

The European Parliament Elections of 2019



Edited by
Lorenzo De Sio
Mark Franklin
Luana Russo

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Introduction

Understanding the European Parliament elections of 2019

LUANA RUSSO, MARK N. FRANKLIN AND LORENZO DE SIO

Understanding an election to the European Parliament (EP) – any election to the EP – is not straightforward. The elections are treated as being akin to a parliamentary election, but whereas parliamentary elections in EU member states lead to the formation of a government pledged to carry out policies on which its member parties campaigned in the run-up to the election, an EP election leads to no government being formed, much less one pledged to certain policies supported by voters. Indeed it is not clear to most of those voters what is the purpose of these elections or what is the point of voting in them. The most common appeal by national parties is that their supporters should vote out of loyalty to those parties. Consequently those without established party loyalties (particularly younger citizens) are especially unlikely to vote and turnout seldom reaches even 50 percent. Some people also vote to register dissatisfaction with government policies or to support policies that they feel are being neglected. As a result, government parties (often larger parties) regularly lose votes at these elections whereas parties espousing ideas with limited appeal (mostly small parties) do well. For reasons explained later in the book these phenomena accord with what is known as Second Order Election (SOE) theory.

In the first three decades of EP elections (1979 to 2009) these elections, despite their ostensive purpose to elect a European parliament, had very little focus on European matters. Instead they presented a distorted mirror of national political concerns. In 2014 for the first time, these elections were clearly "about Europe" but it has been argued that they were still just displaying a distorted reflection of national political concerns which, in the aftermath of the Great Recession and the economic stringency that ensued in many EU countries, had also become "about Europe". In 2019 it was widely expected that the European content of the EP elections that year would be even greater than in 2014. That does not seem to have occurred to any notable extent; although there are signs of a possibly different process – not specifically related to EU issues – leading to some Europeanization of this EP election.

This is a book about those elections. In it a large group of scholars explore the nature of these elections both within each of the 28 countries that participated and also taking a comparative cross-national perspective. It tries to shed light on why these elections were important and in what ways they may even have been pathbreaking, perhaps initiating a new era in which EP elections have palpable consequences that may even bring more European citizens to the polls. Certainly, from a turnout perspective, the 2019 EP elections were quite remarkable: the first such elec-

tion in decades to exceed 50% turnout (the increase was of 8.4 percentage points with respect to 2004). This increase was observed in 21 of the 28 member countries.

Along with the increase in turnout, these elections can be considered a first for other reasons. They are the first to test the institutionalization of a 2014 innovation that sought to link EP elections to the choice between candidates for President of the European Commission – the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. In 2014 the candidate from the European party group winning most votes did go on to become President of the EU Commission, but will that happen again in 2019? That election also may be the first to exhibit a common dynamic across all of the EU in swings of vote shares between party groups – a "Europeanization" of EP voting.

The overall effort of this book is to provide a comprehensive and overarching, yet systematic and detailed analysis of the election outcome. This goal is achieved by explaining the outcome and the implications of the elections both in a wide-ranging perspective – the first part of the book –, and within each country separately – the second part of the book, in which experts from each EU member country describe the elections there in detail.

The first part of the book is composed of five chapters.

Chapter One, *Much ado about nothing? The EP elections in comparative perspective* (by Angelucci, Carrieri and Franklin), takes a close look at the EP groups. The authors find overall a higher level of fragmentation in the mainstream camp, compared to 2014, and some consolidation in the Eurosceptic group. Also, more remarkably, they show that aggregate change moves in the same direction as average change for every EP party group. This finding suggests that these elections might be exceptional in that, for what is probably the first time, it is possible to observe an EU-wide dynamic of common variation across party groups.

In Chapter Two, *Party system dynamics, and potential new cleavages?* (by Emanuele and Marino), the analysis covers all EP elections to date and focuses on three goals: (1) to explain the patterns of electoral instability, (2) to compare these patterns (and their variation) between national and EP elections, and (3) to explicate the underlying dimensions of competition and cleavage structures in the 28 European party systems. They find that party swing is quite similar at the national and at European elections within each country (with the exception of 1999 and 2009), and that class cleavages are steadily declining.

In Chapter Three, *Spitzenkandidaten 2.0: From experiment to routine in European elections?* (by Thomas Christiansen and Michael Shackleton) the authors study the extent to which this 2014 innovation had become institutionalized by 2019, and explore ways in which the practice already shows signs of evolution, by discussing its impact on the inter-institutional dynamics between the European Parliament and Council.

Chapter Four, *Explaining the outcome* (by De Sio, Franklin, and Russo) focuses both on turnout and on party results. Normally turnout at EP elections is quite well predicted by structural factors (such as the electoral cycle and the prevalence of compulsory voting). Effects of these factors are confirmed over the past eight elections.

However, the analysis suggest that the turnout increase in 2019 cannot be attributed to any structural factor. This result is surprising, and further research will need to investigate this unexpected phenomenon. With regard to party results, the authors introduce theoretical and methodological innovations, linking the structural model of turnout evolution with the second order model of party choice. Findings demonstrate a previously undetected role of the electoral cycle in conditioning the way parties gain or lose support as compared with the most recent national election.

Chapter Five, *Impact of issues on party performance* (by Maggini, De Sio, Garzia, and Trechsel), builds on the previous chapter by testing whether there is some issue content to the results. The analysis of EP electoral gains/losses according to party issue stances (collected from EU 2019 expert survey), shows that there indeed are issue effects on party performance. When discounting second-order dynamics, some issue effects even appear significant EU-wide, although the most accurate picture is one that sees area-specific effect patterns, with environmentalist, pro-cultural integration, pro-welfare stances emerging from the North-West, and culturally conservative (and pro-market) stances emerging from Central Eastern Europe. This suggests that the 2019 EU elections might actually, perhaps for the first time, show some genuine issue content that is readable across multiple countries.

The second part of the book is composed of twenty-eight chapters: one for each country. These are detailed electoral reports in which one (or more) experts regarding each of the countries offer a detailed overview of the background and of the results.

The overall structure of the book reflects an effort which we already pioneered at the CISE (Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali) at Luiss in 2014, by offering – shortly after the election – an overview of election results for all countries, plus some contribution covering the result at the aggregate European level. For this book we can say that that the 2014 experiment was further enhanced. New, international co-editors joined the project, a partnership between Luiss and Maastricht University was established, the panel of country experts was, if possible, reinforced (leading to dedicated chapters for each of the 28 countries), and even the scientific content of the comparative chapters of the first part of the book saw an enrichment. However, this was done perhaps in an even shorter time span, which allowed us to publish this book within one month from EP elections. This was of course only possible thanks to all the authors of this book, who delivered interesting analyses and high-quality reports in an incredibly short span of time. The impressive list of authors, to whom our deepest thanks go, includes Davide Angelucci, Marcello Carammia, Luca Carrieri, Giorgos Charalambous, Henrik Serup Christensen, Thomas Christiansen, Mikołaj Cześniak, Lorenzo De Sio, Patrick Dumont, Piret Ehin, Vincenzo Emanuele, Marta Fraile, Mark N. Franklin, Diego Garzia, Heiko Giebler, Vlastimil Havlík, Andrija Henjak, Enrique Hernández, Louise Hoon, Jānis Iktens, Mažvydas Jastramskis, Raphaël Kies, Michał Kotnarowski, Sylvia Kritzinger, Simona Kustec, Romain Lachat, Irene Landini, Marco Lisi, Nicola Maggini, Bruno Marino, Michael Marsh, Julie Hassing Nielsen, Maria Oskarson, Roderick Pace, Aldo Paparo, Carolina Plescia, Luana Russo, Arjan H. Schakel, Dan Schmit, Michael Shackleton, Kaat Smets, Sorina Soare, Peter Spáč,

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PART I
COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Chapter One

Much ado about nothing?

The EP elections in comparative perspective

DAVIDE ANGELUCCI, LUCA CARRIERI AND MARK N. FRANKLIN

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the electoral results of the European Parliament (EP) Election of May 2019. We adopt a twofold strategy: first, we calculate the shares of votes for all the political parties that contested these elections and we then aggregate these results to the level of EP group. Thus, we simulate a single European constituency. This empirical choice aims at capturing the 2019 EP group performances over the EU as a whole, observing differences from the 2014 EP elections. By simulating this scenario, the objective is to understand the *real* electoral increases/decreases of each EP group, net of all those institutional settings (e.g., electoral rules in each member state, different distribution of seats across countries, etc.) which prime the mechanisms through which the new Parliament will be formed. Second, we analyse the new composition of the European Parliament in terms of seats. To the extent that analysis of the election outcome within a single European constituency clarifies the real dynamics of the rise and fall of European parties, this approach will enable us to assess the concrete relationships and potential equilibria that will be established within the EP.

ELECTORAL RESULTS IN A EUROPEAN CONSTITUENCY

Previous work has demonstrated a significant electoral volatility at European Parliament (EP) elections, largely taking the form of increasing fleeing of votes from parties belonging to the established EP groups, the PPE, S&D, ALDE, the Greens/EFA, towards anti-establishment and Eurosceptic parties (old ones as well as new), which are members of the ENF, EFDD, NGL-GUE and, partially, the ECR (Bosco and Werne 2012; Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Morlino and Raniolo 2017). These trends may mirror not solely an electoral realignment, but also the emergence of new ideological foundations in political competition. According to Kriesi et al. (2006), globalization (or de-nationalization) has unleashed a new ideological division, pitching those supporting cultural liberalism (Cosmopolitans) versus those defending a national culture (Nationalists). This integration-nationalism ideological divide may transform the content of political competition, also including support/opposition for European integration as its fundamental component. The pro-

/-anti-European distinction may even, in 2019, have become pivotal in influencing inter-party contestation at the EP level. EP elections represent a good vantage point to assess electoral gains/losses of the Eurosceptic EP groups (the ENF, EFDD, NGL-GUE and ECR) vis-à-vis the Europhile ones (EPP, S&D, ALDE and the Greens/EFA), simulating a single European constituency.

Therefore, we identify a Pro-EU bloc, made up by EPP, S&D, ALDE, and the Greens/EFA. The S&D and EPP have historically represented two main groups, competing to gain the majority of seats in the European Parliament (EP) and crucial positions in the European Commission (EC). The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) mainly includes parties stemming from the Social Democratic, Socialist and Labour traditions, but it has recently comprised progressive parties partially unrelated with this party family, such as the Italian Democratic Party (Carriero 2014). On the contrary, the European People's Party (EPP) is a more complex coalition of parties. Indeed, the EPP had originally assembled parties of the Christian Democratic tradition, which have become a minority over time, while other conservative parties have been integrated within this group (Emanuele 2014). The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), though with an internal degree of heterogeneity, has sought to profile itself as the group of European liberals, merging the liberal-radical and liberal-conservative parties (Marks and Wilson 2000). The Greens/European Free Alliance was founded in 1999, gathering parties with ecologist and post-materialist platforms.

On the other hand, we also identify a Eurosceptic bloc, which has a more complex history. The Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) originated in 1995, including many communist or neo-communist parties, but also more environmentalist and libertarian radical left parties. By contrast, right-wing Eurosceptic parties have often shifted from one EP group to another. The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) had originally a preeminent position within the radical right camp, undergoing several splits (Maggini 2014). Indeed, some of these have joined the European Conservative Reformists (ECR), founded by the British Conservatives, has gathered significant governing and opposition right-wing parties but suffered from some relevant party defections towards a group favored by other eurosceptic parties who had formed the European for Nations and Freedom (ENF). This latter EP group has achieved the more successful strategy in terms of coalition-building, increasing the number of its member parties. Meantime, the EFDD is dominated by Farage's Brexit Party and the Italian Five Star Movement, generally lacking a widespread membership in the EU-28.

In Table 1 we report the electoral results for each political party in each country but identified by the name of the EP group to which that party belongs. We also show (in the row marked "Total") the percentage vote received by each EP group at the European level (evidently not the sum of national-level percentages, given the huge differences in the sizes of national electorates). We also report, for each country, variations in EP group electoral performance over the period 2014-2019, which are the differences between results achieved in 2019 compared to 2014 by the parties that were members of each EP group in each member state. When we average

this statistic across all EU member countries (bottom row of Table 1) we treat the outcome of the EP election in each country as equally important, no matter the size of that country's electorate. Thus, in what follows we refer both to the overall electoral results as calculated at the European level (totals row), and also at this mean of variations across EP groups, which gives us a view of the extent of common trends across countries.

Importantly, the average change across countries always has the same sign as the total change across countries (the EPP total vote share is less in 2019 than in 2014 and its variance across countries is also negative; the ALDE total in 2019 is greater than in 2014 and its variance is also positive – and the same for other party groups), so final outcomes in total votes are not aggregation artifacts. Trends across countries are meaningful.

Both measures of change reported at the bottom of Table 1 tells us that the two major EP groups in 2014, the EPP and S&D, both suffered from significant electoral losses across the majority of countries. On average, the EPP is the main loser of the 2019 EP elections, followed by the S&D. Overall, it is the other way around with the S&D being the main loser with the EPP ranked second. On average the EPP lost 2.8 percentage points as compared to 2014, whereas the S&D lost 1.5 percentage points; overall the losses with 3.2 and 6.8. Similarly, the EFDD, the ECR, and the GUE all suffered important electoral losses.

If the main EP groups can be identified as the losers of this election, the winners are the liberals of ALDE (they have gained, on average, 1 percentage point, an overall gain of 3.6), the Greens and, in particular, the ENF (which attained the highest growth rate both on average and overall, as compared to all the other EP groups). Note that overall gains/losses are always considerably greater than average gains/losses.

The remarkable electoral decline of the S&D is explained by the electoral collapse that the S&D parties underwent in the four largest EU member states. In fact, the Italian Democratic Party (PD), the British Labour, the German Social Democrats (SPD) and the French Socialists all experienced notable electoral losses. This voting trend is due to multifaceted domestic backgrounds, but it clearly weakens the position of this EP group. Once electorally hegemonic at the European level. S&D parties have lost significant share of votes in 17 out of 28 EU member states, across both Western and Eastern Europe. So the electoral losses have been widespread and generalized, unsettling the electoral primacy of the S&D in the entire continent. Though there are some significant success stories within this party family, such as the Portuguese, Spanish Socialists, the Danish Social Democrats and the Labour Party in the Netherlands, the EPP now electorally outweighs the S&D by 20.9 percent to 18.0 percent.

If Athens cries, Sparta does not laugh. This statement seems to synthesize the EPP electoral performances at the 2019 EP elections. It did not lose as much as the S&D but nevertheless lost 3.2 percentage points in the entire continent. This case also mirrors a substantial electoral decline in some of the major EU member states, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, which has dragged down its general performance. The less dramatic losses of the EPP are due to its electoral stability (or moderate growth) in many member states, such as Austria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland,

Table 1 - Electoral results by EP group and country. Cells report the percentage of votes calculated as the ratio of the aggregate of valid votes of parties belonging to each group and the total of valid votes cast in Europe

| PARTY | EPP | | | S&D | | | ALDE | | | GREENS | |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|
| | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 |
| Austria | 27 | 34.6 | 7.6 | 24.1 | 23.9 | -0.2 | 8.1 | 8.4 | 0.3 | 14.5 | 14.1 |
| Belgium | 16.2 | 12.6 | -3.6 | 18.3 | 16.2 | -2.1 | 25.7 | 17.1 | -8.5 | 14.6 | 15.1 |
| Bulgaria | 36.9 | 37.1 | 0.3 | 18.9 | 24.3 | 5.3 | 17.3 | 16.6 | -0.7 | | |
| Croatia | 41.4 | 22.7 | -19 | 29.9 | 18.7 | -11 | | 9.2 | 9.2 | 9.4 | 1.8 |
| Cyprus | 37.7 | 29 | -8.7 | 18.5 | 24.4 | 5.9 | | | | | |
| Czechia | 25.9 | 18.9 | -7 | 14.2 | 4 | -10 | 16.1 | 23.6 | 7.4 | | |
| Denmark | 9.1 | 6.2 | -3 | 19.1 | 31.6 | 12.4 | 23.2 | 23.5 | 0.3 | 11 | 13.2 |
| Estonia | 13.9 | 10.5 | -3.4 | 13.6 | 23.7 | 10.2 | 46.7 | 41.4 | -5.3 | 13.2 | 1.8 |
| Finland | 27.8 | 25.7 | -2.2 | 12.3 | 14.6 | 2.3 | 26.4 | 19.9 | -6.5 | 9.3 | 16 |
| France | 20.8 | 8.5 | -12 | 14 | 6.2 | -7.8 | 9.9 | 24.9 | 15 | 8.9 | 13.5 |
| Germany | 34.5 | 28.9 | -6.5 | 27.3 | 15.8 | -11 | 4.8 | 7.6 | 2.8 | 12.8 | 21.5 |
| Greece | 22.7 | 33.1 | 10.4 | 15.8 | 9.2 | -6.6 | 0.9 | 1.5 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.9 |
| Hungary | 51.6 | 52.6 | 1.1 | 20.6 | 22.7 | 2 | | 9.9 | 9.9 | 12.3 | 2.2 |
| Ireland | 22.3 | 29.6 | 7.3 | 5.3 | 3.1 | -2.2 | 22.3 | 16.5 | -5.8 | 4.9 | 11.4 |
| Italy | 21.7 | 9.3 | -12 | 40.8 | 22.7 | -18 | 1.4 | 3.1 | 1.7 | 0.9 | 2.3 |
| Latvia | 46.6 | 26.4 | -20 | 13.5 | 17.8 | 4.3 | 2.1 | 5.4 | 3.2 | 6.4 | 6.3 |
| Lithuania | 17.4 | 19.7 | 2.3 | 17.3 | 15.9 | -1.4 | 30.8 | 15.6 | -15 | 10.2 | 14.8 |
| Luxembourg | 37.7 | 21.1 | -17 | 11.7 | 12.2 | 0.5 | 14.8 | 21.4 | 6.7 | 15 | 18.9 |
| Malta | 40 | 37.9 | -2.1 | 53.4 | 54.3 | 0.9 | | 2 | 2 | 2.9 | 0.7 |
| Netherlands | 15.2 | 12.2 | -3 | 9.4 | 19 | 9.6 | 27.5 | 21.7 | -5.8 | 7.2 | 11.1 |
| Poland | 38.9 | 38.5 | -0.5 | 9.4 | 6.1 | -3.4 | | | | 0.3 | |
| Portugal | 30 | 30.2 | 0.3 | 34 | 35.9 | 1.9 | 8.5 | 2.6 | -5.9 | 4.2 | 7.4 |
| Romania | 24.7 | 38 | 13.3 | 37.6 | 25.7 | -12 | 21.8 | 26.5 | 4.6 | | |
| Slovakia | 33.3 | 37.4 | 4 | 24.1 | 15.7 | -8.4 | 6.7 | | -6.7 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| Slovenia | 41.4 | 37.5 | -3.9 | 8.1 | 18.7 | 10.6 | 9.3 | 26.9 | 17.6 | 11.2 | 3.7 |
| Spain | 26.7 | 20.3 | -6.4 | 23.5 | 33.2 | 9.6 | 15.4 | 15.1 | -0.3 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| Sweden | 24.4 | 25.5 | 1.1 | 36.9 | 24.3 | -13 | 20.4 | 14.9 | -5.5 | 19.2 | 11.5 |
| UK | 0.2 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 24.4 | 13.6 | -11 | 6.9 | 20.2 | 13.3 | 10.1 | 16.5 |
| Total | 24.1 | 20.9 | -3.2 | 24.8 | 18 | -6.8 | 9.2 | 12.8 | 3.6 | 7.4 | 10.2 |
| Mean var. | | | -2.8 | | | -1.5 | | | 1 | | |

Sources: Official national offices.

| | GUE | | | ECR | | | EFDD | | | ENF | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. |
| | -0.4 | | | | | | | | | | 19.7 | 17.2 | -2.5 |
| | 0.5 | 3.4 | 8.4 | 5 | 16.1 | 14.2 | -1.9 | | | | 4.1 | 12 | 7.9 |
| | | | | | 10.7 | 7.4 | -3.3 | | | | | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| | -7.6 | | | | | 8.5 | 8.5 | | 5.7 | 5.7 | | | |
| | | 27 | 27.5 | 0.5 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 11 | 6.9 | -4 | 7.7 | 14.5 | 6.9 | 5.2 | | -5.2 | | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| | 2.3 | 8.1 | 9.2 | 1.1 | 26.6 | | -27 | | | | | 10.8 | 10.8 |
| | -11 | | | | | | | | | | 4 | 13 | 8.9 |
| | 6.7 | 9.3 | 6.9 | -2.4 | 12.9 | | -13 | | | | | 13.8 | 13.8 |
| | 4.5 | 6.6 | 6.3 | -0.3 | 3.8 | | -3.8 | | | | 24.9 | 23.3 | -1.5 |
| | 8.7 | 8.6 | 5.5 | -3.1 | 7.7 | | -7.7 | | | | | 11 | 11 |
| | -0.1 | 26.6 | 23.8 | -2.8 | 3.5 | 0.8 | -2.7 | 2.7 | | -2.7 | | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| | -10 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 6.5 | 22.8 | 34.8 | 12 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1.4 | 4 | | -4 | 3.7 | 6.5 | 2.8 | 21.2 | 17.1 | -4.1 | 6.2 | 34.3 | 28.2 |
| | -0.1 | | | | 14.4 | 16.5 | 2.1 | 8.3 | | -8.3 | | | |
| | 4.7 | | | | 8.1 | 5.5 | -2.5 | 14.3 | 2.7 | -12 | | | |
| | 3.9 | | 4.8 | 4.8 | 7.5 | 10 | 2.5 | | | | | | |
| | -2.2 | | | | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.1 | | | | | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| | 3.9 | 13.8 | 7.4 | -6.5 | 7.7 | 17.8 | 10.1 | 0.5 | | -0.5 | 13.3 | 3.5 | -9.8 |
| | -0.3 | | | | 35.8 | 45.4 | 9.6 | | 4.6 | 4.6 | 7.2 | 0.1 | -7.1 |
| | 3.2 | 18.6 | 18 | -0.7 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | 3.2 | 3.2 | | | | | | |
| | 0.3 | | 0.6 | 0.6 | 14.3 | 14.9 | 0.6 | 3.6 | 4.1 | 0.5 | 17.5 | 3.2 | -14.3 |
| | -7.4 | 5.5 | 6.3 | 0.9 | | | | | | | | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| | -0.3 | 21.7 | 11.5 | -10 | | | | | | | | | |
| | -7.6 | 7.8 | 6.8 | -1 | | 15.3 | 15.3 | 12 | | -12 | | | |
| | 6.3 | 1.1 | 0.9 | -0.2 | 23.9 | 9.1 | -15 | 26.6 | 30.5 | 3.9 | | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| | 2.8 | 7.7 | 5.4 | -2.4 | 8.3 | 6.8 | -1.5 | 6.7 | 55.3 | -1.4 | 5.2 | 11 | 5.8 |
| | -0.4 | | | | | | -0.5 | | | -1.1 | | | 2.3 |

Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. Nevertheless, and despite losses in 15 out of 28 EU member states, the EPP vote remains fairly uniformly distributed across the continent, with this EP Group being still electorally entrenched in many important Southern, Western and Eastern countries.

