

FRENCH CENTRE RIGHT UNITED IN NEW EPP PARTY

Le Bourget ,November 18, 2002

The resurgent French centre-right inaugurated a new, unified political party Sunday, which also belongs to the EPP political family, with hopes of holding onto power long after President Jacques Chirac steps down.

More than 20,000 people gathered at the founding congress of the Union for a Popular Movement, a new name chosen along with a logo and a party chairman, former Prime Minister Alain JUPPE.

The position could offer Juppe a springboard for an eventual run for the French presidency when Chirac's term ends in 2007.

Juppe served as Chirac's prime minister from 1995 to 1997. His election to head the new party for two years — he won 79 percent of 47,621 votes cast — marked a comeback for Juppe.

The party, uniting the center-right and known by its French initials UMP, was formed in April to help Chirac win re-election. It then went on to a decisive victory in legislative elections in June, defeating a divided left.

"We're not just going to build a political organization. It's a community of destinies where mutual respect and the desire to share will reign," said Juppe. "We've wanted this union for years."

Supporters at the congress at Le Bourget outside Paris greeted him with shouts of "Juppe for president!"

"We will never forget our years of division," Raffarin said in an address to the congress. "Forgetting one's past is to condemn oneself to living it over again."

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar also attended, as did his Portuguese counterpart, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso CDU President Angela Merkel and EPP President Wilfried Martens. .

Barroso's center-right coalition drove Portugal's Socialists from power in March and Aznar won elections in 1996 and 2000. The French right, in contrast, has not won consecutive legislative elections since the 1970s.

"With this party, this project, this political team, I am sure that you have many years in government before you," said Aznar, who was greeted by rapturous applause.

"It's good news for France, for Spain and the whole of Europe."

Chirac did not attend the congress but sent a message hailing it as "a great moment in our political history."

"Never in France had we succeeded in putting an end to the dispersal of our forces," Chirac said in the message read out by Juppe.

Aside from choosing Juppe, UMP members picked their logo: a white tree against a blue and red

backdrop. Members cast ballots over the Internet.

"Our party won't be like others," said Jean-Francois Cope, the government's main spokesman. "It has transcended the old frontiers."