun, took a shower at their hotel rooms, and went straight back to work at 8.00am. What energy!

Michael Hoppe embodied this crew spirit in every aspect of his political career.

He was one of the finest and most noble colleagues we ever had among us. Michael joined the S&D Group in 1996 and worked in various functions, from parliamentary assistant to cabinet adviser, and later deputy secretary general for many different group presidents. In 2019, he became our secretary general.

Married to a Spanish colleague and one of our dear comrades, Marisol Guirao, he not only spoke English and French in addition to his native German, but he was also fluent in Spanish – which always impressed me. This enabled him to interact with almost everybody in the parliament and beyond. On a professional as well as a personal level.

As a true internationalist and European Socialist, he provided support to everyone, in whatever function and without any national bias or prejudice. There was this thing with Michael that he made issues that might seem less important to others a personal affair. He always helped others, invested much and tried to find good solutions for everyone.

Personally of an extremely modest attitude, his pride was to serve the S&D Group. For that purpose, he more than once made enormous sacrifices for which we will always be grateful.

The numerous political leaders who worked with him could count on his absolute loyalty. But it was never the servile loyalty that lacks self-confidence or is grounded on selfishness and its opportunistic considerations. It was the self-assured loyalty of somebody whose values go beyond and reach further than the current mapping of time-restricted political circumstances. This is such an outstanding quality in today's times of ever more intense political battles. The common good of the whole family of Socialists and Social Democrats was, to him, always more important than personal greed and political ambition.

Unique in his background and personality, Michael Hoppe perfectly represented the 'spirit of the crew', the moral integrity and legacy of the old 'Willi Görlach school'. This spirit of the crew became vivid so often. When I was asked to write this piece, I checked my diary to see which meetings Michael and I had had in the past. Among dozens of formal meetings and group activities, one stood out in particular.

On 9 January 2019, Michael sent an invitation for his birthday the next day. The gathering was at 12:00 on a Thursday for a 'drink *tout spécial*'. Right before it, he was busy with the Conference of Presidents, and right afterwards there was a meeting with campaigners. This was classic Michael. In the midst of a busy day, he wanted to raise everyone's morale and make people feel good in their environment and the team in which they work.

Michael was a very special person and to so many of us in the European Parliament a dear friend and a role model.

Adieu Michael.

We miss you. Every day.