It is worth noting that the EPP and S&D total sum of votes decreased from 48.9% (2014) to 38.9% (2019), indicating a sizeable and rapid electoral downturn of the two main pro-EU EP groups, presaging many coalition-making dilemmas in the EP and Commission (EC). However, these electoral losses have been partially compensated by the increase of the votes achieved by the ALDE and Greens-EFA. These two EP groups embody different ideological traditions as compared to the EPP and S&D, but clearly belonging to the pro-EU pole. In 2019, the ALDE gains 2.8 percentage points, reaching an overall share of 12.8%. This result is mainly due to the voting boost achieved by the French *The Republic on the Move* (EM) and the British Liberal Democrats. ALDE parties also obtained good performances in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. Though the electoral growth of the ALDE parties appears to be indisputable, there are some elements of weaknesses linked to its overall result. In fact, the uncertainty of the UK membership, with the Liberal Democrats probably leaving the group with the rest of British MEPs, and the peculiar nature of the EM, depending so much on Emmanuel Macron's personal fortunes, leaves some questions regarding the future of this EP group, which has obtained an important, but perhaps ephemeral, result.

On the contrary, the Greens-EFA electoral growth (+2.8 percentage points) presents different characteristics, outlining a well-defined electoral pattern. Indeed, these parties have gained significant shares of votes in the West and, in particular, in North European countries, such as Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK. This result is certainly unsurprising, because of the geographic bias of the Post-Materialistic cleavage (Inglehart 1976), which has historically set up a favourable window of opportunity for this party family in North-Western European democracies. Though the Greens-EFA parties have reinforced their position in the in West European left camp, they are still electorally marginal in Southern and Eastern European democracies. This geographical unbalance in the electoral fortunes of the Greens also explains the discrepancies between their electoral performance calculated on the whole European constituency (+2.8) and their electoral performance assessed in terms of average variation across countries between 2014 and 2019 (+0.2). Moreover, it is worth noting that the second-order nature of the EP elections has always rewarded these parties in Western Europe, with the EP electorate being less constrained by strategic motivations.

The Eurosceptic EP groups were widely expected to make major breakthroughs at this EP elections. Instead, these groups have had only a limited electoral success, undergoing (as we shall see) a redistribution of votes and seats among themselves. In fact, three out of four of the Eurosceptic groups have lost remarkable shares of votes. First and foremost, the radical left parties of the GUE-NGL have suffered a notable setback, losing ground in their South-Western strongholds (especially Greece, France and Spain). These parties appeared to present a successful challenge to

the austerity policies and the neo-liberal bias of the EU at the 2014 EP elections. Indeed, the parties belonging to the GUE-NGL became central actors in many national party systems. Nowadays, this so-called anti-austerity bloc is electorally stagnating, weakening its presence almost everywhere. Meantime, the EFDD has lost 1.4 percentage points, suffering from the electoral defeat of one of its major members, the M5S in Italy. Though Nigel Farage's Brexit Party has enhanced its votes as compared to the UKIP in 2014, which was the leading party of this EP group, the EFDD overall performance has lagged behind in 2019.

The ECR has also decreased its share of votes, losing 1.8 percentage points. This electoral defeat has mainly to do with its lack of coalition-building capacity. In fact, this EP group has suffered from many significant defections, with AFD (Germany), DF (Denmark) and True Finns (Finland) moving towards the ENF. This shift of parties largely explains the ECR voting losses, which has also been accompanied by the collapse of the British Conservative party. The political and electoral crisis of the Tories, plus the outcome of the so-called Brexit referendum, may have minimised the ECR appeal for other Eurosceptic parties. Nevertheless, the ECR has managed to increase its share of votes in some national contexts, such as Croatia, the Czech Republic, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden. While the ECR coalition-building strategy has been flawed, the ENF has been able to become more inclusive over time. We may hypothesize that the Italian Lega entrepreneurial efforts have brought substantial payoffs, with this governing party being committed to securing the adherence to this group of new and old parties. Unmistakably, the ENF is one of the success stories of these EP elections, gaining 5.8 percentage points and becoming the fourth electoral EP group. Apart from its coalition-building strategy, many important results have been obtained by its traditional members (FPO, LEGA, FN, VB, etc.), with the notable exception of the Dutch PVV. Nonetheless, the ENF's relative electoral breakthrough has appeared to occur under the form of a voting redistribution with the other right-wing Eurosceptic groups, which do not allow us to recognize a proper electoral realignment.

All things considered, despite the gains and losses summarized above, by scrutinising the overall percentages of the pro-EU parties and the anti-EU ones we may identify some kind of stability in the balance of power within the continent. The pro-EU camp has decreased its vote share by 3.9 percentage points. This bloc is certainly more fragmented as compared to 2014 EP elections, with losses of votes by its two major components (EPP and S&D) being moderately offset by the performance of the two minor ones (Greens-EFA and ALDE). This is a pattern of electoral stability with fragmentation, which clearly summarizes the pro-EU parties' trajectory in the 2019 EP elections. Meantime, the Eurosceptic bloc has not boosted its overall voting score, gaining only 0.5 percentage points. However, the ENF is clearly taking on a hegemonic role within this camp, increasing votes and perhaps its blackmail power within the EP. It is worth noting that the ENF may present a more concrete challenge towards the pro-EU parties, because of its capacity to reduce the fragmentation of the Eurosceptic formations in the EP. In a nutshell, the shift of the absolute votes would draw a pattern of electoral stability, and in spite of some concerns concerning the EU's destiny, it is a "*much ado about nothing*" scenario.

SEATS FOR THE EP GROUPS

The electoral results of the main European groups at the EU level do not reveal the real balance of power within the new European Parliament. Its composition in fact derives from the diversified electoral mechanisms within the Union, the different allocations of seats between member states, as well as the different electoral dynamics within each member state. After all, we are talking about 28 different elections, reflecting very diverse internal scenarios, and electing a different number of representatives in the EP. Even at a first glance, it is clear how the electoral results calculated on a European basis are not perfectly reproduced in the distribution of seats across the various groups, which compose the European Parliament (Table 2). And it is equally clear (as we shall see) that a distribution of seats based on the EU-wide result would have returned an even more fragmented Parliament than the one that will actually take its seats in the coming weeks.

Therefore, it is now time to delve into the real composition of the new European Parliament, analyzing the new equilibria and the strategic options for the several key players in town, in light of the next crucial steps to be taken regarding the appointments of key figures of the Union (i.e. the President of the Commission, the President of the European Parliament and the President of the Council).

As we have seen, the losers of these elections are the parties linked to the EPP and S&D groups, the parliamentary groups that in past EP legislative sessions held together a majority within the EP. Contrary to what we saw in terms of electoral results on an European constituency (Table 1), the Populists (EPP) are the big losers in terms of seats (Table 2). Overall, compared to 2014, they lost 41 seats, down to 333. The loss is not localized but spans across different geographical areas in a rather homogeneous way, just as did the loss of votes. In Northern European countries and in Eastern European countries they lose 14 seats, whereas 13 are the seats lost in countries of the Mediterranean area. In general, compared to the 2014 elections, in only 6 countries out of 28 do the Populists improve their position in the new EP – a worse result than in terms of votes, where they lost ground in 11 out of 28 countries.

The S&D lose 38 seats compared to 2014, and now get 153 seats. Not differently from what we observed for the EPP, losses are widespread in many EU countries, particularly in Northern Europe and Southern Europe. Nevertheless, the most notable drop was recorded in Northern countries: 29 seats have been lost, an even greater loss than that recorded for the Populists in the same geographical area. The defeat in Southern European countries was more contained. Here the sharp decline of the Italian S&D representation (-12 seats) was partly dampened by the growth of the Social Democrats in Spain (+ 6 seats) and, to a lesser extent, in Portugal (+ 1 seat). Finally, the losses of the Social Democrats in Eastern Europe are minimal (-3 seats compared to 2014).

Just as we saw in terms of votes, together with the Greens and the members of the ENF group, the Liberals of the ALDE are the winners of these elections in terms of seats. Taking advantage of the crisis of the traditional parties, which are mostly linked to the two historical groups of the EPP and the S&D, liberal forces

have been able to gather wide support in the 2019 elections. The figures are remarkable in Northern Europe, where the success of the ALDE has been impressive. The group moved from 38 to 70 seats, with an increase of 32 seats in total. The parties which are included in the ALDE group obtained a good result also in Eastern Europe: here 10 more seats have been gained as compared to 2014, thus moving from 19 to 29 MEPs.

The group of the Greens strengthens its presence in the European Parliament, winning 73 seats, 23 more than in 2014. The '*Green wave*' that in the chronicles seems to have crossed the Old Continent, is however geographically localized, exclusively involving the countries of Northern Europe. Except in Sweden and Austria, where the parties linked to this Eurogroup lose 2 and 1 seats respectively, the Greens visibly gained support everywhere in Northern Europe. Overall, in Northern Europe the number of seats assigned to the Greens grew by 24 units, an increase that is second only to that of those parties which are linked to the ALDE. In Southern Europe and in Eastern Europe, the Greens representation, already meagre in 2014, remains substantially stable. Of the 4 seats occupied in 2014, all are reconfirmed in 2019, with the decisive contribution of Spain and Portugal, the only two countries in the area able to elect Green MEPs. The situation remains substantially unchanged, compared to 2014, also in Eastern Europe, where the number of seats for the Greens, already small in 2014, falls by one unit.

Apart from mainstream groups, significant losses are recorded both in the radical-left group GUE and in the right-wing groups ECR and EFDD. For GUE, the number of seats goes from 52 to 39, with a generalized drop throughout the continent and a prevalence of losses in Southern Europe. For the EFDD group, the loss was 5 seats in a rather homogeneous way throughout the continent. The only exception is in fact the United Kingdom, where the parties linked to the group still managed to obtain 5 more seats than in 2014 (and this is the figure that returns an overall positive balance between 2019 and 2014 in Northern Europe). Even the ECR, taken as a whole, loses seats (-11 seats compared to the 2014 elections), but in this case it is a geographically localized loss that mainly involves the countries of Northern Europe. By contrast, a positive balance clearly emerges in Eastern Europe and, to some extent, in Southern Europe.

Compared to the forecast on the eve of the election, the advance of right-wing groups with a strong Eurocritical or even Eurosceptic connotation has been rather limited, although still relevant. The EFDD and ENF groups together reach 115 seats, 26 more than in 2014. If we add the seats of the ECR group, where there are also some parties that are rather critical towards the EU (Fratelli d'Italia in Italy, for example), the right-wing pole of the new EP will be able to count on 174 seats, far from the majority of seats and, more importantly, far from being able to become a key player in the formation of a new majority. For these groups, the only larger parliamentary group with which there is the possibility of dialogue is in fact the EPP, but even by adding the total number of seats obtained by the Populists with those of the right-wing groups, the coalition would not reach the 376 seats that are necessary to have a majority in Parliament. In addition to the scarcity of numbers, there exist deep di-

Table 2 - Seats distribution in the new European Parliament by country, EP group, and regional area.
Green colours indicate gains; red colours indicate losses

| PARTY | EPP | | | S&D | | | ALDE | | | GREENS | |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|
| | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 |
| Northern Europe | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Finland | 3 | 3 | | 2 | 2 | | 4 | 3 | -1 | 1 | 2 |
| Sweden | 4 | 6 | +2 | 6 | 5 | -1 | 3 | 3 | | 4 | 2 |
| Ireland | 4 | 5 | +1 | 1 | | -1 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 |
| UK | | | | 20 | 10 | -10 | 1 | 17 | +16 | 6 | 11 |
| Austria | 5 | 7 | +2 | 5 | 5 | | 1 | 1 | | 3 | 2 |
| Belgium | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 3 | -1 | 6 | 4 | -2 | 2 | 3 |
| Denmark | 1 | 1 | | 3 | 3 | | 3 | 5 | +2 | 1 | 2 |
| Germany | 34 | 29 | -5 | 27 | 16 | -11 | 4 | 7 | +3 | 13 | 24 |
| Luxembourg | 3 | 2 | -1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | +1 | 1 | 1 |
| Netherlands | 5 | 4 | -1 | 3 | 6 | +3 | 7 | 6 | -1 | 2 | 3 |
| France | 20 | 8 | -12 | 13 | 5 | -8 | 7 | 21 | +14 | 6 | 12 |
| Total | 83 | 69 | -14 | 85 | 56 | -29 | 38 | 70 | +32 | 39 | 63 |
| Southern Europe | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cyprus | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | | | | | | |
| Greece | 5 | 8 | +3 | 4 | 2 | -2 | | | | | |
| Italy | 17 | 7 | -10 | 31 | 19 | -12 | | | | | |
| Malta | 3 | 2 | -1 | 3 | 4 | +1 | | | | | |
| Portugal | 7 | 7 | | 8 | 9 | +1 | 2 | | -2 | | 1 |
| Spain | 17 | 12 | -5 | 14 | 20 | +6 | 8 | 8 | | 4 | 3 |
| Total | 51 | 38 | -13 | 62 | 56 | -6 | 10 | 8 | -2 | 4 | 4 |
| Central Eastern Europe | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bulgaria | 7 | 7 | | 4 | 5 | +1 | 4 | 3 | -1 | | |
| Croatia | 5 | 4 | -1 | 2 | 3 | +1 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 1 | |
| Czech Republic | 7 | 5 | -2 | 4 | | -4 | 4 | 6 | +2 | | 3 |
| Estonia | 1 | | -1 | 1 | 2 | +1 | 3 | 3 | | 1 | |
| Hungary | 12 | 13 | +1 | 4 | 5 | +1 | | 2 | +2 | 2 | |
| Latvia | 4 | 2 | -2 | 1 | 2 | +1 | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Lithuania | 2 | 3 | +1 | 2 | 2 | | 3 | 2 | -1 | 1 | 2 |
| Poland | 23 | 17 | -6 | 5 | 8 | +3 | | | | | |
| Slovenia | 5 | 4 | -1 | 1 | 2 | +1 | 1 | 2 | +1 | 1 | |
| Slovakia | 6 | 4 | -2 | 4 | 3 | -1 | 1 | 2 | +1 | | |
| Romania | 15 | 14 | -1 | 16 | 9 | -7 | 1 | 8 | +7 | | |
| Total | 87 | 73 | -14 | 44 | 41 | -3 | 19 | 29 | +10 | 7 | 6 |
| Total - EU | 221 | 180 | -41 | 191 | 153 | -38 | 67 | 107 | +40 | 50 | 73 |

Source: EP Parliament

| | GUE | | | ECR | | | EFDD | | | ENF | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | 2014 | 2019 | Var. | |
| | +I | 2 | 2 | | 2 | | -2 | | | | 2 | +2 | |
| | -2 | I | I | | | 3 | +3 | 2 | | -2 | | | |
| | +I | 4 | 3 | -I | I | I | | -I | | | | | |
| | +5 | I | I | | 20 | 4 | -16 | 24 | 19 | +5 | | | |
| | -I | | | | | | | | | | 4 | 3 | -I |
| | +I | | I | +I | 4 | 3 | -I | | | | I | 3 | +2 |
| | +I | I | I | | 4 | | -4 | | | | | I | +I |
| | +II | 8 | 5 | -3 | 8 | | -8 | | | | | II | +II |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | +I | 3 | I | -2 | 2 | 5 | +3 | | | | 4 | | -4 |
| | +6 | 4 | 6 | +2 | | | | I | | -I | 23 | 22 | -I |
| | +24 | 23 | 20 | -3 | 4I | 15 | -26 | 27 | 29 | +2 | 32 | 42 | +IO |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 6 | 6 | | I | | -I | | | | | | |
| | | 3 | | -3 | | 5 | +5 | 17 | 14 | -3 | 5 | 28 | +23 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | +I | 4 | 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | -I | II | 6 | -5 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 26 | 18 | -8 | I | 5 | +4 | 17 | 14 | -3 | 5 | 28 | +23 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| | -I | | | | I | I | | | | | | | |
| | +3 | 3 | I | -2 | 2 | 4 | +2 | I | | -I | | 2 | +2 |
| | -I | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | -2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | I | 2 | +I | I | | -I | | | |
| | +I | | | | I | I | | 2 | | -2 | | | |
| | | | | | 19 | 26 | +7 | | | | 4 | | -4 |
| | -I | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | I | +I | | | | | | |
| | -I | 3 | I | -2 | 28 | 39 | +II | 4 | | -4 | 4 | 2 | -2 |
| | +23 | 52 | 39 | -13 | 70 | 59 | -II | 48 | 43 | -5 | 4I | 72 | +3I |

visions within the European right. Although some members of the EPP have called for a new dialogue between centre-right and right-wing parties, this road seems to be all uphill, primarily because this position is in fact a minority one within the EPP. Moreover, even for the supporters of a dialogue with more Eurosceptic parties, this strategy should involve only those parties which are most open to negotiation – which would probably exclude, for example, the MEPs of the Brexit Party. At the same time, an EPP shifting towards the right would definitively break the alliance with the S&D and, most importantly in a EP that is for sure more fragmented than in the past, with the Liberals of the ALDE who, at this point, seem to hold a critical position for the formation of a majority in Parliament.

If it is true that the 2019 elections will not be remembered as a success for Eurosceptic parties, it is equally true that the traditional groups of the centre-right and centre-left have lost their centrality within the Parliament. The EPP and the S&D together do not reach the 376 seats that are necessary to have a majority and, as a consequence, the coalition that was majoritarian in the previous legislature will necessarily move towards the centre. The most plausible hypothesis is that of a coalition with the centrist forces of the ALDE, which already in the previous legislature repeatedly supported proposals of the PPE-S&D coalition. It is also the only realistic possibility for the formation of a rather cohesive majority. Indeed, the other possibility for the PPE-S&D would be that of including the Greens in the coalition. However, the main Greens component from Germany seems not to be willing to negotiate on crucial matters such as environmentalism and socio-economic issues. Also, given the strong socialist inspiration of the group, its entry into the coalition would skew the balance of power between the EPP and the S&D excessively, an eventuality that seems not to be plausible in the immediate future, given that the EPP still remains the largest group in the Parliament.

In the coming weeks the picture will become clearer. The appointments of the President of the Commission, the President of the Parliament and the President of the Council will be a test for the new parliamentary arrangements. Until the end of the previous legislature, these offices were owned by the groups most represented in the EP. This time, however, in addition to the EPP and the S&D, there will be another player, and it is to be expected that compromise will be more difficult than in the past. These difficulties might emerge quite soon in the process of selecting the new President of the Commission. Usually, the President of the European Commission is selected by the most representative group within the Parliament. However, the inclusion of the ALDE in the EPP-S&D coalition might generate internal conflicts within the coalition itself. The *Spitzenkandidat* of the Populists is in fact Manfred Weber, a long-standing MEP, elected from the CSU in Germany, whose candidacy is strongly opposed by the Liberals (including Emmanuel Macron). Whether this will lead to an early deterioration of the internal relationships is still to be seen. However, it seems clear that, in a fragmented parliament, the most moderate groups will retain a predominant position.

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Chapter Two

Party system change in EU countries: long-term instability and cleavage restructuring

VINCENZO EMANUELE AND BRUNO MARINO

This chapter deals with the analysis of party system change in Europe after the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections. Our task is threefold. First, we explore the patterns of electoral instability in Europe at the 2019 EP elections and compare them across countries and over time. Second, we compare trends and variations in electoral instability between national and EP elections, following the expectations derived from the Second Order Election (SOE) theory (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Third, we aim to understand the underlying dimensions of competition and cleavage structures in the 28 European party systems. From an empirical viewpoint, our analysis is based on data taken from a recently published dataset on electoral volatility and its internal components in EP elections since 1979 (Emanuele et al. 2019).

ELECTORAL VOLATILITY IN EP ELECTIONS: NATIONAL AND TEMPORAL VARIATIONS

Starting with the first task, let us focus on the electoral instability of European party systems after the 2019 round of EP elections. Table 1 reports figures using the Pedersen (1979) index of electoral volatility for the 2019 EP election in the 28 EU countries.

Overall, electoral volatility (Total Volatility, TV) in 2019 was 23.7. This quite remarkable level of electoral instability has been driven by particularly highly volatile elections in some countries, such as the United Kingdom (50.4), Slovakia (41.6), and Italy (37.25). In as many as nine countries, this EP election has been the most volatile in each country's EP electoral history: Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom, including both Western European (WE) and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Moreover, in only three countries (Malta, Austria, and Cyprus) TV has been lower than 10, lower than the average volatility in WE national elections after World War II (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2017).

As expected, there are some differences between WE and CEE countries (respectively, 20.7 and 28.2). Notwithstanding this – still relevant – difference between the two regions, even Western European countries display a clear pattern of instability, as the average volatility exceeds the threshold of 20 set by Mair (2011) for considering an election as highly volatile. The key difference that still distinguishes Western countries from their Central and Eastern counterparts can be found by disentangling the aggregate index of electoral volatility between its two internal com-

| Table 1 - Electoral Volatility and its components in the 2019 EP elections, European Union | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|------|---------|
| COUNTRY | REGV | ALTV | OTHV | TOTAL V |
| Austria | 2.65 | 5.6 | 0.25 | 8.5 |
| Belgium | 0.55 | 16.8 | 0.65 | 18 |
| Bulgaria | 4.05 | 6.55 | 2.95 | 13.55 |
| Croatia | 8.55 | 11.75 | 10.2 | 30.5 |
| Cyprus | 2.75 | 4.3 | 1.9 | 8.95 |
| Czech Republic | 3.75 | 28.15 | 3.7 | 35.6 |
| Denmark | 4.45 | 19.4 | | 23.85 |
| Estonia | 2.95 | 16 | 14.1 | 33.05 |
| Finland | | 10.7 | 1.5 | 12.2 |
| France | 3.3 | 8.25 | 2.25 | 13.8 |
| Germany | 1.65 | 19.35 | 2.4 | 23.4 |
| Greece | 7.9 | 13 | 5.75 | 26.65 |
| Hungary | 6.3 | 13.4 | 0.65 | 20.35 |
| Ireland | 1.25 | 18.95 | 3.05 | 23.25 |
| Italy | 3.85 | 31.7 | 1.7 | 37.25 |
| Latvia | 6.3 | 21.35 | 1.35 | 29 |
| Lithuania | 4.75 | 19.6 | 8.15 | 32.5 |
| Luxembourg | 1.05 | 16.5 | 0.25 | 17.8 |
| Malta | 1.35 | 1.75 | 1.05 | 4.15 |
| Netherlands | 6.45 | 23 | 0.95 | 30.4 |
| Poland | 4.75 | 11.45 | 0.3 | 16.5 |
| Portugal | 6.2 | 9.05 | 1.8 | 17.05 |
| Romania | 12.55 | 6.55 | 5.9 | 25 |
| Slovakia | 22.25 | 15.75 | 3.6 | 41.6 |
| Slovenia | 20.05 | 11.6 | 1.25 | 32.9 |
| Spain | | 17.25 | 2.55 | 19.8 |
| Sweden | 3.15 | 13.35 | 0.2 | 16.7 |
| United Kingdom | 16.5 | 31.6 | 2.3 | 50.4 |
| Mean WE | 3.71 | 15.33 | 1.68 | 20.71 |
| Mean CEE | 8.75 | 14.74 | 4.74 | 28.23 |
| Mean EU | 5.69 | 15.1 | 2.88 | 23.67 |

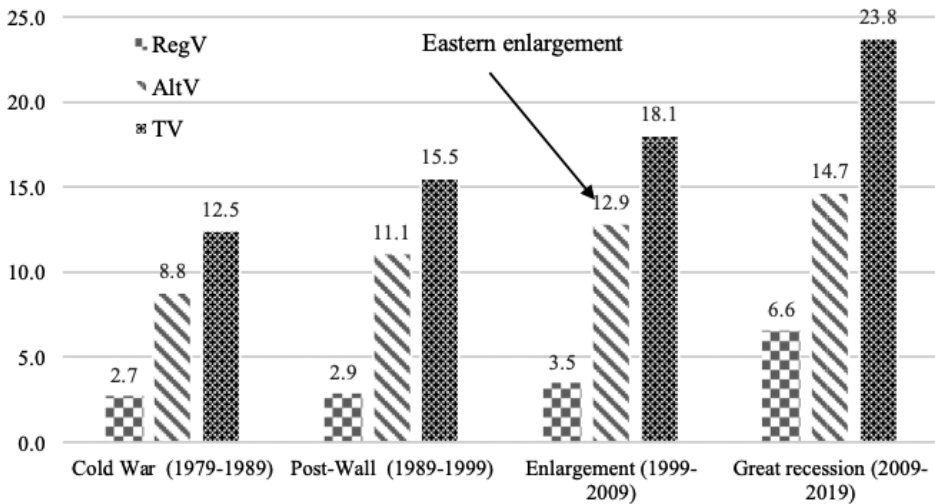
Note: RegV refers to Regeneration volatility, AltV to Alteration volatility, OthV to Other parties volatility. For more information, see Emanuele et al. (2019)

ponents of Regeneration (RegV) and Alteration (AltV). The former measures the electoral volatility due to the entry and exit of parties from the party system, while the latter is the electoral volatility caused by vote switching between existing parties.

Table 1 shows that what accounts for most of the difference in electoral volatility levels between the two regions is due to RegV: despite the recent wave of new party emergence in Western Europe (Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Emanuele and Chiamonte 2018), CEE countries continue to represent a sort of ‘world apart’. Indeed, RegV is equal to 8.75 in CEE, against 3.7 in WE. In other words, in an average 2019 EP election in CEE, one or more new parties emerge, accounting for 17.5% of votes, or one or more parties that existed in the 2014 election disappear.¹ Conversely, the electoral shifts among established parties are similar in the two regions, as AltV is 15.3 in WE and 14.7 in CEE.

To fully understand the scope of party system change brought about by this round of EP elections, it is necessary to put the 2019 results into a longitudinal perspective. Figure 1 reports the average levels of electoral volatility in Europe over time. We have divided the temporal span of the analysis into four meaningful electoral phases: the ‘Cold War’ period, 1979-1989; the ‘post-Wall’ period, 1989-1999; the ‘Enlargement’ phase, 1999-2009; and, finally, the ‘Recession’, after 2009.

Figure 1. Components of electoral volatility in EP elections during different electoral phases



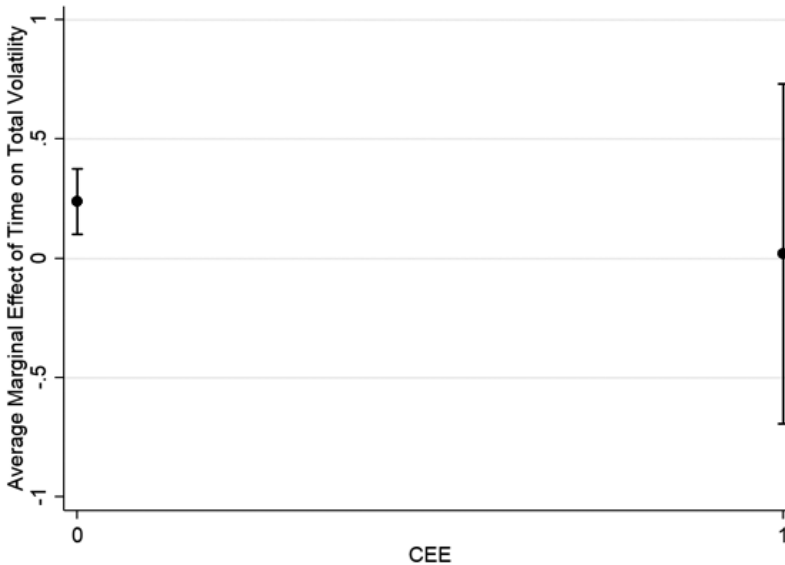
1. This finding is consistent with previous studies about the exceptionality of CEE as concern the multiplication of ‘electoral hurricanes’ due to new party emergence in national elections (Houghton and Deegan-Krause 2015).

By looking more into detail at the data, what strikingly emerges from the figure is that moving from phase 1 to phase 4, electoral volatility and its two internal components have undergone a monotonic increase over time. TV has skyrocketed from 12.5 in the Cold War period to 23.8 in the Recession. Turning to its internal components, AltV shows a fairly constant increase over time, from 8.8 (first phase) to 14.7 (last phase), while RegV is almost stable in the first three phases before a sharp upsurge in the Recession phase (6.6).

The monotonic increase of TV over time is not merely a descriptive fact but, rather, a robust finding. Table 2 shows the results of a multivariate regression analysis of TV (Models 1 and 2) and its internal components (Models 3, AltV, and 4, RegV) on time (measured in years) and a dichotomous variable indicating CEE countries.

Overall, evidence shows the effect of time on the increase in TV is significant at the highest level of confidence ($p < 0.01$)². Furthermore, our analysis shows this increase over time is due only to the changing patterns in WE, given that CEE countries display very high but steady values of TV across the three electoral periods (2004-2009, 2009-2014, 2014-2019). This is shown by Model 2, where an interaction between time and the dichotomous variable for CEE proves not statistically significant. Figure 2 below reports the Average Marginal Effect (AME) of time on volatility at the two possible values assumed by our dichotomous variable. As shown in the figure, the effect of time on TV is significant only in the case of Western Europe. In other words, a ‘permanent instability’ is what has occurred in EP elections in CEE countries since 2004, while an increasingly destructured party system is the dominant trend in WE.

Figure 2. Average Marginal Effect of Time on TV in WE (CEE=0) and CEE (CEE=1)



- These findings are robust to alternative specifications: adding an additional dichotomous variable to account for Southern European countries, performing a regression with country clusters, a panel-corrected standard error (PCSE) regression, or a Prais-Winsten regression.

Table 2 - Regression analysis of TV and its internal components (AltV and RegV)

| | MODEL 1 (TV) | | MODEL 2 (TV) | | MODEL 3 (ALTV) | | MODEL 4 (REGV) | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|--------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | b | se | b | se | b | se | b | se |
| Time | 0.232** | 0.068 | 0.238** | 0.069 | 0.152** | 0.051 | 0.054 | 0.036 |
| CEE | 9.075*** | 1.798 | 15.82 | 11.429 | 2.600 | 1.340 | 4.493*** | 0.959 |
| Time*CEE | | | -0.219 | 0.367 | | | | |
| Constant | 11.74*** | 1.584 | 11.58*** | 1.610 | 8.613*** | 1.181 | 2.200* | 0.845 |
| R-squared | 0.297 | | 0.298 | | 0.127 | | 0.198 | |
| Number of elections | 147 | | 147 | | 147 | | 147 | |
| Number of countries | 28 | | 28 | | 28 | | 28 | |
| *p < .05; **p < .01, ***p < .001. | | | | | | | | |

By disentangling TV into RegV and AltV, Models 3 and 4 in Table 2 indicate that AltV shows the same increasing pattern over time as TV, with only an important difference: the dichotomous variable for CEE is not significant, which means that there are no differences in the AltV between the two regions, as compared to TV. Conversely, in the case of RegV, the effect of time is not significant (as already mentioned), while the analysis shows a powerful positive effect of the CEE dichotomous variable. In other words, this means that a certain level of Regeneration volatility has always existed in EP elections, and this marks a clear difference compared to the historical patterns observed in Western European national elections (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2017).

COMPARING EP AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS: STILL A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE?

In the remaining part of this chapter, we raise two further research questions to address the two tasks formulated at the beginning. First, to what extent do the levels and trends of electoral volatility in EP elections match or deviate from those observed in national elections in the same countries and phases. Second, whether this increasing instability of party systems signals changing patterns of competition and cleavage structure across Europe.

Starting from the first research question (RQ), by considering all EP elections occurred in the 28 member countries, volatility (TV) is equal to 19 (N=147), while in national elections, in the same countries and period, TV is 15.1. By disentangling this average between Western Europe (WE) and the CEE countries, TV in EP elections is 16.4 (N=118) in WE and 28.0 (N=29) in CEE. To make a comparison, in WE national elections, TV has been, on average, 12.3 and, in CEE national elections, 26.4.³

As we have previously shown, this average TV in EP elections is the result of a sharp and monotonic increase over time (see Figure 1) and this is absolutely consistent with the trends observed in TV in national elections in WE, specifically with regard to the last phase marked by the impact of the Great Recession (Drummond 2006; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Dassonneville and Hooghe 2017). Conversely, for CEE, we have evidence of sustained and prolonged instability ever since the democratic transition. However, recent studies have not detected an increase over time for CEE countries, but rather a steady trend or even a decrease (Lane and Ersson 2007; Casal Bértoa 2013; Emanuele, Chiaramonte and Soare 2018).

All in all, and with some surprise, a clear difference between EP and national elections can be detected only in Western Europe.⁴ In this regard, the long-established second-order election theory (Reif and Schmitt 1980) stresses that, given that there is less at stake in EP elections compared to national elections, voters are freer to cast a sincere vote, and they often exploit this opportunity to defect from governing parties or, more generally, from major parties to support opposition parties and new contenders. As a result, a higher TV is expected in EP elections compared to national ones. To accurately gauge whether TV significantly differs in two electoral arenas (EP and national ones) and to what extent such difference predicted by the second-order-election theory varies over time, we performed a regression analysis where the outcome is Total Volatility (TV) in both European and national elections, and the predictors are: a dichotomous variable for CEE countries, a categorical variable for phases (reference category: Cold War), and a dichotomous variable where 0 is attributed to TV in national elections, and 1 to TV in EP elections. Finally, we also added an interaction between the variable for EP vs national elections and the phase variable.⁵ This interaction allows us to test whether being an EP election vs a national one has a significant marginal effect on TV across phases. Figure 3 reports the average marginal effects (AMEs) of the interaction.

3. Data on WE have been taken from Emanuele (2015), while, for CEE, from Emanuele Chiaramonte and Soare (2018).
4. This result is similar to the one found by Caramani (2015), whose analysis does not consider elections after 2009. This means that the recent Recession phase has not changed the overall volatility pattern between national and EP elections.
5. Results are not shown but are available upon request.

Figure 3. Average Marginal Effect of EP vs national elections at different phases

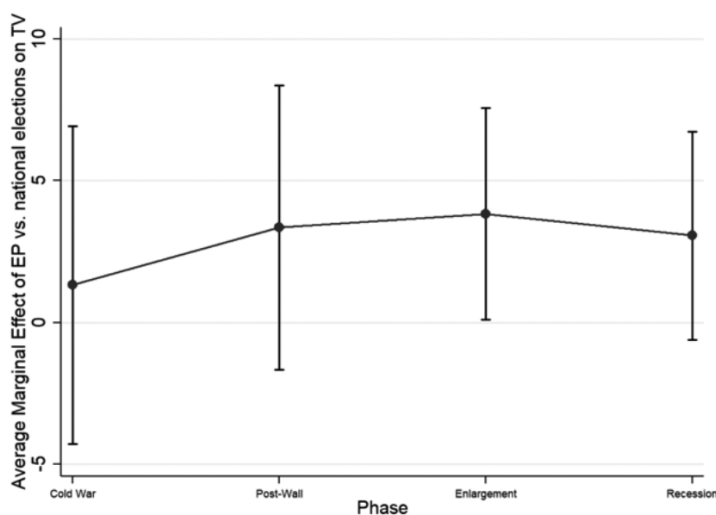


Figure 3 shows that the marginal effect of the dummy distinguishing EP elections from national ones has a significant effect only during the Enlargement phase. This finding is rather surprising, as it shows that the distinction between EP and national elections does not make a difference for predicting TV scores neither until 1999 nor after 2009. In the first two phases, European party systems are still in a phase of relative electoral stability, and the above finding means that EP elections do not bring a significant additional instability compared to national elections. Conversely, the non-significant marginal effect in the Recession phase, characterised – as seen earlier – by skyrocketing electoral volatility, witnesses a general convergence towards instability, regardless of the type of election. To sum up, this analysis rejects, except for the 1999-2009 period and at least for this limited aspect related to the expected difference in volatility between the two electoral arenas, the second-order election model.

BELOW THE SURFACE:

A CHANGING CLEAVAGE STRUCTURE IN EUROPEAN PARTY SYSTEMS?

What remains to be explored is our second RQ, namely, whether the detected increasing instability witnesses the presence of changing patterns of competition and cleavage structure in European party systems. To do so, we have resorted to a traditional conceptual and empirical tool, namely, bloc volatility (Bartolini and Mair 1990). The concept of bloc volatility refers to the net change in the aggregate vote share for all parties included in a given bloc.⁶ For a long time, given the predomi-

6. Bloc volatility is a component of TV, the other one being the electoral shifts among parties within the same bloc (Within-Bloc volatility).

nance of the left-right dimension of competition in Europe (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990), the concept of bloc has been intrinsically connected to that of cleavage and, more specifically, of class cleavage (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Bartolini 2000). Nonetheless, the concept and the measurement of bloc volatility can be extended beyond the class cleavage, to capture the divide produced by any given cleavage. In this regard, besides the class cleavage, recent studies have emphasized the emergence of a new important transnational cleavage, that has been thought to structure political conflict in Europe. Kriesi and others (2006; 2008; 2012) have extensively analysed the emergence of a ‘demarcation-integration’ cleavage, opposing the so-called ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ of globalisation. This cleavage is based on three main dimensions: one related to the opposition to free trade and open markets (economic globalisation vs. protectionism); the second related to the EU dimension (pro-EU vs. anti-EU); and the third one related to being in favour or against multiculturalism and immigration.⁷

To capture the characteristics of the cleavage structure in European party systems and their evolution over time, we have calculated, in each country and election period, the vote share received by parties belonging to the class and the demarcation blocs and also the related class bloc volatility and demarcation bloc volatility. To do so, we refer to the classification of parties in the two blocs provided in Emanuele et al. (2019) and based on both quantitative and qualitative criteria⁸. According to the theoretical framework of Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Bartolini (2000), the strength of a cleavage can be captured by two indicators. The first, straightforwardly, is the aggregate vote share of parties politicising that cleavage: the larger this vote share is, the more relevant this division is in the society.

The second indicator can be captured by the mobility of voters across the cleavage line. The interpretation of this second indicator depends on the degree of maturity of the cleavage: in cases of a consolidated cleavage, like the class one, limited electoral mobility across the cleavage line signals that voters conceive that conflict mainly as a dimension of *identification*. Conversely, high electoral mobility across the cleavage line witnesses that voters no longer consider that conflict as relevant, given they cross it between consecutive elections. On the other side, for emerging cleavages, like the alleged demarcation one, the first phase of political and electoral instauration is usually characterised by a relevant mobility across the cleavage line, as voters move towards parties emphasising the new cleavage. Therefore, in this context, the new cleavage is mainly a dimension of *competition*.

7. Different scholars have supported the idea of the existence of this new cleavage by providing a vast range of conceptualisation (Bornschier 2010; De Vries 2018; Strijbis, Helmer and De Wilde 2018; Hooghe and Marks 2018). For more details, see the codebook in Emanuele et al. (2019).
8. For further information on the operationalisation and classification methods, see the codebook in Emanuele et al. (2019).

Figure 4. Aggregate vote share for parties in the class and demarcation blocs in EP elections across different electoral phases

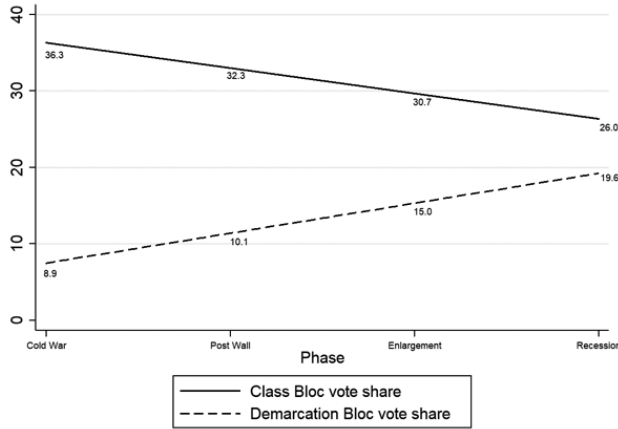
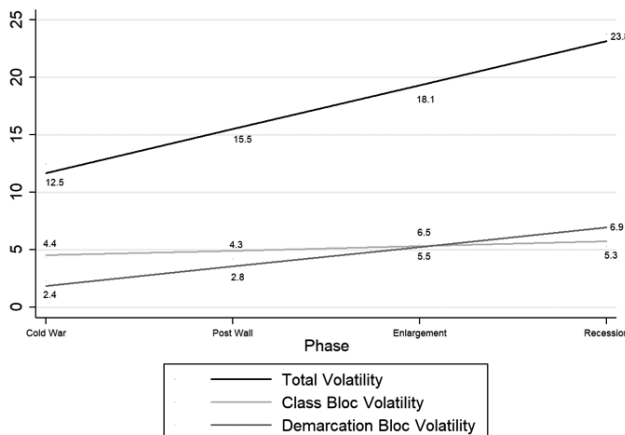


Figure 4 patently shows a different evolution of the two cleavages over time. On the one hand, the traditional class cleavage has experienced a sharp decline over time in the vote share of parties politicising it (Communist, Socialist, and Social-Democratic ones). This finding is, of course, not new and largely discussed by the literature (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Franklin, Mackie and Valen 1992; Drummond 2006), but what really strikes us is the evolution of the vote share of parties belonging to the deemed demarcation bloc, which has undergone an opposite, increasing, trend over time. While, in the 1980s, the ratio between the two blocs was more than 4:1 in favour of the class bloc, in the last decade, this ratio has shrunk to 1.3:1, with a class bloc representing, on average, 26% of the vote share vs. a demarcation bloc following with an average of 19.6.

Figure 5. Evolution of TV, class bloc volatility, and demarcation bloc volatility across different phases



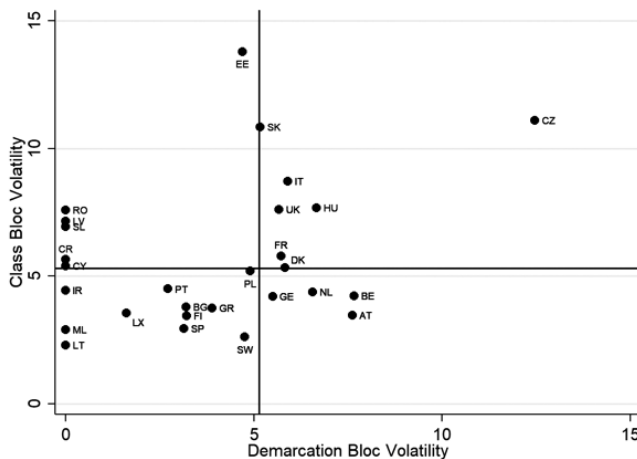
Yet, this is just the first part of the story. Figure 5 tells us the second part, comparing the mobility across the cleavage line for the two cleavages. We observe two distinct patterns for the two cleavages also in terms of bloc volatility. The class bloc shows a fairly stable volatility over time, which is also very limited compared to TV. This brings us to a crucial point: notwithstanding the sharp electoral decline observed above, class bloc volatility still represents a domain of *identification* for a – more and more limited – portion of the electorate. Indeed, it also interesting to note that, in an age of increasing electoral instability, bloc volatility, which represents a component of TV, has not followed the same upwards trend, which also means that volatility is more and more accounted for by different dimensions of competition besides class.

The demarcation bloc volatility is different. In this regard, Figure 5 shows that, from the first to the last phase, the level of electoral mobility across the cleavage line has tripled. This is a largely expected outcome in the case of emerging cleavages, where, at the beginning, bloc volatility is limited because of the very small vote share of parties competing on that dimension, and, then, as these parties obtain increasing

percentages of votes and a larger portion of the electorate abandons older allegiances for this new one, bloc volatility consequently rises. This trend signals that demarcation bloc volatility represents more and more a domain of *competition* in Europe.

Finally, it is interesting to take a look at the *national* variations of cleavage structure configuration in Europe. Figure 6 plots the 28 EU countries across two dimensions based on, respectively, the average volatility of parties in the class and demarcation blocs. The chart can be divided into four quadrants according to the mean values of the two variables.

Figure 6. National variations of class bloc volatility and demarcation bloc volatility in Europe



Starting from the lower right quadrant, we find four ‘consensual’ (Lijphart 1999) democracies (Austria, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands), where class represents a domain of *identification* (class bloc volatility is lower than the European average), while the demarcation bloc volatility is comparatively high. This means that, next to the class cleavage, a new dimension of competition has been consolidating: let us notice the presence, in these four countries, of relevant parties belonging to the demarcation bloc, such as, among others, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Flemish Interest (VB) in Belgium, Alternative for Germany (AFD), and the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV).

A different situation can be found in the upper right quadrant, where the demarcation bloc is also on the rise, but the high mobility across the class cleavage is likely to witness a reduced capacity of class to represent a domain of identification for voters. This quadrant mixes Western European countries with Central and Eastern European countries. The former are clearly facing a reshaping of their dimensions of competition, with a decline of traditional parties to the advantage of challenger parties (France, Italy, the United Kingdom). The latter (Central and Eastern European countries) are countries where the class bloc has always been limited (Hungary) or has experienced a deep decline (Czech Republic and Slovakia).

Moreover, in as much as 11 countries (lower left quadrant), both cleavages show a pattern of electoral stability. This may be due to the low relevance of the cleavage as a dimension of conflict (such as the paradigmatic case of Ireland for class), or to the fact that the cleavage has already stabilised, thus becoming a central domain of *identification*. Obvious examples of this circumstance are Spain and Portugal, in the case of class, and Poland for demarcation. This latter represents an exception in the demarcation cleavage, as parties referring to the demarcation bloc total an average support of 37.1%, witnessing that, in this country, this cleavage has successfully overcome its phase of instauration and consolidation, becoming the main domain of identification.

Lastly, in the upper left quadrant, we find five countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Romania, and Slovenia) where there are no parties at all representing the demarcation bloc and where the volatility for the class bloc is comparatively high. Also, here, we find Estonia, an outlier with the largest class bloc volatility in Europe by far, which means that voters massively cross the class cleavage line in consecutive elections, thus not recognising it as a proper dimension of conflict.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have explored features of European party systems, both following the 2019 EP elections and also from a longitudinal viewpoint, by focusing on electoral volatility. Among our main findings, we have discussed the remarkable electoral mobility brought about by the recent round of EP elections. This can be seen as the last step of a long-term process of increasing instability, at least in Western Europe, while Central and Eastern European countries have been always characterized by a permanent instability since their accession to the EU. Interestingly, from a longitudinal

perspective, a substantial difference in electoral volatility between EP and national elections is detectable only between 1999 and 2009. This piece of evidence signals the second-order election model, at least from the viewpoint of electoral volatility, appears not anymore very suited to fully describe EP elections – and their differences from national elections. Finally, we have also focused on the stability and changes in party systems concerning the structure and the evolution of the class and the demarcation cleavages across Europe. Our analysis has shown a marked decline in the class cleavage which, even if it still represents an important domain of identification in many European countries, is now flanked in most countries by the demarcation cleavage, which has undergone a process of development or even consolidation.

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Chapter Three

Spitzenkandidaten 2.0: From experiment to routine in European elections?

THOMAS CHRISTIANSEN AND MICHAEL SHACKLETON

ABSTRACT

The Lisbon Treaty ushered in a new mode of appointing the President of the European Commission. The 2014 European elections witnessed the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process through which European political parties and the European Parliament managed to wrest control over this appointment from the European Council. While successful from the Parliament's perspective in terms of the political outcome, the academic assessment of the system led to mixed reviews, and from both a political and a legal perspective the process has remained controversial. Nevertheless, in the run-up to the 2019 elections, pan-European campaigns by *Spitzenkandidaten* intensified, with most parties except for the Far Right nominating leading candidates. This article analyses the maturation of this process, by reviewing its evolution from 2014 to 2019, identifying the degree of change and continuity in practices and then assessing the impact of the process on party political campaigns, election results and subsequent appointment decisions. By way of conclusion, the article discusses the degree to which *Spitzenkandidaten* have become established as a routine part of EU politics and reflects on the future prospects of the system.

INTRODUCTION

One of the key features of the 2014 European elections was the innovation of *Spitzenkandidaten* – leading candidates nominated by the main political parties for the post of President of the European Commission. This idea was founded on a new provision in the Lisbon Treaty, for the European Council to take into account the elections in proposing a candidate for the European Commission presidency, who would then be elected by the European Parliament.¹ Providing a particular – some would argue extreme – interpretation of this treaty article, the Party of European Socialists

1. Treaty of European Union, Art. 17(7): “Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members.”

took the initiative in 2014 by putting forward the then-President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, as their candidate. The other parties – Christian-Democrats, Liberals, Greens and the European Left - eventually followed suit, leading to pan-European campaigning including a series of debates among the leading candidates.

The outcome of this process is well-known: the election of Jean-Claude Juncker, the leading candidate of the European People's Party (EPP) as Commission President. It was regarded as a success for the European Parliament (EP) in its inter-institutional power struggle with the European Council, where several heads of state had reservations about ceding the initiative to the EP. As such, it fitted into a wider history of the EP expanding its power beyond the formal text of the treaty – a process which has been termed interstitial institutional change in the European Union (Farrell and Heritier, 2007; Moury, 2007) – and which included previous innovations such as trialogues and hearings for designated Commissioners.

This is not to say that this innovation was without controversy. Beyond the European Council which, as an institution, was somewhat critical about the idea for obvious, self-interested reasons, critics have suggested different interpretations of the legal text. For example, does “taking account of the elections” necessarily mean that the largest party to emerge from the elections has a right to the Commission President position? Does the Treaty not intend that the European Council be the body that proposes the candidate for this position rather than the EP or individual political parties?

Given the novelty of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process in 2014, initial assessments concluded that its introduction had the potential to constitute a transformative moment for representative democracy at the European level (Shackleton, 2017), but that an evaluation of its lasting impact would be more appropriate after the 2019 experience (Christiansen, 2015). The second instalment of the use of this procedure ought to provide clues as to whether the 2014 experiment was a one-off, or whether it has managed to establish itself as a routine part of European democratic governance. While this chapter is written only a couple of weeks after the 2019 election, and prior to the subsequent appointments to the main leadership positions in the EU, it nevertheless provides a first opportunity for such an assessment. In other words, this chapter addresses the question of how the *Spitzenkandidaten* process has performed in 2019, and what this experience tells us about the lasting impact of the system. We do so by providing in the next section a brief discussion of how the system has been assessed, distinguishing between its perceived advantages and disadvantages. This is followed by an analysis of the 2019 experience, considering both developments that have strengthened and those that have weakened the operation and the impact of the system. By way of conclusion we provide an outlook on the future prospects of the system based on this analysis.

THE PROMISE AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SPITZENKANDIDATEN SYSTEM

The underlying rationale for the original treaty change and the subsequent introduction of leading candidates was the intention to increase the democratic legitimacy of the office of the Commission President (and by implication of the Commission as a whole). This would be achieved through a more direct link between the outcome of European elections and the appointment of the head of the European Commission, creating a tangible connection between voter preferences and the way in which Europe is governed. This would be further facilitated by the intermediate steps that the introduction of *Spitzenkandidaten* engenders: the need to form a party-political coalition in order to achieve the required majority for the election of the Commission President, the conclusion of formal or informal agreements among parties concerning the ‘governing programme’ of such a coalition, and the creation of a more stable majority in Parliament on which the Commission can then base its legislative and policy agenda (Ondarza, 2014).

A corollary of this increase in democratic legitimacy is the greater transparency of the way in which leadership appointment decisions are taken in the European Union. The Commission President is now expected to emerge from a public contest rather than from deal-making behind the closed doors of the European Council (Baldoni et al., 2014). Election to this position involves prior public commitments to certain objectives and adherence to specific positions, making the holder more accountable to Parliament and the electorate as a whole.

Furthermore, the strengthened link between Commission and Parliament resulting from this process also implies a weakening of the link between Commission and European Council, which in turn points to a Commission President who is more independent of national governments, and hence more able to advance the common European interest. This system therefore is seen as enabling the European executive to be more effective and more impartial in comparison with past practice when member states in the European Council could bargain with potential Commission President candidates over favourable treatment in return for their appointment.

One other important benefit of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system was meant to be the greater salience of the European elections, the greater media attention devoted to the individual candidates, and the impact that this would have in terms of public awareness, electoral turnout and ultimately the legitimacy of the election results (Schmitt et al., 2015). Against the background of a decades-long decline in participation rates at European elections (it fell from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2014 – but see Chapter 4), the *Spitzenkandidaten* system promised a reversal of fortunes in this respect by making the European elections both more visible and more genuinely European (thereby countering their nature as second-order elections).

While expectations with regard to greater democratic legitimacy, an increase in public accountability and a higher electoral turnout were strong arguments in favour of the new system, critics have pointed out several weaknesses. One weakness was that the President of the European Commission is a president in name only, presiding as she or he does over a College of Commissioners that formally decides by sim-

ply majority, and which is composed of members nominated by national governments. This means that Commission Presidents have less authority over their ‘government’ than prime ministers have at the national level (not to speak of actual presidents like in the US or France).

Beyond the Commission itself, any successful candidate not only has to work with coalitions in the EP in order to succeed with a particular policy-initiative, but also requires majority support in the European Council. In other words, unlike national leaders a Commission President is inevitably engaged in a permanent search for compromise, first within the Commission and then in relations with the other EU institutions. This in turn means that the kind of promises and even manifestos that candidates would be campaigning on cannot actually be taken as indicators of subsequent performance in office and are thus misleading for the electorate. This not only limits the usefulness of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system in terms of holding the Commission President to account, but also suggests that – far from providing a stable legislative majority – the system still requires the search for ad hoc support for each individual policy proposal (Ondarza, 2019).

These arguments run counter to the previous arguments on democratic legitimacy and stability of governance, indeed – if correct – they amount to the charge that the image created by the *Spitzenkandidaten* is actually counterproductive in raising false expectations among the electorate. Once voters come to realise that this promise of a more accountable and stable ‘European government’ emerging from the outcome of elections is not achievable in practice, the impact on support for the European Union could prove to be negative (Höpner, 2014).

In addition to these criticisms one also needs to consider the wider limitations of such a system. The idea of pan-European campaigning may sound good, but actually hits the buffers when confronted with the multilingual electoral space that constitutes the EU. No single candidate can actually hope to speak directly to the voters of more than a few countries, and on occasion perhaps only his or her own native country. While English has become a lingua franca in Brussels, and debates among candidates have been held in English, French and German, most EU citizens have not been able to listen to communications from leading candidates in their own language. Consequently, in 2014 (and most likely again in 2019) the *Spitzenkandidaten* received most attention in Germany where both candidates were able to debate directly in German (Shackleton, 2017).

This structural impediment to pan-European campaigning contributes to and is reinforced by media coverage of European elections that is still very much divided along national lines, with – essentially still *national* – media reporting on national lead candidates (which many parties in various members states appoint in addition to the EU-level leading candidates). The consequence of this is a generally low level of name recognition of the leading candidates across the EU (Van der Brug et al., 2016), and *Spitzenkandidaten* receiving attention from the media predominantly in their own country (Hobolt, 2014). For their part, national political parties have little incentive to prioritize candidates of another nationality for Commission President above their own candidates standing for the European Parliament. These practical

considerations feed into the much broader question of an elusive European *demos* (Weiler, 1999) and the presence of multiple *demoi* in the European polity (Nicolaidis, 2004). In other words, the new system cannot remove the structural obstacles to pan-European elections, and its pretence of doing so could also be counterproductive in terms of the legitimacy of EU governance.

ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SPITZENKANDIDATEN SYSTEM

Against the background of the advocacy in favour and against the idea of *Spitzenkandidaten* it is important to be specific about the manner in which the actual practice of the system and its impact on EU politics is being assessed. A fairly simple, if not simplistic, approach to such an assessment would focus on the basic continuation of the discourse about, and the practice of, the system. In that regard, a repeat in 2019 of the 2014 practice counts as a success. However, even such an assessment does not take us very far. A more meaningful assessment must include an analysis not only of the basic maintenance of the system, but ultimately also of the impact it has on the nature of campaigning, electoral behaviour and post-election decision-making.

Implicit in the above discussion of “success” for the EP was the idea that a measure of its performance was the ability to determine who would be the “winner”. However, we would suggest a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes “successful” performance of the system. This includes recognition of several elements of what the system stands for, not all of which may be realised. In other words, success or failure can be partial.

Specifically, a variety of scenarios and outcomes are possible in this regard. First, EP and European Council may have different preferences regarding the choice of Commission President, and a resolution of such a disagreement would require one side or the other to back down. This would mean that if the EP managed to coalesce around a single candidate and to impose him/her on the European Council, the system could be seen to have succeeded in firmly establishing itself. On the other hand, if the European Council was able to get its preferred choice for Commission President elected by the EP and that person had *not* been a leading candidate, then that would be seen *per se* as a sign of failure for both the EP and the idea of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system.

However, matters are more complex than that. For example, the parties in the EP may come to an agreement on one particular lead candidate while the European Council, perhaps due to different party political majorities in that institution, may push for a different *Spitzenkandidat* representing one the other European political parties. If the European Council succeeded in this strategy, this could be seen as a loss for the EP, but nevertheless as a success for the procedure – increasing its chance of become a routine part of EU politics.

Indeed, the case could also be made that even if in the end a Commission President is elected who was not among the nominated leading candidates, that would not necessarily mean that the system had had no influence. It would be a matter for

empirical assessment whether the European Council had to "buy" the nomination by giving in to the EP on other issues (i.e. matters of policy substance or other leadership appointments), and also as to the degree to which an alternative candidate would have had to demonstrate particular ability, not required in the *pre-Spitzenkandidaten era*.

Beyond this assessment of the inter-institutional struggle over the appointment of the Commission President, there are wider criteria to be considered. Specifically, a measure of success of the system is the nature and extent of the media attention it generates ("To what extent do pan-European leading candidates help to raise the profile of the European elections?") and the impact that the system has on participation rates in the European elections ("To what extent is turnout at European elections related to the presence of leading candidates?").

For this paper it has not been possible yet to conduct the kind of empirical data collection that would be required to make dependable statements about the system's impact on media coverage and voting intentions. It is true, of course, that in 2019 the turnout at European election had gone up for the first time ever, rising above 50 per cent for the first time since 1994.² It is tempting to attribute this increase to the added publicity and political debate generated by the *Spitzenkandidaten* (*Financial Times*, 2019). However, without further research this remains an assumption rather than a proven fact. Instead, in the analysis below we limit ourselves to a preliminary assessment of the way in which the re-appearance of the system in 2019 has impacted on inter-institutional relations, party politics and leadership appointments.

THE IMPACT OF SPITZENKANDIDATEN SYSTEM ON THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

The first point to note is that, as in 2014, the main political parties did again nominate leading candidates (see Table 1 below), that these candidates engaged in pan-European campaigning, that a significant number of public, televised debates were held involving some or all the candidates (*Financial Times*, 2019; Fleming, 2019), and that post-election discussions about the future Commission President were dominated by the *Spitzenkandidaten* system (*Politico*, 2019). As in 2014, the leading candidates of the two largest parties, EPP and PES, Manfred Weber and Frans Timmermans, respectively, received most of the attention and debated on a number of occasions, both alone and with the other candidates (even if Weber was strangely absent from the Maastricht Debate, the biggest debate outside the official debate in the EP). At first glance, it therefore seemed as if it was business as usual for the system, giving credence to the belief that it had gone beyond a one-off experiment and had established itself as an emerging routine.

2. Turnout (in per cent) at European elections: 61.99 (1979); 58.98 (1984); 58.41 (1989); 56.67 (1994); 49.51 (1999); 45.47 (2004); 42.97 (2009); 42.61 (2014); 50.95 (2019). See Chapter 4 for analysis on this point.

| EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTY | EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTY |
|---|--|
| European People's Party (EPP) | Manfred Weber (DE) |
| Party of European Socialists (PES) | Frans Timmermans (NL) |
| Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) | Emma Bonino (IT); Guy Verhofstad (BE); Katalin Cseh (HU); Luis Garicano (ES); Margrethe Vestager (DK); Nicola Beer (DE); Violeta Bulc (SV) |
| European Green Party | Bas Eickhout (NL); Ska Keller (DE) |
| Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE) | Jan Zahradil (CZ) |
| Party of the European Left (GUE) | Nico Cué (BE); Violeta Tomić (SV) |
| European Free Alliance (EFA) | Oriol Junqueras (ES) |

However, while at the time of writing a decision on the new Commission President is still outstanding, one can already observe how the situation has changed in important ways. The 2019 experience exhibited a number of significant differences as compared to 2014 when it comes to the manner in which the EP and the European Council entered the 'game'. First, the European Council in 2019 was much better prepared than in 2014 when it arguably was taken by surprise at the dynamic that the Parliament's initiative in favour of *Spitzenkandidaten* produced. It struggled and ultimately ran out of time – under pressure from EP and the media – to propose credible alternatives to the EP's preferred candidate. In 2019, the European Council knew better what to expect, scheduled meetings for 28 June and 21 July in order to debate its options in good time, and appointed its own working group composed of six of its members – two each representing the EPP, Socialists and Liberals (De La Baume and Herszenhorn, 2019b).

Second, by contrast, the EP appeared significantly less cohesive than it had been in 2014. Whereas previously there was unanimous consent among the four biggest groups that had nominated leading candidates that they would support each other in order to ensure that the procedure would succeed (Shackleton, 2017), that unity was broken in 2019 when the Liberals changed position on the idea of *Spitzenkandidaten*. They now regarded it as illegitimate, particularly because of the absence of agreement in Parliament and the European Council on the creation of transnational lists for the European elections (Rios, 2019). Instead they appointed an 'expertise team' of seven senior politicians that was to be regarded as pool for the various leadership positions that would need to be filled in 2019. This 'having your cake

and eating it' approach worked well, since it allowed Liberal politicians to participate in the various debates among leading candidates, while at the same time keeping their options open with regard to the deals that would subsequently be made to appoint not only the Commission President, but also the positions of European Council President, EP President and High Representative for Foreign Policy.

Both the better positioning of the European Council and the more fragmented support in the EP can be linked to the same source: the opposition of French President Macron's to the idea of *Spitzenkandidaten* reflecting not only his interest as a member of the European Council, but also the fact that in 2019 the Liberals – the political party that Macron's *En Marche* was intending to merge with after the elections – actually had a position of strength comparable to EPP and Socialists in the European Council, in contrast with their minority position in 2014. Based on the calculation that it would be highly unlikely that the Liberals would emerge as the largest party from the elections, but that it was perfectly reasonable to expect the European Council to agree on a Liberal candidate, it made sense for the Liberals to 'defect' from the previous coalition of parties supporting the new system.

To have the third-largest party depart from the previous script certainly weakened the system (Eder, 2019). On the other hand, the fact that in 2019 the European Conservatives (ACRE) nominated a leading candidate for the first time – the Czech MEP Jan Zahradil – meant that the Eurosceptic side also had a voice in the debates prior to the elections, and thus strengthened the representative character of the system. Indeed, in 2014 one of the main objections had been that the debates had not reflected the full range of political views since none of the Eurosceptic elements in the EP had nominated a candidate. How far the absence in 2019 of a leading candidate from the Far Right – Matteo Salvini (Lega, IT), Marie Le Pen (RN, F), the German AfD and other right-wing populists had not been able or willing to agree on joining the race with their own leading candidate – weakened the system is difficult to judge in the hypothetical. A populist anti-European contribution to the public debate might have added legitimacy to the contest but might also have generated more heat than light in the course of the debates.

This discussion already indicates that party political considerations mattered more in 2019 than they did in 2014. What was previously very much an inter-institutional battle between EP and European Council (i.e. national governments) was by 2019 much more a contest between the main political parties. For a start, it became evident already in the campaigning for the elections that the formation of a workable coalition in support of a Commission President would be required. According to all forecasts, and as confirmed by the election result itself, EPP and PES would be unable to command sufficient votes in the new EP to decide matters among themselves. Whereas in 2014 a fairly straightforward deal between these two parties – PES support for Juncker as Commission President in return for EPP support for Martin Schulz as EP President – was enough to unite the EP against the European Council, the arithmetic in 2019 is more complicated. A majority in the newly elected EP now requires either the support of the Liberals (who, as discussed above, had failed to back the system) or a deal with the Greens and exclusion of the Liberals. Either of these ave-

nues implied that the European Council would have a strong position in confronting the EP's preferred candidate with its own choice.

This observed shift from a mainly inter-institutional battle to one dominated by party political considerations is also evident from the – arguably remarkable – candidacies of several politicians who were serious contenders for the Commission President position: Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the Commission and the PES leading candidate, Margarethe Vestager, Competition Commissioner and among the slate of ALDE candidates, and Michel Barnier, the EU's Brexit Negotiator who, while not a leading candidate had been frequently mentioned as a possible successor to Jean-Claude Juncker. Each of these politicians was regarded, before and after the election, as a credible candidate for the Commission position, even though none of them was a member of a party that formed part of the government in their own country. This aspect of their CV was considered a certain limitation, but it did not categorically exclude them from consideration in a way that it would have done in the pre-*Spitzenkandidaten* era. In other words, the arrival of the new system of nominating candidates massively enlarged the pool of politicians from which a Commission President would be chosen, and this happened because party affiliation at the EU level now mattered at least as much, if not more, than party affiliation at the domestic level. Depending on the final decision regarding the various leadership posts, this change may well constitute a significant transformation in EU politics.

The leading candidates, today, dominate discussions about the choice of the next Commission President. However, it also needs to be recognised that not all of this talk has been supportive. Beyond the kind of fundamental critique against the system launched by Emmanuel Macron and others referred to above, questions were also raised about Manfred Weber's qualifications for the position, given his lack of executive experience – similar to the doubts raised about Martin Schulz's candidacy in 2014, given that he also had made his career in the European Parliament. Still, such objections against the system and individual candidates actually demonstrate the degree to which the *Spitzenkandidaten* system has set the agenda for the post-election appointment cycle. Commentators may have raised issues about Manfred Weber's fitness for the job (De La Baume and Herszenhorn, 2019) as well as his acceptability to the European Council (Kelemen, 2019), but he was nevertheless regarded as the frontrunner throughout the election campaign, given that the EPP was predicted to become the largest party in the 2019 parliament (De La Baume, 2019). 'Outsiders' such as Michel Barnier are talked about as possible alternatives to Manfred Weber (or to other *Spitzenkandidaten*) if the European Council could coalesce around them (Beswick, 2019), but that also signifies that they are seen (merely) as *alternatives* and evaluated *in comparison to* the leading candidates.

Observers and – presumably – political actors have also considered the wider range of EU leadership positions that will need to be filled in 2019 (Russack, 2019). Thus, parties having proposed lead candidates for Commission President may accept that this goal is unattainable for them in the light of the electoral arithmetic, but nevertheless have staked a claim to one of the other positions available. What in 2014 was a fairly straightforward division of spoils between Jean-Claude Jun-

cker (Commission President) and Martin Schulz (EP President), has become a more complex game in 2019, with the positions of European Council President and High Representative also in play. This logic appeared to be one of the drivers behind AL-DE's decision to nominate a "Team Europe" in order to have a range of candidates for consideration for the various positions. Even the succession of Mario Draghi as head of the European Central Bank became caught up in these considerations, if only because of informal rules about nationality: for example, if the German government were to succeed in its bid to appoint the *Bundesbank* president to this position, then this would undermine Manfred Weber's chances of becoming Commission President – and vice versa.

In other words, the *Spitzenkandidaten* system in 2019 has a number of corollary effects on EU politics beyond just the designation of the Commission President. In 2019, the system has evolved and become more complex. On the one hand, the ambivalent attitude of the Liberals and explicit opposition of Emmanuel Macron and other heads of government weakened the system. On the other hand, the larger number of parties across the political spectrum participating in the system gave it a boost, even if anti-European populists did not engage with it. Until the decisions about the Commission Presidency and other leadership positions have been concluded, it is too early to draw final conclusions about the system's impact on the 2019 elections. What we will offer in the final section below is therefore an attempt at some preliminary observations about the effects the system has had on EU politics and about its future prospects.

CONCLUSION

The title of this chapter promised a judgement on whether the *Spitzenkandidaten* system has established itself as a routine part of EU politics or was a one-off (and therefore failed) experiment. The 2019 experience has demonstrated that the system did return, and arguably more strongly so, with a wider range of parties and candidates actively participating in it. However, that does not mean that it has already acquired the status of an accepted routine. The idea remains contested, and – perhaps precisely because of its initial success in 2014 – this contestation has become more intense in 2019. After a heady launch in 2014 the *Spitzenkandidaten* system has matured in 2019, but only a successful reprise in 2024 will make it possible to offer a firmer judgement as to whether it has become a permanent fixture of EU politics.

As for the immediate impact in 2019, the outcome of negotiations over who takes over from Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission President will signal whether EP or Council have prevailed on this occasion. While this remains unresolved at the time of writing, a number of lessons can already be drawn. First among these is that the system has proven to be an effective tool for the European Parliament to set the agenda and to impose itself on the European Council. The fact that for the first time since Jacques Delors' appointment as Commission President none of the candidates, whether lead candidates or 'outsiders', was a previous member of the European Council is a powerful sign of the new dynamic and the loss of control over the

process that the European Council has experienced. The idea that the European Council would simply choose one of their own as a Commission President seems to be a thing of the past.

However, rather than looking at this in terms of absolute winners and losers, it is more appropriate to view the *Spitzenkandidaten* system as part of the wider inter-institutional relations that continue to evolve. The European Council has responded to the challenge laid down by the EP and is learning better how to play the game. Furthermore, beyond the horizontal relationship between EU institutions, the vertical nature of the process has become more apparent: in having opened up a new pan-European circuit of electoral politics, the system has also strengthened the EU level of party politics vis-à-vis the domestic level. National political parties now have to recognise the significance of EU level politics – from intra-party decision-making to party political voting shares in Parliament and European Council – in a way that was not the case before.

This is perhaps the most lasting impact so far: the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, despite being contested and still emerging, has significantly raised the importance of party politics at the European level. By 2019, in addition to inter-institutional battles and bargaining among national governments, the strategies of individual political parties, their electoral fortunes and the formation of coalitions and alliances have also become essential parts of the process determining the Commission leadership. In 2014 it might have been controversial for Jean-Claude Juncker to declare that he wanted to lead a more political European Commission. From the experience of the 2019 European elections, it is apparent how things have developed further since then, as party politics have become a defining element in the process of electing the President of the European Commission.

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Chapter Four

Explaining the outcome. Second-order factors still matter, but with an exceptional turnout increase

LORENZO DE SIO, LUANA RUSSO AND MARK N. FRANKLIN

EU ELECTIONS AS SECOND ORDER ELECTIONS

After thirty-five years, nine elections, and an impressive amount of academic literature, it is common knowledge that European elections are second-order elections. Since the seminal work of Reif and Schmitt (1980), the Second Order Election (SOE) theory has been tested in the aftermath of each successive election (among others: van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996; Marsh 1998; Schmitt 2005; Schmitt and Teperoglou 2015), and has repeatedly confirmed its effectiveness.

The main characteristic of a second-order election is to be less salient than a national Parliamentary election (which is first-order), because less is at stake. However, the key difference between other second-order (e.g. local elections) and European elections is that the latter share a key feature with first-order elections: they are both held at the national level.

Reif and Schmitt (1980) identify three main distinctive features that mark the difference between a national and a European election. Namely, (1) a lower turnout, (2) the parties in government will lose votes, and (3) smaller parties will do better and bigger parties will do worse.

Of these three characteristics, lower turnout is the one that is most obviously linked to the lower saliency of European elections. If little is at stake, why bother casting a ballot? Building on the assumption that voting in three successive national elections creates the habit of voting (Butler and Stokes, 1975; Plutzer, 2002; Franklin, 2004), Franklin and Hobolt (2011) have shown that it is indeed habitual voters that show up at the EU polls, because EU elections do not sufficiently mobilize the non-habitual ones. This partially explains why *big parties* – and especially parties in government – lose votes (van der Eijk, Franklin, and Oppenhuis 1996; Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004; Kousser 2004; Marsh 1998, 2003; Hix and Marsh 2007; Reif 1984). In fact, research suggests that voters tend overall to confirm their preferences at EU elections (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Weber, 2007; Hobolt et al., 2009). Big parties and parties in government are generally those that also manage to mobilize non-habitual voters at national elections. Therefore, low turnout will inevitably – and disproportionately – punish them (Franklin and Hobolt 2011; Franklin and Hobolt 2015). On top of this, there is evidence that 40% of voters who switch party between a national and a European election, go from a big to a small

party (Hix and Marsh, 2007). Those who tend to perform consistently better are anti-EU parties and green parties, whilst socialist parties tend to do worse. This seems to be due to a mix of (mostly) protest voting and (very partially) a proper European vote (Hix and Marsh, 2007).¹

Regarding issues, these are expected to be more important at EP elections than at national elections because the latter engender strategic considerations. Many people would rather vote for a party that is likely to have an opportunity to pass its policies into law than to simply vote for the party that is closest to them on their most important issues – if that party would be unlikely to actually enact those policies. So votes for small parties go along with votes on issues that the voters concerned feel strongly about. SOE theory would lead us to expect these to be national issues, but there can easily be a pattern of concern for issues felt to have been neglected, for example environmental issues.

Although the volatility of vote preferences might have repercussions on the stability, and, more in general, on the party system of a country, low levels of turnout are more problematic at the EU level. In fact, turnout is widely considered an indirect indicator of legitimacy and quality of democracy (Lijphart 1999; Coppedge et al 2011). Therefore, making these elections more salient and actually about Europe (and not simply a substitute for internal polls of parties' popularity among voters) has been a crucial point both in scholarly discussions and at the political level. For example, van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) argued that in order to make elections more salient in the eyes of the voters, it was necessary that they would actually focus on Europe – but this is hard to achieve. An attempt in this sense was the introduction in 2014 of the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. The main idea was to try to reinforce the link between the President of the Commission and the elections. As Hobolt (2014) noticed, this reform did alter the way in which the candidate was selected, but did not change the nature of the EU elections (see also Christiansen and Schackleton 2019, in this book). This is of course due to several circumstances, but as Nielsen and Franklin (2017) argue, the core problem lies in the fact that even with the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, the 2014 EU elections failed “to achieve the objectives that elections are supposed to achieve: failing to provide direct policy consequences for the voice of people” (p. 9). The real power does not lie in the Commission, but in the European Council and in the club of EU Prime Ministers. Therefore, linking the elections to the President of the Commission did not ignite a process that would finally instate the democratic linkage between the EU Parliament and the EU's citizens. For these reasons Nielsen and Franklin (2017) argue that EU elections not only are second-order – they are also *second-rate*. If a second-order election lacks saliency, a second-rate election lacks a policy linkage, as the connection between the

1. It should be born in mind that SOE theory sees EP elections as displaying pale reflections of national political processes and concerns. It follows that if national politics show no interest in European matters that EP elections will show no such interest either. But the discovery of European issue concerns at EP elections does not in itself run counter to SOE theory if those European issues have become evident in the national politics of the countries concerned.

voters' choices and policies that will be produced is missing. It could be argued that it is actually this second-rate nature that made the EU elections inevitably second-order in the eyes of national electorates.

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON EP ELECTION TURNOUT

Though turnout at EP elections is invariably low, the level of turnout does fluctuate from one EP election to the next, tempting commentators to try to interpret these fluctuations in terms of support for or opposition to the EU or its European Parliament. Franklin (2001) argued, with a wealth of supportive evidence, that variations in EP election turnout could be almost entirely explained on the basis of a small number of contextual (or structural) factors, leaving little room for any sort of verdict on the EU or its Parliament.

First, many European Parliament elections have evidently been subject to a "first election boost". Like the first elections held in many circumstances (Kostelka 2017), turnout was elevated at each 20th century EP election that was a first-time event: the first EP election ever held (to the Parliament of 1979); the first EP election held in the Southern Enlargement countries (Spain and Portugal) to the Parliament elected in 1984, and the first election held in the Northern Enlargement countries (Austria, Finland and Sweden) to the Parliament elected in 1994. Only in the 21st Century did there appear to be no "first election boost", at the first EP election held in Eastern Enlargement countries. But various reasons can be adduced to explain this failure of a boost to appear (in particular, electoral fatigue at elections that followed closely on referendum campaigns to ratify membership in the EU).

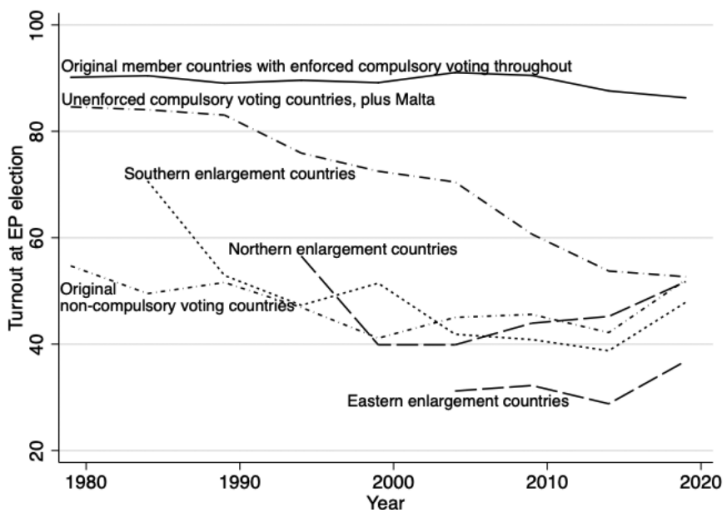
Second, European Parliament elections occur at different times in the national election cycles of member countries. This varies the low importance bestowed on them, increasing that low importance somewhat when these elections take place shortly before a national parliamentary election, meaning that they can be viewed as 'barometers' of national party standings (Eijk and Franklin 1996). The contrary is also true. When held in the immediate aftermath of national elections, EP elections have less importance than average because a better barometer of national party standings already exists in the results of that recent national election.

Third, EP elections are subject to composition effects, as repeated enlargements change the EU's complexion by adding countries in which turnout is higher or lower than the average turnout of the existing EU member states. In particular, the EU started out with four members in which electoral participation was compulsory (Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg – 40 percent of then member countries). Over time, however, Italy removed its compulsion to vote and only one of the 28 new member countries, Cyprus, was a compulsory voting country. Given the 37-percentage-point effect of compulsory voting on turnout at EP elections shown in the appendix to this chapter, the progressively smaller proportion of countries exhibiting this effect would naturally cause turnout to decline.

Finally, a new contextual effect has recently become apparent, also having to do with compulsory voting. It has been well-established that when compulsory voting

is abolished this initiates a long process of downward turnout adjustment as those who learned their voting habits under the compulsory regime retain those high-level turnout habits even as new voters fail to acquire the habit of voting at the same high level. Over the next fifty years, generational replacement slowly reduces the level of turnout to the level of those who had never known a compulsion to vote (Franklin 2004). This pattern of behavior applies to countries that had enforced the compulsion with sanctions that were apparent, even if not potent (as in Italy). But a number of countries have compulsory voting laws on the books that are not enforced. In such countries turnout was high when they acceded to the EU, even if not as high as in countries where the compulsion was enforced. Two such countries are Greece and Cyprus, both EU member states. What has become apparent in the years since Cyprus became an EU member is that it has suffered a decline in turnout that looks very like a decline that had recently become apparent in Greece (a decline that had initially been masked by the timing of Greece's second and third EP elections, very close to the next national election in each case). The implication is that, in both Greece and Cyprus, elections to the EP in a country with un-enforced compulsory voting behave like elections at which the compulsion has been abolished. It seems that a symbolic compulsion is not potent at an election with no apparent purpose. This realization provides us with a group of three countries (Cyprus, Greece, and Italy) in which turnout at EP elections is in decline for a quasi-structural reason. For Greece and Cyprus this decline started at their second EP elections; for Italy it started at the first election after compulsory voting was abolished there, in 1994. A final country behaves as though it were a member of this group. In Malta there was never a compulsion to vote, but turnout in years leading up to EU accession was as high as in compulsory voting countries (Hirczy 1995; Franklin 2004). It seems that an initially widespread habit of voting responds to the experience of EP elections in the same way regardless of the source of that habit, so long as a compulsion to vote is not enforced.

Figure 1. Turnout by different groups of EP-voting countries over time

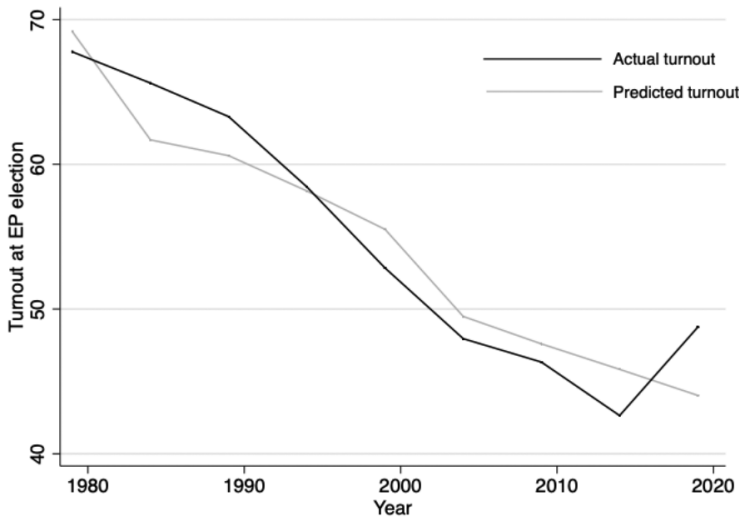


The four contextual effects just listed define four types of turnout evolution that different groups of countries should exhibit at predictable times during the course of their individual histories of EP election participation, giving the patterns shown in Figure 1. The figure distinguishes between the ten countries that participated in all EP elections (“Original”) and those that acceded at different times thereafter (“Southern enlargement”, “Northern enlargement”, “Eastern enlargement”) while also distinguishing, among original EP voting countries, between those that had enforced compulsory voting throughout and those that never had compulsory voting. Additionally, we include a trace for countries with initially high turnout but no enforced compulsion to vote. At early EP elections this trace contains Greece and Italy, but those countries are joined by Cyprus and Malta in 2004.

The graph shows clearly the first election boost enjoyed by southern and northern enlargement countries (that boost is less obvious for original non-compulsory voting countries, but can still be discerned; it is absent for Eastern enlargement countries). The graph also shows a massive turnout decline from 1994 onwards among countries with initially high turnout but no enforced compulsion to vote. Indeed, turnout for all these different groups of countries appears to converge over time. For southern and northern enlargement countries this convergence is complete by the time of their second EP elections, after which variations in turnout are due to variations in election timing (see appendix). For West European countries (other than those with enforced compulsory voting) it is as though they had a “natural” level of turnout at EP elections that was rapidly approached with the passage of time, whatever their initial turnout level. Eastern enlargement countries have lower turnout over the entire span of their membership in the EU, producing a gap that appears rather constant over time as their turnout fluctuates more or less in step with that of the other non-compulsory voting countries.

Just one major anomaly remains to be mentioned. There is an uptick in turnout at the end of the series that applies to all EU member countries excepting only the countries with some type of compulsory or quasi-compulsory voting (in both of which traces, however, the rate of turnout decline seems to reflect the same anomaly). An important question attends that anomaly. Is it just a fluctuation, such as those we see for particular groups of countries in particular years – fluctuations that may be largely the result of variations in the timing of elections for different groups? The pattern of turnout change in 2019 suggests an effect felt in common across all groups of countries, which could hardly be the result of peculiarities of election timing since such timing effects are country-specific.

Figure 2. Actual turnout at EP elections and turnout predicted by the structural model



We can verify the supposition that the 2019 turnout uptick was not due to factors included in the structural model if we use that model (see appendix, Table A) to predict the 2019 turnout outcome and compare the predicted outcome with the actual outcome. Indeed, we can do even better, predicting the turnout outcome for each year using the same structural model so that we can see to what extent predictions match outcomes over the whole sequence of EP elections.

As can be seen in Figure 2, actual turnout is quite well predicted by the structural model, even in 2019. Certainly the structural model does a good job of explaining the overall decline in turnout over the whole sequence of elections. And, although the fit of predicted to actual turnout was better in EP elections from 1989 to 2014, that fit is still pretty good in 2019. What is not good is the the fit of *trend* in predicted turnout to *trend* in actual turnout. The EP election of 2019 is the only one in which the trend in turnout since the previous election is wrongly predicted in terms of sign (positive instead of negative), and the error is huge. Effectively the fit of change in predicted turnout to change in actual turnout is zero in 2019.

So 2019 proves to be quite remarkable in terms of turnout – the first election in a sequence of 8 successive EP elections where the evolution of turnout since the previous election diverged completely from what would have been expected on the basis of structural factors. In our statistical appendix we “explain” this divergence by means of what statisticians call a “dummy variable”. Usually such variables are poorly named, since they are used to indicate well-known factors that are associated with specific cases. In this instance the word “dummy” is unusually appropriate, however. The variable indicates only the date when an otherwise unexplicated shock was felt.

Since the effect is not based on any structural factor yet known to scholars, the uptick in 2019 could be due to absolutely anything, and commentators will no doubt make hay attributing to it theories concocted for the occasion. Our own guess is that

citizens of all member states have been shocked by the Brexit spectacle (including citizens of Britain itself), and that a new appreciation of the importance of EP elections has been the result. But there is no way in which we can confirm that guess with data available to us at the time of writing.

Findings regarding turnout also have implications for other aspects of second order election theory, to which we now turn.

SECOND-ORDER EFFECTS ON EP PARTY SUPPORT

The second order theory expects parties to gain votes if they are small parties that are not members of the government of the day. However, the theory is not explicit about when these gains should occur. An important implication of our structural model's findings is that any gains in vote share made by small parties should occur towards the start of the electoral cycle, which is when most additional votes are cast.

In our analysis for this chapter we introduce what we take to be an additional innovation. We distinguish between two different ways in which gains to small parties can be measured. At first-take, one might presume that gains should be thought of relative to total votes cast – absolute gains – but, for individual small opposition parties, what would surely matter are gains or losses relative to votes won by that party at the most recent national election – relative gains. A party that gains 2 percent of the total vote might not seem to be gaining much and, in absolute terms, it is not. But, if that gain doubles its vote-share this would, relatively speaking, be hugely newsworthy and seen as a big victory by party supporters.

In the appendix to this chapter, Table B validates the structural expectations we get from the second order model. Small non-government parties do gain support both because they are small and also because they are not members of the government. The separate effects of being small and being in opposition to the government apply whichever method is used for measuring gains to small parties. However, being in opposition and being small are highly correlated, and if one is interested in the joint effects of both reasons for party gains it matters whether those gains are measured absolutely or relative to the size of the small party. When measured in absolute terms, opposition status does not add significantly to small party gains over what would be seen were the small party to have been a government member. However, if gains are measured relatively then small parties gain both because they are small and also because they are in opposition.

Additional analyses included in Table B show that these gains occur mainly at the start of the electoral cycle. Indeed effects for small parties at EP elections held shortly after national elections are the strongest effects in the table. Such parties gain four times more than the absolute proportion of votes they received at their most recent national election – gains that are statistically highly significant.

This is the first time, to the best of our knowledge, that a link has been made between the structural model of EP election turnout and the second order implications for party gains and losses. Because this is an incidental finding made in the course of a hurried preliminary investigation of new data, it is beyond the remit of this chap-

ter to validate the finding by seeing whether it can be replicated using data produced by previous EP elections. Until such an investigation is conducted we cannot be sure about these findings and must treat them as suggestive.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we performed a first effort at providing explanatory factors for the outcome of these elections. Our reflection started from the established model that sees EP elections as second-order elections, and covered two separate dimensions: turnout and party support.

In terms of turnout, our analysis employed the established structural model that sees EP turnout conditioned by several factors which are not related in any way to the contingencies of political debate related to the EU. And it is here that we found a first, striking finding: while the structural model has in general a remarkable predictive power for EP election turnout, it clearly *cannot account for the turnout increase seen in these elections*. As a result, it has to be recognized that the 2019 EP elections might be marking a turning point in this regard: we might be witnessing – for different reasons, whose relative importance cannot be rigorously tested here – a turnout increase which might be related to some real politicization of these elections.

In terms of party support, our first tests do not show equally exceptional results. The second-order model still applies, with party gains and losses being partly explained by a combination of opposition status and small size, in turn interplaying with the timing of the EP election – whether it occurs close to the previous national election or not. However, our identification of structural dynamics that influence party support does not go into the detail of *what types* of small, opposition parties were rewarded in these elections. The open questions remain, whether, in the context of structural dynamics of party support, there might still have been some EU-wide trend that has rewarded parties with specific policy positions. Some clues that this might be the case have already emerged from the results presented in chapter 1 in this book (Angelucci and Carrieri 2019); but – more rigorously – this is the key research question assessed in the next chapter (Maggini et al. 2019).

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 4
STATISTICAL ANALYSES EXPLAINING TUROUT AT EP ELECTIONS

Table A - OLS regression findings for the structural model of EP election turnout (Franklin 2002)

| | MODEL 1: WITHOUT NEW DEMOCRACIES | | MODEL 2: WITH NEW DEMOCRACIES, NO INTERACTIONS | | MODEL 3: WITH NEW DEMOCRACIES AND INTERACTIONS | | MODEL 4: AS C BUT WITH DUMMY FOR 2019 | |
|--|--|----------|--|----------|--|----------|---|----------|
| | Coef. | (s.e.) | Coef. | (s.e.) | Coef. | (s.e.) | Coef. | (s.e.) |
| First election "boost" | 4.92 | (2.90) | 2.12 | (2.37)ns | 5.29 | (2.94) | 3.46 | (2.88)ns |
| Time to next national election (0-1 proportion of 5 years)* | -6.79 | (3.23) | -7.31 | (3.00) | -6.92 | (3.28) | -7.40 | (3.17) |
| Compulsory voting** | 37.12 | (2.07) | 37.30 | (2.11) | 37.16 | (2.10) | 37.20 | (2.03) |
| New democracy | | | -14.81 | (2.17) | -12.44 | (3.59) | -11.40 | (3.48) |
| New democracy X first election | | | | | -8.07 | (4.40) | -4.37 | (4.37)ns |
| New democracy X time to next national election | | | | | -2.65 | (7.89)ns | -6.36 | (7.68)ns |
| 2019 year dummy | | | | | | | 8.96 | (2.48) |
| Electoral sequen- ce (0-1 proportion of 9 elections) | -4.95 | (3.17)ns | -5.02 | (3.12)ns | -4.10 | (3.16)ns | -10.98 | (3.59) |
| Intercept | 52.56 | (2.42) | 53.12 | (2.35) | 52.09 | (2.44) | 55.15 | (2.50) |
| R-squared | 0.73 | | 0.76 | | 0.77 | | 0.79 | |
| Observations | 132 | | 172 | | 172 | | 172 | |

Notes: All coefficients significant at the 0.05 level, one-tailed, unless marked "ns".

* Originally measured in days.

** Compulsory voting coded 1 if in effect and enforced. If abolished, coded as proportion of years left before all pre-reform voters have been replaced, starting with first election following abolition. If not enforced, coded as for abolition, starting with the second EP election at which the country participated (see main text for details).

In Table A, Model 1 corresponds to the model presented in Franklin (2001), though with time to the next national parliamentary election coded as a proportion (so that coefficient magnitudes are comparable across variables) rather than in months) and with established democracies included at every election up to 2019. Model 2 adds new democracies (countries acceding to the EU in 2014 with the exception of Malta and Cyprus, which were already included in Model 1). Model 3 adds interactions between new democracy and each of first election and time to next election. These show new democracies turning out at an even lower rate 2.9 percent lower than established democracies would have done in the absence of a first election boost ($5.29 - 8.07 = -2.78$), though the difference would not have been statistically significant. It also shows new democracies being more strongly affected (over a third more strongly) by time to the next election ($-6.92 / -2.65 = 0.38$), but again this difference would not have been statistically significant. This is the model used to derive predicted outcomes for Figures 1 and 2 in the main text. Finally, Model 4 introduces the 2019 election year dummy, mentioned in the main text. The effect of this variable shows turnout in 2019 to have been almost 9 percent greater than would have been expected on the basis of the structural model (which would have led us to expect the turnout level shown in Figure 2 in the main text. This effect is highly significant, statistically. Indeed, there is less than a 1 in a thousand chance of this effect being the result of happenstance.

Importantly, all of these models except for the final one show no significant effect of electoral sequence – a measure of the location of each election in a nine election sequence coded 0 to 1. The effect (leaving aside Model 4) suggests a total drop in turnout of 5 percent. This is the fall in turnout *not* accounted for by contextual changes, a little more than half of one percent per EP election – rather less than the decline that would have been expected on the basis of work by Franklin and Hobolt (2011). It is possible that, far from a reduction in EP election support over the years, there has actually been an increase, net of contextual and other factors.

In Table B we show effects on party gains in vote share between national and EP elections, using both types of measure (overall and relative) mentioned in the main text. These different measures are presented in pairs of columns for different analyses. The explanatory power of second order theory is seen there to be very low, especially when it comes to relative gains, meaning that much of the fluctuation in party support between national elections and following EP elections is due to other factors than those that the theory takes into account, or are random in nature. Because effects are so small we set the bar for statistical significance at 0.1 rather than the more conventional 0.05.

The first four columns show effects of small party size and opposition status, each taken alone. Size has about ten times the apparent effect of opposition status and the relative measure shows close to ten times the apparent effect produced by the absolute measure. These four coefficients are highly significant, statistically. However, size and opposition status are also highly correlated, and share explanatory power. When we take the two together in Model 3 we find that, from both perspectives, opposition status loses statistical significance (and, indeed, acquires the wrong sign when

Table B - Relative and absolute gains from opposition status and small party size, OLS regressions

| OUTCOME: GAIN IN VOTE SHARE | MODEL 1: OPPOSITION STATUS | | MODEL 2: SMALL PARTY SIZE | | MODEL 3: BOTH TOGETHER | | MODEL 4: SMALL PARTY SIZE X TIME | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|--|----------|
| | Overall | Relative | Overall | Relative | Overall | Relative | Overall | Relative |
| Opposition status | 0.03 | 0.57 | | | | -0.34 | | -0.34 |
| | (0.01) | (0.20) | | | (0.01)ns | (0.22)ns | (0.01)ns | (0.22) |
| Small party size* | | | 0.27 | 2.59 | 0.28 | 1.99 | 0.26 | 0.03 |
| | | | (0.03) | (0.76) | (0.04) | (0.85) | (0.06) | (1.48)ns |
| Time left until the next national election (proportion) | | | | | | | 0.01 | 0.76 |
| | | | | | | | (0.02)ns | (0.40) |
| Small X time | | | | | | | 0.04 | 4.44 |
| | | | | | | | (0.12) | (2.86) |
| Intercept | -0.01 | -0.03 | 0.03 | -0.10 | =0.03 | -0.12 | -0.02 | 0.24 |
| | (0.00) | (0.09)ns | (0.00) | (0.11)ns | (0.00) | (0.11)ns | (0.01) | (0.22)ns |
| R-squared | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.22 | 0.04 | 0.22 | 0.05 | 0.22 | 0.06 |
| Observations | 267 | 267 | 267 | 267 | 267 | 267 | 267 | 267 |

Notes: All coefficients significant at 0.1, one-tailed, unless marked "ns." Standard errors in parentheses.

* 1 - size of party at the most recent national election, measured as a proportion of total votes cast.

measured from a relative perspective). The two measures also tell different stories in the final pair of columns, those for Model 4. There we see that the proportion of time left to the next election plays an important role in conditioning the strength of relative effects, but not of absolute effects. Relative effects of opposition status are significant in this model even though small party size is also taken into account. In

this model, effects of small size become significant in the expected direction only provided there is a long time left before the next national election. More importantly this effect is the most powerful of any seen in Table 1. At EP elections held close to the start of a country's election cycle, the smallest parties gain by a factor that is four times their size, though this boost explains little variance because the smallest parties are few in number and rarely have the good fortune to contest an EP election in the immediate aftermath of a national election.

This last model is suggestive of a strong link between the structural theory and second order theory, which should not surprise us since the structural theory itself incorporates second order theory in a number of ways. However, the findings are based on models with little power and we should bear in mind the relatively high probability (little less than 1 in 10) that these findings are spurious. Evidently they need to be confirmed in future research.

Chapter Five

Impact of issues on party performance

NICOLA MAGGINI, LORENZO DE SIO, DIEGO GARZIA AND ALEX H. TRECHSEL

INTRODUCTION

European Parliament (EP) elections are traditionally analysed and interpreted according to the second order model (Reif and Schmitt 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996): EP elections are second order contests characterized by low turnout (Franklin 2001) and driven by domestic factors (de Vreese et al. 2006). Such contexts, furthermore, offer a platform for new parties to emerge, they tend to favour small rather than big parties and, finally, they are likely to result in electoral losses for governing parties. Since the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, the second-order theory has been tested in the aftermath of each single election (van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996; Marsh 1998; Schmitt 2005; Schmitt and Tepeoglou 2015), and has repeatedly confirmed its conceptual and empirical validity.

As regards the main characteristics of a second-order election, lower turnout is the one that is most strictly linked to the lower saliency of EP elections. This feature has been explained by relying on a small number of structural factors (Franklin 2001), which are not related to the EU dimension. For instance, scholars have shown that saliency of EP elections depends also on the time of national electoral cycles in which they occur: EP elections are more important when they take place shortly before a national parliamentary election, at which time they gain an importance as 'barometers' of national party standings (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

Compared to other second-order elections (e.g. local elections), nevertheless, EP elections share with first-order elections an important feature: they are both held at the national level. Party competition at national level has been interpreted by some scholars in terms of issue competition (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Green-Pedersen 2007). According to the second-order perspective, the impact of issues on EP elections should be mostly related to domestic factors (de Vreese et al., 2006). Consequently it has traditionally been maintained that these elections had no European issue content (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). However, more recently scholars started to question some of the second order features, especially trying to show the increasing importance of supranational elements in EP elections (Bellucci, Garzia and Rubal 2010; Trechsel 2010; Hix and Marsh 2011; Shuck et al. 2011; Hobolt and Spo-

on 2012).¹ In this contribution, we support the argument of a “growing European-ness of European elections” (Trechsel, De Sio and Garzia 2017) through empirical analyses which take into account the role played by shared issues among EU member states in explaining party performances.

By taking as a reference point the previous parliamentary elections, we first demonstrate the lower relevance and predictive power of the second-order model for analysing party performance when issues are not taken into account; then, we show that party gains and losses – compared to previous national elections – can be significantly explained by party stances on the same issues across the 28 EU countries, showing signs of a perhaps new emergence of a common European debate, structured around a few key issues; nevertheless, relevant differences emerge when the main geographical areas of the EU are taken into account.

BEYOND THE SECOND-ORDER ELECTION MODEL: THE IMPACT OF ISSUES ON PARTY PERFORMANCE

In this chapter, we aim at analysing and explaining party performance in the 2019 EP elections going beyond the traditional second-order explanations. In light of recent studies that show, with different degrees of success, that the influence of Europe on voting might have even increased over time due to the continuous strengthening of the EP’s powers (Schmitt 2005) and a greater visibility of European issues during the campaign (Trechsel 2010, Trechsel, De Sio and Garzia 2017), we expect that parties take positions on similar key issues which inform the political debate in Europe, not only when national elections are held, but also in times of EP elections. Thus, we first expect that:

in order to predict electoral performance in the 2019 EP elections in terms of gains or losses compared to previous parliamentary elections, issue stances of political parties significantly contribute in terms of predictive power on top of structural second-order factors, even when estimating a common model for all EU-28 countries.

Secondly, we expect that, despite a potentially increasing Europeanization of the political space, issue stances of parties have a differentiated impact on electoral performance in different geographical areas of the EU, rooted in diverse political traditions, developments and socio-economic contexts. In this regard, the structure of

1. It needs to be recognized that the 2014 EP elections (and perhaps also those of 2019) were held in the context of a considerable europeanization of national political discourses. If EP elections constitute distorted reflections of national political concerns (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996) then it would be expected, even according to Second Order Election (SOE) theory, that these elections would reflect any European content that national elections might acquire. So such content occurring after 2009 does not contradict SOE theory. The discovery of shared trends across EU countries in issue effects also does not contradict SOE theory since SOE theory does not consider this possibility.

political conflict in Central Eastern Europe has been traditionally very different compared to Western Europe, with the former characterised by higher electoral volatility, weaker party allegiances, a less structured political space (Bielasiak 2005) or different ideological combinations of economic and cultural issues (Kitschelt 1992). Furthermore, studies that have analysed citizens' attitudes through the lenses of post-materialism (Inglehart 1990) have shown that individuals have different issue priorities depending on their level of material wellbeing, with post-materialist attitudes spreading especially among well-educated middle classes. Borrowing on these insights and recognising the risks to empirical inference that derive from data limitations (given that we do not employ individual-level data), it is plausible to expect that:

distinguishing between the different European geographical areas, electoral gains are explained by different party positions on issues, with post-materialist, environmentalist positions playing a greater role in the richest countries of the Centre-North.

DATA

In our analysis, following a long-standing analytical approach (e.g., Schmitt 2005; Hix and Marsh 2007; 2011; Schmitt and Toygur 2016), we rely on aggregate-level data to investigate why citizens switch votes from national to European elections. Consequently, individual parties running at the 2019 EP elections are our unit of analysis, whereas the dependent variable is for each party the difference between the percentage of valid votes polled in the EP elections and that obtained at the previous national parliamentary elections held in the country (the same measure as used in Chapter 4 of this book). In contrast to the strategy pursued by De Sio, Russo and Franklin in that chapter, we focus only on the relative difference, ignoring the absolute one. More precisely, for each party we calculated vote-share gains or losses relative to votes won by that party at the most recent national election. Relying on relative vote changes across elections has the notable advantage of permitting a straightforward comparison between large parties (more likely to lose votes at EP election, according to the second-order model) and small parties, with results that are more sensitive compared to simple party performance differences. For instance, a party gain of 2-3 percent of the total vote is not a big gain in absolute terms. However, if that gain doubles the party's vote share, this would be conceived as a big victory by commentators and party supporters.

The main independent variables that operationalize the second order model are as follows:

- "Size" is the percentage of votes for each party in the last national election. This variable also represents the baseline to calculate the vote-share gap between national and the 2019 EP elections;
- "Government status" is a dummy variable scoring '1' for all parties included in the national government at the time of the 2019 EP elections and '0' for all others;

- “Early” is an index ranging between 0 and 1 that measures the period of the electoral cycle in which the EP election is held (the highest the index, the closest the EP election is to previous parliamentary election);
- The interaction between “size” and “early”, which is intended to measure the influence of party size mediated by the effect of the electoral cycle. As shown by De Sio, Russo and Franklin in this book, electoral gains of small parties occur mainly at the start of the electoral cycle.

The coding of parties’ positions on issues comes from the 2019 *euandi* project (whose dataset will be soon publicly released). In order to place parties in the political issue space, these operational measures are the result of an iterative approach to party placement strictly linked to the development of Internet-based Voting Advice Applications (VAAs). This method consists in comparing expert judgements with party self-placements (Trechsel and Mair 2011; Garzia, Trechsel and De Sio 2015; Trechsel, De Sio and Garzia 2017) in order to maximize the strengths of both methodologies, while at the same time attempting to counterbalance the respective weaknesses. Expert coding and party self-placement occur independently, but the respective results are compared to allow a control mechanism. Through this kind of datasets, it is possible to cover immediately in the aftermath of the EP elections a large number of policy issues, which are related to actual policy statements rather than to a generic classification of political conflict dimensions.

RESULTS

In Table 1 we show effects on party performance in the 2019 EP elections. In Model 1 only the aforementioned second orders factors are included as control variables. In Model 2 we added as predictors party positions on issues.² The first evident result that emerges is that the explanatory power of second order theory is not very large: the variance explained by Model 1 is 13%.³ This means that much of the variation in party support between national elections and following EP elections is due to other factors than the structural elements of the second-order theory: indeed, when we add party positions in Model 2, R-squared increases significantly, reaching 24%.

2. Considering the relatively low number of observations and the relatively large number of issues, we pursued a systematic strategy for identifying a parsimonious model. We first ran a full model with 21 issues from the VAA of the 2019 *euandi* project (after having excluded the “EU transnational party lists” issue because of too many missing values). We then excluded issues with effects characterized by very high p-values (equal or above 0.8). Finally, we looked at bivariate Pearson correlations between the remaining issues. According to the strength of association (Cohen 1988), we excluded some variables (e.g. “anti-immigration”, “green taxes”, “EU foreign policy”) in order to avoid items picking up on the same covariance component. See the Appendix for the complete list of analysed issues, along with question wording.
3. Because effects are small and the number of observations is limited being aggregate data, we set the bar for statistical significance at 0.1 rather than the more conventional 0.05.

Hence, our first empirical expectation is confirmed: the predictive power of the second-order model when considered only in terms of its structural implications has considerably less predictive power for analysing party performance, compared to a model which includes party stances on the same issues across the 28 EU countries.

In particular, looking at Model 2, we notice that some issues have a significant effect on party performance: banks taxation (negative), assimilation (negative), tougher criminal sanctions (positive) and EU integration (positive). This means that parties which support EU integration and claim that criminals should be more severely punished are likely to have made electoral gains in the 2019 EP elections, compared to previous parliamentary elections. Conversely, positions in favour of cultural assimilation of migrants and of a higher taxation on banks and stock market exchanges are associated with electoral losses. This suggests the emergence of a common European debate, centred on different dimensions of the political space: the economic left-right dimension (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Knutsen 1995; 1997); the cultural dimension based on the libertarian-authoritarian distinction (Kitschelt 1994); and a dimension based on the divide between cultural integration and demarcation linked to globalization and EU integration processes (Kriesi et. al. 2006). In this regard, good party performances are explained by a mixture of political positions: right-wing on economy, authoritarian as regards law and order issues, but culturally open as regard EU integration and cultural integration of migrants.

However, we expect that this Europeanization of political dynamics is partial, with significant differences among geographical areas of the EU, consistently with the different steps of the EU enlargement and the very different political traditions and recent developments of EU countries, especially if we consider the distinction between eastern countries (of the former soviet bloc), countries of the centre-north of Europe and southern countries.⁴ We therefore proceeded to test this second empirical expectation by interacting all the issue-related variables of Model 2 with dummy variables for the aforementioned areas, through separate models. Here we present the results of the significant interactions through plots of the marginal effects of issue positions on party performance across geographical areas.

Figure 1 shows the marginal effects of pro renewable energy stances on party performance across groups of countries. This variable in Model 2 of Table 1 was not significant. Interestingly, when we take into account the interaction with groups of countries, it becomes significant and positively associated with electoral gains in the Centre-North. This result is consistent with the geographically differentiated success of green parties in the 2019 EP elections, with the largest gains that occurred in the central-northern countries (for instance, the astonishing success of the Green Party in Germany which has become the second most voted party with 20% of the vo-

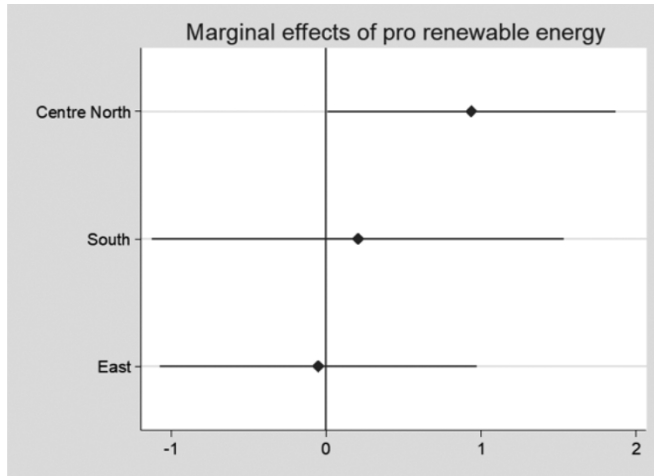
4. France is a country that shares features of both the South and the North: considering both socio-economic and political-institutional factors, we decided to include it in the Centre-North. To check the robustness of our results, we replicated the analyses including it in the South, and findings are substantially confirmed.

Table 1- Testing the full model of party performance in 2019 EP elections, OLS regressions

| OUTCOME: RELATIVE GAINS/LOSSES IN VOTE SHARE | MODEL 1 BASE MODEL: ONLY SECOND-ORDER CONTROLS | MODEL 2 PARTY STANCES ON ISSUES |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Second-order controls (<i>government status, party size, early in the electoral cycle, size*early</i>) | (included) | (included) |
| unemployment support | | -0.19 (0.39)ns |
| banks taxation | | -0.46 (0.34) |
| lower taxes | | -0.36 (0.35)ns |
| assimilation | | -0.74 (0.39) |
| tougher criminal sanctions | | 0.93 (0.35) |
| asylum quota | | -0.14 (0.28)ns |
| euthanasia | | 0.02 (0.27)ns |
| renewable energy | | 0.41 (0.36)ns |
| EU integration | | 0.45 (0.30) |
| no veto power | | 0.00 (0.30)ns |
| Constant | 1.00 (0.60) | 1.00 (0.60) |
| R-squared | 0.13 | 0.24 |
| Observations | 126 | 126 |
| Notes: All coefficients at least significant at 0.1, one-tailed, unless marked "ns." Standard errors in parentheses. | | |

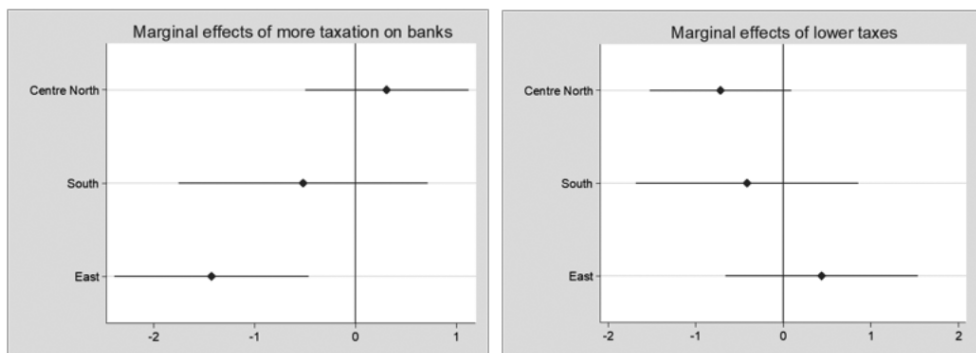
tes). Again, environmental issues seem to play a relevant role in electoral terms only in the most economically developed part of Europe, confirming our expectation based on the assumptions of post-materialist theory (Inglehart 1990).

Figure 1. Marginal effects of renewable energy on party performance by groups of countries.



As regards economic issues (see Figure 2), positions supporting lower taxes (in Model 2 not significant) become substantially significant and negatively associated with party performances only in the Centre-North. Conversely, the negative and significant association between positions in favour of banks taxation and party performance holds only in eastern countries, whereas in the Centre-North the sign of the effect is the opposite, although not significant. These results seem to indicate a relevant political distinction between eastern and central-northern countries: in the latter, positions attached to the defence of the traditional welfare state (originated precisely in these countries) seem to be electorally rewarding, whereas in the East right-wing pro market positions appear more promising.

Figure 2. Marginal effects of banks taxation and lower taxes on party performance by groups of countries.



Political differences between geographical areas, especially those between central-northern and eastern countries, appear evident also when we consider marginal effects of cultural issues on party performance by groups of countries. Concerning issues related to cultural demarcation-integration (see Figure 3), the aforementioned significant and negative association between positions supporting cultural assimilation of migrants and party performance is a phenomenon which occurs mostly in the Centre-North (in the South it is less significant, while in the East such positions are positively associated with electoral performance, although not significantly). Similarly, pro-EU integration positions show substantial significant effects in the same geographical area (whereas in the South and in the East they are not significant, albeit the sign of the association is the same). Therefore, noteworthy political differences between Centre-North and East emerge not only as far as economic issues are concerned, but also when cultural issues are on the table. This latter point is confirmed by looking at Figure 4: positions in favour of tougher criminal sanctions – an issue traditionally linked to the authoritarian-libertarian dimension – are highly significant and positively associated with electoral gains in the East, whereas in the South and in the Centre-North are less significant, albeit showing the same direction. Finally, positions supporting distributions of asylum seekers quota among EU member states (a variable not significant in Model 2), keep being not statistically significant in the South and in the Centre-North, while becoming significant and associated with electoral losses in eastern countries.

Figure 3. Marginal effects of cultural assimilation and EU integration on party performance by groups of countries.

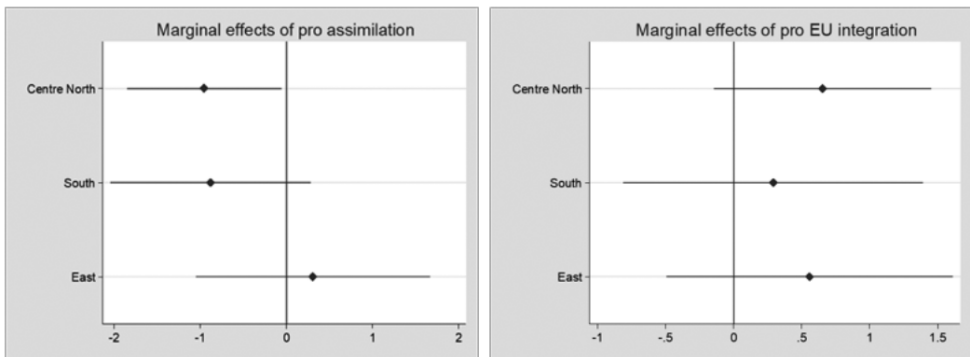
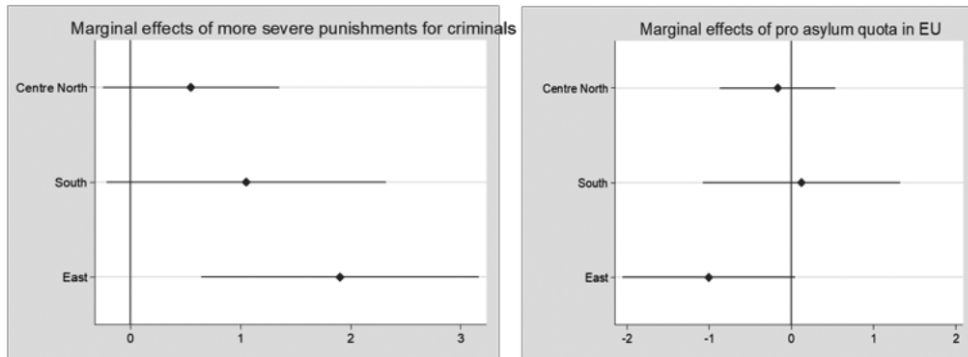


Figure 4. Marginal effects of tougher criminal sanctions and asylum quota on party performance by groups of countries.



To conclude, this analysis has shown that traditional second-order and structural factors, certainly relevant, are only partially sufficient to interpret and predict electoral performance of parties at the 2019 EP elections. Including in explanatory models party positions on key issues shared among EU countries appears a promising strategy. Furthermore, the growing importance of an European issue space should be nuanced taking into account relevant political differences between the geographical areas of the EU. Our results have shown, indeed, a clear divide between central-northern and eastern countries, in terms of the type of issue stances that can be electorally rewarding. In the Centre-North environmentalism, positions pro-cultural integration and to a certain extent the defence of the welfare model seem to be all issues than can lead to electoral gains. This issue context is particularly fruitful to explain the (geographically differentiated) “green wave” of the 2019 EP elections. This progressive landscape totally changes when we look at issue opportunities in the East: authoritarian stances on the cultural dimension and to a certain extent right-wing positions on the economy seem to be electorally rewarding, consistently with the political development of the last years. This is of course preliminary research with significant limitations, especially as regards the number of cases analysed (aggregate data from two elections). However, results appear promising and further research is needed to explore more in depth these preliminary insights, both enlarging the number and type of elections analysed and interplaying aggregate level data with citizens’ opinions on issues through public opinion surveys.

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5:
QUESTION WORDING OF ISSUE STATEMENTS

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| WELFARE | Social programmes should be maintained even at the cost of higher taxes |
| UNEMPLOYMENT SUPPORT | The state should provide stronger financial support to unemployed workers |
| EU DEFICIT | The European Union should rigorously punish Member States that violate the EU deficit rules |
| ASYLUM QUOTA | Asylum-seekers should be distributed proportionally among European Union Member States |
| ANTI IMMIGRATION | Immigration into Denmark should be made more restrictive |
| ASSIMILATION | Immigrants from outside Europe should be required to accept our culture and values |
| GAY UNIONS | The legalisation of same sex marriages is a good thing |
| LEGALISATION DRUGS | The legalisation of the personal use of soft drugs is to be welcomed |
| EUTHANASIA | Euthanasia should be legalized |
| LOWER TAXES | Government spending should be reduced in order to lower taxes |
| EU TAXATION | The EU should acquire its own tax raising powers |
| BANKS TAXATION | Bank and stock market gains should be taxed more heavily |
| GREEN TAXES | The promotion of public transport should be fostered through green taxes (e.g. road taxing) |
| RENEWABLE ENERGY | Renewable sources of energy (e.g. solar or wind energy) should be supported even if this means higher energy costs |
| INTERNET RESTRICTIONS | Restrictions of personal privacy on the Internet should be accepted for public security reasons |
| TOUGHER CRIMINAL SANCTIONS | Criminals should be punished more severely |
| EU DEFENCE | The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy |
| EU FOREIGN POLICY | On foreign policy issues the European Union should speak with one voice |
| EU integration | European integration is a good thing |
| ANTIEURO | The single European currency (Euro) is a bad thing |
| NO VETO POWER | Individual member states of the European Union should have less veto power |

PART II
RESULTS ACROSS THE 28 EU COUNTRIES

Austria: An election overshadowed by Ibiza-gate

SYLVIA KRITZINGER AND CAROLINA PLESCIA

INTRODUCTION

On May 17th 2019, the campaign for the European Parliament election came to an abrupt halt in Austria. That evening, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the German magazine *Der Spiegel* released a video that resulted in one of the biggest national political scandals in Austrian history, now known as “Ibiza-gate”. In the video – secretly recorded shortly before the national election in 2017 – the FPÖ-party leader Heinz-Christian Strache and deputy leader Johann Gudenus revealed modes of illegally funding the FPÖ, promising government orders at inflated prices to a purported niece of a Russian oligarch in a villa in Ibiza. The video caused the collapse of the coalition government between the right-wing *Peoples’ Party* (ÖVP), led by the Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, and the populist-right *Freedom Party* (FPÖ), led by the Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache – who has been in position since December 2017 – and resulted in a snap-election to be held in early September 2019.

The scandal and the subsequent government crisis redirected the attention of political commentators, politicians and citizens to the national level, making the European Parliament election *per se*, as well as parties’ positions on European integration, politically irrelevant. Still, the EP-election served as a first nationwide ‘poll’ on how the parties are likely to perform in the upcoming national election in September. The 2019 EP-election taking place on Sunday 26 May was thus not even second-order (Boomgaarden et al., 2016), but can be characterised as a pre-test of the upcoming national snap-election.

THE EP-ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BEFORE IBIZA-GATE

Seven parties ran in the 2019 EP-election. Beside the two parties in government – the ÖVP and FPÖ –, all parties currently represented in the parliament ran for election. Namely, the *Social Democrats* (SPÖ), the liberal *New Austria* (NEOS) and the *List Now* (Liste Jetzt), which supported the electoral list *1 Europe*, whose leading candidate was a former MEP for the Greens. Additionally, the *Greens* and the *Communist party* (KPÖ) also decided to run. The Greens are no longer represented in the National Council after failing to reach the threshold of 4% in the last national elec-

tion in 2017 (Bodlos and Plescia, 2018) – but they were still represented in the European Parliament with 3 MEPs. Overall, in 2019, fewer parties participated in the EP-election than in 2014 (Plescia and Kritzinger, 2014).

Apart from the FPÖ, all parties can be considered pro-European. The Greens campaigned for a European social union and a common tax system; the NEOS even supported the establishment of a United States of Europe. The SPÖ were less favourable towards European integration by comparison, and mainly campaigned for a Europe attentive to the needs of its citizens – not to financial interests – and thus largely overlapping with Green demands. All three parties also campaigned on avoiding a *Rechtsruck* – that is, containing the electoral success of populist right parties – in the upcoming EP-election. The KPÖ can also be classified as Euro-friendly but, overall, did not gain a lot of attention during the campaign.

While Sebastian Kurz worked hard in presenting himself as well as the ÖVP as clearly pro-European (especially after having formed a coalition with the Eurosceptic FPÖ in 2017), two weeks before the 2019 EP election he caught media attention both nationally and Europe-wide by making a number of Eurosceptic statements. These included condemning European overregulation and calling for a substantial reform of the European Union and its institutions.

Overall, however, in 2019 the FPÖ was the only clearly Eurosceptic party in Austria. But even the FPÖ has changed its discourse substantially since 2014: an ÖXIT (Austrian exit from the EU) was no longer on the FPÖ agenda and the party rather focused on campaigning for more national sovereignty.

As already mentioned, however, ‘Ibiza-gate’ overshadowed the EP election campaign during the week immediately before the election.

RESULTS

Austria has a proportional system, with a threshold of 4% and the possibility for voters to express a preference vote for a single candidate. However, to obtain a mandate in the 2019 election, a party needed to obtain around a 5% vote share. Seats are distributed within a single national constituency. All citizens aged over 16 can vote in EP-elections.

As in most other countries, electoral participation increased substantially in Austria, from 45.4% to 59.8% – an increase of 14.4 percentage points. Only in 1996, Austrians' first opportunity to vote in an EP election after Austria became a member of the EU, was the turnout higher (67.3%).

This year, the ÖVP won a landslide victory with 34.6% of the vote, outpolling the second-place party, the SPÖ, by 10.7%. This is an increase of 7.6 percentage points for the ÖVP compared to 2014, while the SPÖ obtained 23.9% of the votes (-0.2 percentage points). Interestingly, the FPÖ was able to contain its losses and ‘only’ lost 2.5 percent of votes, compared with 2014, resulting in a 17.2% vote share. The NEOS obtained almost as many votes as in 2014 (8.4%, +0.3 percentage points). At the same time, the Greens did exceptionally well with 14.1% (-0.4 percentage points) of the vote, especially when considering that the party only won 3.8% of the popu-

lar vote in the last national election in 2017. The EP election in 2019 seems to have put them back on the political scene. The 1 Europe list and the KPÖ obtained 1% and 0.8%, respectively – far below their expectations.

Austria is entitled to eighteen seats – nineteen after Brexit. The ÖVP won seven seats (two more than at the previous election), while the SPÖ maintained its five seats in the Parliament. The FPÖ as well as the Greens lost one seat each, and now hold three and two seats respectively, while the NEOS, as in 2014, can send one MEP to Brussels. After Brexit, the Greens are set to get the additional seats assigned to Austria.

Interestingly, the possibility to cast a preferential vote has been widely used in this EP election, with entire party lists (particularly that of the ÖVP) being overthrown. Although Mr Strache – who was at the centre of the Ibiza-gate scandal – was symbolically ranked last on the FPÖ-party list, he received more than the necessary 33,500 preferential votes, which provides him with a seat in the new Parliament.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESULTS

While the first half of the European election campaign focused on European issues and ideas on how to reform the EU, the last week was completely dominated by the government crisis.

The clear winner of this election is the ÖVP, which not only gained 7.6 percentage points more than in 2014, but is also the party with the largest vote share in Austria. The Greens can also be considered election winners. After their debacle in the national election of 2017 that resulted in the loss of parliamentary representation in the National Council, the EP elections 2019 were about political survival. Here the Greens not only won back the voters they lost in the national election, but were able to obtain a similar electoral result to 2014 – a result that could hardly have been envisaged beforehand. The vote loss of the FPÖ was rather moderate in light of speculation about the consequences of Ibiza-gate. It seems that the FPÖ, by presenting itself as a victim rather than a perpetrator of Ibiza-gate, was able to mobilise voters of its own party who would not normally vote in EP elections to vote all the more for the FPÖ. Furthermore, the NEOS won more votes than in 2014, but they had hoped for an additional seat.

There are two clear election losers. The first one is the SPÖ. As the biggest opposition party, the SPÖ was not only unable to profit from Ibiza-gate, but also lost support compared with 2014. With a weak leading candidate as well as a weak party leader, the party's (non-)handling of the Ibiza-gate led to the worst ever result in a nationwide election. The second election loser is 1 Europe. Though it had a very prominent candidate – Johannes Voggenhuber – its electoral campaign, as well as earlier intra-party conflicts at the national level, resulted in only a 1% vote share.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Austria

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) | EPP | 1,305,954 | 34.6 |
| Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) | S&D | 903,151 | 23.9 |
| Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) | ENF | 650,114 | 17.2 |
| The Greens (Grüne) | G-EFA | 532,194 | 14.1 |
| NEOS-The New Austria (NEOS) | ALDE | 319,024 | 8.4 |
| Jetz - Liste Peter Pilz | | 39,234 | 1.0 |
| Others | | 30,086 | 0.8 |
| Total | | 3,779,757 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 59.8 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 4% |

CONCLUSION

Though Austrian parties started the EP campaign largely focused on European issues, national political turmoil dominated the last 10 days of the EP election campaign. Thus, the 2019 European election in Austria was a clear second-order election – or rather effectively an early national election poll. The Austrian case shows just how quickly national politics can dominate European politics, with European issues and problems losing out when national politics gains prominence. There is therefore still a long way to go before Europe-wide election politics can be considered equally as important as national politics. To a certain extent, this is bad news for policies that need common European understanding and problem-solving, such as climate change or taxation. There are thus two takeaway messages: turnout finally increased in the EP election of 2019, but it also showed that the national arena is still the centre of political activity, at least in Austria.

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 7 | 7 | +7.6 | +2 | +2 |
| | 5 | 5 | -0.2 | +0 | |
| | 3 | 3 | -2.5 | -1 | -1 |
| | 2 | 3 | -0.4 | -1 | |
| | 1 | 1 | +0.3 | +0 | |
| | | | +1.0 | | |
| | | | | | |
| | 18 | 19 | | | +1 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

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Belgium: Least salient, but very European

LOUISE HOON

INTRODUCTION

As happened five years ago, the 2019 Belgian elections to the European Parliament (EP) coincided with regional and federal elections. As voting is compulsory, the exceptional turnout of 88.5% is a bad indicator of the salience of the election. But from the near absence of European campaigns and candidates from public debate and media, as well as from the marginal differences in the election results between the three levels, we may read the EP election as being again overshadowed by national campaigns and candidates (Kelbel et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this competition had a European dimension, as it was dominated by two transnational issues: the climate and migration. Radical right, radical left and green parties that ‘own’ these issues were the winners of the election, at the cost of center parties (Van de Wardt et al., 2014). This development is not new to most EU member states. But it poses a new challenge to the Belgian federal system, as it exacerbates the long-standing divide between Flanders and Wallonia.

BELGIUM: A FEDERAL STATE OF COMMUNITIES AND REGIONS

To interpret the dynamics of this three-level election, some understanding of the Belgian political system is needed. Belgium is a federal state, with three competent levels: the federal, provincial and municipal levels. At the highest level, the federal state, the communities and the region are on an equal standing. The communities are groups of citizens with a shared culture and language: next to the main languages, Dutch and French, there is a tiny German-speaking community. The competences of the communities’ governments and parliaments focus on culture and education.¹

The regions are territorially defined and hold mainly socio-economic competences. The Northern, Flemish region covers the largest part of the country. Wallonia covers the Southern part, and the Brussels Capital region is situated at the heart of the country, near the language border, but entirely surrounded by Flemish territory. The Fle-

1. The German-speaking community counts about 76.000 citizens.

mish community and region institutionally overlap, as they are both represented by the Flemish Parliament. The Walloon region, the French-speaking community, the Brussels Capital region and the German-speaking community (located in the East of the Walloon region) have separate parliaments and governments.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Members of these six parliaments are selected through proportional elections, with a 5% threshold and different constituencies. The complex and asymmetrical political system results in a two largely separate party systems: a Flemish and a Walloon one. Debates, campaigns and awareness of candidates remain highly confined to the two main regions. In Brussels, voters get to choose between lists of French- or Dutch speaking candidates. By consequence, the two party systems co-exist in Brussels. As there is only a minority of Dutch-speaking citizens there, debate is dominated by the French-speaking parties.

The federal government is a coalition of parties from Flanders and Wallonia. For a long time, the center parties dominating the political landscape, the democrat CD&V and CdH, the social-democrat Sp.a and PS and the liberal OpenVld and MR were ready to compromise across the linguistic divide.

However, Flemish voters have long been more right-leaning, while socialists are stronger in Wallonia. In recent years, this divide has deepened, especially with the rapid growth of the conservative right Flemish nationalist N-VA, which has been the largest party in Flanders since 2010. The most outspoken case for Flemish independence is made by the radical right VB. Due to its racist and discriminatory discourse, the party has been excluded from government negotiations by the other Belgian parties, in a so-called *cordon sanitaire*.

RESULTS

The results of the European election are presented in Table 1. In Flanders the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) remains the largest party at all three levels. However, it loses a few percentage points at each election. The radical right Flemish Interest (VB) came in second, but is the clear winner, with an average increase of 12.5% over the three levels. On the Walloon side, this dynamic is mirrored on the left side of the political spectrum. The social-democrat PS remains the first party, but it lost between 3 and 5% over the three levels. Its radical challenger on the left, the communist Labour Party (PTB), increased its vote by about 9%, with results between 14 and 15% over the three levels. Scores for the Walloon green party Ecolo increased between 6 and 8%.

If we compare results over the three levels, differences are rather small. Comparing the regional² and the EP election results, the most remarkable difference is that green parties do better in the EP elections than in the regional and federal ones. The Flemish green party Groen took 2.3 percentage points more in the EP election, and

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Belgium

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Dutch-speaking constituency | | | | | | |
| New-Flemish Alliance (N-VA) | EPP | 954,048 | 22.4 | 3 | -4.2 | -1 |
| Flemish Interest (VB) | ENL | 811,169 | 19.1 | 3 | 12.5 | +2 |
| OpenVld | ALDE | 678,051 | 16.0 | 2 | -4.5 | |
| Christian-Democrat & Flemish (CD&V) | EPP | | | | | |
| Christian-Democrat & Flemish (CD&V) | EPP | 617,651 | 14.5 | 2 | -5.4 | -1 |
| Green (Groen) | G-EFA | 525,908 | 12.4 | 1 | +1.8 | |
| Socialist Party Different (Sp.a) | S&D | 434,002 | 10.2 | 1 | -3.0 | |
| Labour Party (PVDA) | GUE-NGL | 210,391 | 5.0 | | +2.6 | |
| Total | | 4,231,220 | 99.6 | 12 | | |
| French-speaking constituency | | | | | | |
| Socialist Party (PS) | S&D | 651,157 | 26.7 | 2 | -2.6 | -1 |
| Ecolo | G-EFA | 485,655 | 19.9 | 2 | +8.2 | +1 |
| Mouvement for Reform (MR) | ALDE | 470,654 | 19.3 | 2 | -7.8 | -1 |
| Belgian Labour Party (PTB) | GUE-NGL | 355,883 | 14.6 | 1 | +9.1 | |
| Humanist democratic center (cdH) | EPP | 218,078 | 8.9 | 1 | -2.4 | |
| Défi | | 144,555 | 5.9 | | +2,5 | |
| Popular Party (PP) | | 113,793 | 4.7 | | -1.3 | |
| Total | | 2,439,775 | 100 | 8 | | |

| (continued) Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Belgium | | | | | | |
|---|----------|------------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
| German-speaking constituency | | | | | | |
| Christian-Social Party (CSP) | EPP | 14,247 | 34.9 | 1 | +4.6 | |
| Ecolo | | 6,675 | 16.4 | | -0.3 | |
| For German-speaking community (ProDG) | | 5,360 | 13.1 | | -0.1 | |
| Party for Freedom and Progress (PFF-MR) | | 4,684 | 11.5 | | -4.6 | |
| Socialist Party (SP) | | 4,655 | 11.4 | | -3.7 | |
| Vivant | | 4,550 | 11.2 | | +2.6 | |
| Animal Party (DierAnimal) | | 606 | 1.5 | | | |
| Total | | 40,777 | 100 | 1 | | |
| Total | | 13,423,544 | | 21 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 88.5 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

the Walloon greens took 5.4%, with about 1.5 percentage points increase in the vote share.³ It suggests that the outspokenly transnational and pro-European programs these parties presented may have incentivized voters to make a particularly European choice.

This pattern could also be a consequence of the typical phenomenon of ‘sincere voting’ in second order elections, where voters opt for a smaller party they sympathize with, when the stakes in the election seem lower to them (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). However, with radical left and radical right challengers, we see no such effects. Results for PTB and VB are equally strong in Wallonia and Flanders, as they are in the EP election. Whereas research has shown that voters behave differently in European elections, coincidence and compulsory voting seem to mitigate these effects in Belgium (for example Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004; Hobolt et al., 2009).

ISSUES AND CANDIDATES: LEAST SALIENT, VERY 'EUROPEAN'

Despite the lack of attention to the EP election, the elections had a European dimension due to the two topics dominating the agenda: migration and the climate. The latter was especially debated in Flanders. Migration had been a hot topic over the departing government's term, as the federal state secretary for asylum and migration, Theo Francken (N-VA) had caused several incidents, taking a very tough stand on migration, and sharing controversial tweets about refugees and migrants. Eventually, the government fell over the issue, when coalition partner N-VA refused to back the United Nations Global Compact for Migration.

The climate had been at the center of public debate since the weekly protests of Belgian youngsters in the streets of Brussels. Following the example of the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, the youngsters held weekly 'strikes', taking to the streets instead of going to school. Shortly after the demonstration, the Flemish Christian-democrat minister for the environment, resigned after falsely claiming that the secret services informed her about radical forces orchestrating the protests.

The issue of European integration itself remained largely depoliticized. Despite a tough anti-migration agenda, both N-VA and VB refrain from placing hard Euroscepticism at the center of their programs. A possible explanation for this, is that they may see the EU as a vehicle, rather than an obstacle in that struggle. Contrary to what the strong position of the two Flemish nationalist parties may imply, the topic of state reform, or of a further redistribution of competences within Belgium, was barely discussed in the run-up to the election.

While national politicians took turns showing up in daily political shows on the Belgian national channels, there was little attention given to the EP candidates. On Flemish television, there was a rather low-profile debate between candidates, and there were two or three slightly more ambitious debates in Walloon media. There was no Belgian candidacy for the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. In 2014, the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt for the Presidency of the Commission had attracted at least some attention to the European election (Kelbel et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

Altogether, the EP election went by without much notice. For many Belgians, the European vote was just another box to be filled on an already complex ballot paper. Nevertheless, the salience of migration and climate, and the gains of parties that 'own' these issues, gave the election a European dimension. It seems that Belgium is catching up with a development that has been redrawing party systems elsewhere in Europe for quite some time now. But in the particular Belgian context, it results in a growing fracture between the two parts of the country. Without touching upon the issue, the Flemish nationalists may have succeeded in getting the issue of state reform on the table by means of the essentially European issue of migration.

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Bulgaria: neither a protest, nor a European vote

NIKOLETA YORDANOVA

In May 2019, over six million voters were eligible to select seventeen members of the European Parliament (EP) in Bulgaria under a proportional representation system with preferential voting in a single nation-wide constituency.¹ Three hundred and eighteen candidates were nominated by thirteen political parties, eight coalitions and six initiative committees.² Voting in the EP elections is mandatory in Bulgaria, but there is no penalty for not turning out to vote. Furthermore, voting can take place only in person at polling stations and there is no postal voting. These voting arrangements, combined with the lack of any new political formations to mobilise habitual non-voters and the fact that the election fell on the third day of a long weekend, prompted low electoral turnout.³

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Until election day, the winner of the European elections in Bulgaria was unpredictable. A week before the elections, one fourth of the voters were undecided.⁴ The main governing political party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), in coalition with the United Democratic Forces (SDS), was predicted by opinion polls to receive 30%. So was the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the biggest opposition party and a successor of the ex-communist party. A distant third, but sure to obtain EP representation (polling at about 11%), was the long-standing Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), representing the ethnic Turkish minority in Bulgaria. A number of smaller parties and independent candidates fought for single seats. Most likely to pass the 5.88% effective threshold needed to obtain a seat were the “Democratic

1. A candidate needs 5% of the party vote for the party list to be reordered.
2. Central Electoral Commission (CIK). <https://www.cik.bg/bg/ep2019/registers/candidates> (Retrieved May 15, 2019).
3. Interview by the newspaper Duma with the political commentator Dimityr Ganer, Research Center Trend on May 21, 2019. <https://duma.bg/dimitar-ganev-ochakvam-niska-izbiratelna-aktivnost-1192192> (Retrieved on May 21, 2019).
4. National survey by research center Spectyr conducted in the period 16-21 May 2019 <https://fakti.bg/bulgaria/382876-spektar-borba-za-chetvartoto-masto-za-evropeiskite-izbori>.

Bulgaria” coalition and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), a political party.⁵

Corruption scandals involving the government dominated the public debates in April and early May, leading to a drop in support for the governing GERB and a lead of two percentage points for BSP.⁶ The so-called “apartment-gate” scandal exploded when the media revealed high-ranking government officials had obtained luxurious apartments in the centre of Sofia at unrealistically low prices. Public protests threatened the government’s survival, and the main opposition party BSP demanded early national elections should it win the European elections.

Another outcome of the scandal was increased apathy among the electorate. The public grew tired of the electoral political propaganda. While 51% of the voters viewed the European elections as important in April, only 38% did so a month later.⁷ The expected turnout was revised from 42% in early May to 35% as the elections approached.⁸

Concerns about the protection of Bulgaria’s national interests in the EU also surfaced in the electoral campaigns. The top candidate of the governing party GERB and current Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel, pledged her party would pursue ending the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, a post EU-accession monitoring program of the progress of Bulgaria in fighting corruption and assuring the rule of law via an independent judiciary. GERB positioned itself strongly against double food standards in Eastern Europe compared to the rest of the EU.⁹

The main opposition party, BSP, focused on attacking the government in the wake of the corruption scandals. It also criticised the government’s failure to secure the end of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. Furthermore, BSP emphasised problems of low income in Bulgaria and supported the introduction of some form of minimum wage across the EU.¹⁰ The party strongly advocated ending the EU’s economic sanctions against Russia. Notably, BSP assumed conservative views by fervently opposing the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women on the grounds that it also entailed the protection of transsexual people.

As usual, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) was expected to mobilise their supporters and gain a double-digit result in the election. It led a pro-EU campaign with emphasis on economic development to entice Bulgarian emigrants to come back to the country.

5. https://www.dnevnik.bg/politika/2019/04/25/3424680_za_17_evrodeputatski_mesta_se_boriat_318_bulgari/ Retrieved on April 25, 2019.

6. Mediana Agency. “Two weeks before the European Elections: Public and Political Attitudes.” www.mediana.bg/download-analysis/MAY_2019_press.doc. Retrieved May 10, 2019.

7. Ibid.

8. Capital citing survey by Specter Research Center https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ekonomika/bulgaria/2019/05/26/3911079_live_evroizbori_2019/. Retrieved May 26, 2019.

9. Svobodna Evropa, interview with GERB’s party list leader Mariya Gavriel on 21.05.2019 <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/29952541.html>.

10. Svobodna Evropa, interview with BSP’s party list leader Elena Yoncheva on 22.05.2019. <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/29954975.htm>.

Next in line for possible EP representation were the nationalist-patriotic parties. The front-runner was IMRO, which promoted less EU bureaucracy and federalism, but not less European integration per se. It also advocated the end of the discriminatory EU monitoring of Bulgaria's internal affairs and judiciary as well as scrapping the EU's Mobility Package.¹¹ IMRO further campaigned against illegal immigration and double standards in the EU and promoted protectionist policies for Bulgarian industries.¹² The party's rhetoric included strong sentiments against any political influence of Turkey over Bulgaria.

Other nationalist-patriotic parties with somewhat slimmer chances included Volya-The Bulgarian Patriots, Patriots for Valeri Simeonov and Ataka. These parties emphasized to various degrees populist anti-establishment policies and strict immigration controls.

A final likely candidate to gain a seat was the coalition Democratic Bulgaria (DB), uniting the centre-right and green parties. Its leader, Radan Kanev, advocated continued EU monitoring of law and justice in Bulgaria and continued sanctions on Russia. The party stood for deeper political union and integration in the spheres of defence and security, justice and energy.¹³ It viewed the EP elections as an opportunity for a vote of no confidence against the government.

RESULTS

The governing GERB was the winner of the elections. Together with its coalition partner SDS, it sends six deputies to Brussels. GERB's recovery from the corruption scandals is attributable to the personal engagement of its popular party leader Boyko Borisov in the final days of the party campaign.

BSP ended up in second place with five EP seats, damaging its hopes for early parliamentary elections. Its former leader and current President of the Party of the European Socialists, Sergey Stanishev, ascribes the party loss to intra-party conflicts, lack of a united campaign with real EU content and the party's exit from the national parliament earlier this year to boycott an electoral rule change.¹⁴ BSP did not suc-

11. The Mobility Package has been criticized in Bulgaria for undermining the competitive advantage of Eastern European hauliers in prices and services by introducing new regulation of truck drivers' postings, driving and rest times among others.
12. Svobodna Evropa, interview with IMRO's party list leader Angel Dzhambazki on 21.05.2019 2019 <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/29952690.html>.
13. Svobodna Evropa, interview with the list leader of "Democratic Bulgaria" Radan Kanev on 22.05.2019. <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/29952857.html>.
14. Interview by BNT with Sergey Stanishev on 26.05.2019. <https://izbori.bnt.bg/analizi-single/sergej-stanishev-tova-ne-e-poslednata-bitka-koyato-vodim/> In an effort to distract attention from the prime ministers' successes in the international arena, BSP tried to redirect attention to national politics and left the parliament in protest against a proposal to amend the electoral law, which would have scrapped preferential voting.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Bulgaria

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) | EPP | 607,194 | 31.1 | 6 | +0.3 | |
| Bulgarian Socialist Party for Bulgaria (BSP) | S&D | 474,160 | 24.3 | 5 | +5.4 | +1 |
| Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) | ALDE | 323,510 | 16.6 | 3 | -0.7 | -1 |
| Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) - Bulgarian National Movement | ECR | 143,830 | 7.4 | 2 | | +1 |
| Democratic Bulgaria (DB) | EPP | 118,484 | 6.1 | 1 | | |
| Volya-The Bulgarian Patriots | ENF | 70,830 | 3.6 | | | |
| Initiative committee for Desislava Petrova Ivancheva | | 30,310 | 1.6 | | | |
| Initiative committee for Mincho Hristov Kuminev | | 22,992 | 1.2 | | | |
| Patriots for Valeri Simeonov (NFSB and Middle European Class) | EFD | 22,421 | 1.1 | | | |
| The Way to the Young | | 21,315 | 1.1 | | | |
| Ataka | NI | 20,906 | 1.1 | | -1.9 | |
| Vazrazdane | | 20,319 | 1.0 | | | |
| Reload Bulgaria (formerly Bulgaria without Censorship) | ECR | 3,907 | 0.2 | | | -1 |
| Others | | 74,113 | 3.8 | | | |
| Total ^a | | 1,954,291 | 100 | 17 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 33.3 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

Note: PR system with preferential vote.

^a The total does not include the 61,029 votes for "I don't support anyone".

Sources: Central Electoral Commissio. <https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/447/2019-05-29> and <https://results.cik.bg/ep2019/rezultati/index.html> (Retrieved on 29.05.2019)

ceed in mobilising centrist voters to oppose the government, leading to the resignation of its leader Kornelia Ninova.¹⁵

DPS obtained three EP seats, one fewer than in the previous EP elections. A bigger surprise was the success of the newly formed coalition Democratic Bulgaria, which garnered a plurality of the vote from expatriot Bulgarians (i.e. 28.8%) and won one seat in the EP. IMRO also did remarkably well by consolidating the nationalist vote and securing two EP seats. None of the other nationalist parties mustered enough votes to obtain representation. Euroscepticism did not define the European elections in Bulgaria.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the EP elections in Bulgaria does not sit well with any of the established theoretical models of European elections. It conforms to the second order electoral model only in so far as the turnout was notably low at 33.3% (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Hix and Marsh, 2007).¹⁶ This is significantly lower than the average turnout across the member states of 51.0%¹⁷ and it is 2.6 percentage points lower than in the 2014 EP election in Bulgaria.¹⁸ The low electoral activity can be viewed as a protest against the political elites in Bulgaria. In line with this interpretation, of those who did turn out, 3% chose the vote option “I do not support anyone”.¹⁹ However, contrary to the other two predictions of the second order model, the government and larger parties more generally were not the clear losers in the elections. On the contrary, opposition parties did not succeed in framing the European elections as a vote of (no) confidence in the government. Moreover, smaller parties only slightly increased their vote share in the EP elections compared to the national parliamentary elections (by 11 percentage points altogether). Overall, the results cannot be summarised as a protest vote, even though the EP elections fell in the middle of the national electoral cycle when the government’s honeymoon period is over and it is more vulnerable to electoral punishment (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996).

The alternative “Europe matters” model of European Parliament elections predicting sincere voting based on EU issues cannot account for the results either (e.g. De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and Spoon, 2012; Hobolt, 2015). Although European issues emerged during the electoral campaign, none of the winning parties

15. That is despite the timing of the elections during a long weekend holiday that favoured BSP. While GERB’s more well-off sympathizers were expected to go on holidays, higher turnout was anticipated by BSP’s core supporters, i.e. pensioner for whom the elections offered rare means of social participation.

16. CIK. <https://www.cik.bg/b> (Retrieved May 29, 2019).

17. <https://www.election-results.eu/> (Retrieved May 31, 2019).

18. For comparison, the voter turnout in the 2017 national parliamentary elections was 54.1% (CIK. <http://results.cik.bg/pi2017/aktivnost/index.html>. (Retrieved May 31, 2019).

19. CIK <https://www.cik.bg/b> (Retrieved May 29, 2019). Curiously, 36% also took advantage of preferential voting rather than relying on the pre-ordered lists devised by party leaders.

offered a clear EU programme for the coming years. Crucially, the hard Eurosceptics enjoyed remarkably weak electoral support.

Thus, a new theoretical model is needed to explain the results of the EP elections in Bulgaria, and perhaps more broadly in Eastern Europe.

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Croatia: Towards further fragmentation of the party system

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INTRODUCTION

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections in Croatia were held in a very different political environment than previous EP elections. Economic conditions have improved as GDP growth resumed in 2015, unemployment has declined by more than half, and the government's fiscal position has improved as well. However, the entry into the EU and expiration of the restrictions on the free movement of labour produced mass emigration of mostly younger Croatians towards countries of Western Europe. Thus, despite the migrant crisis that affected Croatia in 2015 and 2016, and the constant pressure of migration on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was emigration – rather than immigration – that was at the core of public debates in the two years preceding the 2019 EP elections. Emigration particularly affected the eastern part of the country, which suffered huge population losses and turned a fertile and potentially prosperous region into a symbol of the country's failure to manage its own development and to take advantage of its EU membership. The Croatian economy was largely unable to tap new markets in the EU, it is heavily dependent on tourism and it suffers from a weak export sector and lack of innovation capacity and competitiveness. This resulted in Croatia becoming one of the countries with the lowest GDP per capita in the EU.

THE CONTEXT

In two years prior to the European Parliamentary elections, the government, led by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), was faced with many challenges: the collapse of the largest company in the country, the bankruptcy of more than half of the shipbuilding industry (one of the few remaining significant industries in Croatia), internal political infighting between various wings of the HDZ itself, pressures from trade unions (which mobilised huge support in opposition to a proposed pension reform), and pressures from conservative and nationalist groups (by challenging party leadership when HDZ had moved to a more centrist position after 2016 under the leadership of Andrej Plenković). For two years, the fight between the prime minister and his more nationalist and conservative opponents on the right was played out very publicly, affecting the undisputed perception of HDZ as the sole credible representative of voters on the right.

At the same time, the period preceding the EP elections was characterised by infighting within the main opposition Social Democrat Party (SDP), which saw numerous but ineffective challenges to its even more ineffective leader Davor Bernardić. These challenges resulted in expulsions, suspensions and defections from the party, reducing party strength in the parliament and its credibility with voters. As a consequence, the party lost almost half of its support in the polls. At the same time, the party Most failed to effectively position itself in the Croatian party system. This party emerged as the anti-establishment reform party in 2015, seeking to break the two-party duopoly. Most won significant support in parliamentary elections in 2015 and 2016, briefly participated in two governments, and brought both of them down in short order. Yet, it was overall unable to clearly define its identity and suffered from splits and defections, losing support along the way. On the populist end of the party spectrum, *Živi Zid* (Human Blockade), which also emerged in 2015, had fewer problems defining its message, which consisted in opposing Croatian membership in the Eurozone and NATO, calling for political control over the central bank, and suggesting leaving the EU. The party almost rose to second place in the polls, but it declined immediately thereafter, as new political actors with similar appeals entered the stage at the beginning of 2019.

Overall, between the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament elections, the party system in Croatia underwent further fragmentation, primarily as a result of popular demand for new political actors. However, none of these parties were able to effectively establish a functional organization and presence on the ground. These parties were often reduced to, and therefore completely dependent on, a few prominent personalities acting as the public face of the party. These parties also struggled to form candidate lists that had visibility for the EP elections, and struggled to sustain political activity. Sheer numerical fragmentation did not help. To compensate for this and prevent the wasting of votes, parties formed coalitions which often included four, five or even more members.

As a consequence, on the eve of the 2019 European elections the combined support in the polls for the two largest parties (HDZ and SDP) had dropped from over 60% before the 2015 parliamentary elections to around 40%. The combined vote share of the four largest parties was approximately 60%, having fallen from over 80% compared to the 2015 parliamentary elections, and there were about ten parties polling below 3%.

THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign for the 2019 EP elections was more visible than at the previous EP elections. After six years of membership, it appears that in this campaign the electorate was more familiar with the role of the European Parliament and somewhat more engaged with the issues facing the EU. Furthermore, parties or individual candidates, mostly MEPs, were even making statements about how they see the future of the EU, which was not really the case in previous elections.

Having incumbent MEPs produced significant advantage in the campaign, especially if those MEPs had managed to remain visible to the Croatian public throughout their term. Here SDP enjoyed a particular advantage as both of their MEPs were quite well-known and popular among the general public. A similar advantage was enjoyed by the group of nationalists and conservative parties forming the coalition of Croatian Sovereignists headed by the well-known and popular MEP Ruža Tomašić, the only Croatian MEP member of the ECR group.

Perhaps the biggest risk was taken by HDZ, which advanced a list of relatively new and unknown candidates and failed to include any prominent members from the right wing of the party. Additionally, the list did not include two prominent MEPs representing former HDZ coalition partners, both of whom likely enjoyed significant support among the party adherents, despite not being party members. Thus, despite having perhaps the most organized and resourced electoral campaign, HDZ struggled to raise the profile of their candidates. Also, the HDZ campaign, in comparison with previous EP elections, did not rely as heavily on symbolic politics based on history and values. Instead, influenced by the prime minister and his centrist strategy, it emphasized dangers of populism and extremism for the EU. This message was directed both at the populist parties like *Živi Zid*, and HDZ's competitors on the right such as Independents for Croatia and Croatian Sovereignists. The party leadership was using this election campaign to place the party firmly in the centre of the party system and the European mainstream; and attendance at the party's final rally of Manfred Weber and Angela Merkel served to emphasize this appeal.

The SDP campaign was led by their EP candidates as the party leader entered this race with a weakened position – the party had been suffering in the polls for quite some time and dissatisfaction in the party was palpable. Most, which entered the campaign as the fourth party in the polls, focused their message on the criticism of HDZ. However, as the list was topped by the party leader and a majority of the MPs from the national parliament, it failed to present a clear candidate or message for the EP election, and offered only a weak and somewhat directionless Eurosceptic appeal. Similarly, the nationalist Independent for Croatia were focusing on their domestic message and criticism of the current HDZ leadership, but otherwise did not have a clear position or a candidate for this election, as their most prominent candidates indicated that they will remain in the national parliament. *Živi Zid* was the only party promoting a clear Eurosceptic message, but their campaign also lacked a prominent candidate for the EP and there was a relatively weak presence of the party in the media. Other parties and lists varied greatly in their focus and the tone of their campaign, as some emphasised their candidates and others focused on domestic issues.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Croatia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|------------------|------------|-----------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) | EPP | 244,176 | 22.9 | 4 | -18.5 | |
| Social Democrat Party (SDP) | S&D | 200,976 | 18.9 | 4 | -11.0 | +2 |
| Croatian Souverenists (HRAST-HKS-HSP AS-UHD) | ECR | 91,546 | 8.6 | 1 | +8.6 | |
| Independent list Mislav Kolakušić | NI | 84,746 | 8.0 | 1 | +8.0 | +1 |
| Human Blockade (Živi Zid) | EFD | 60,847 | 5.7 | 1 | +5.7 | +1 |
| Amsterdam coalition (HSS-GLAS-IDS-HSU-PGS-D-HL-SR) | ALDE | 55,806 | 5.2 | 1 | +5.2 | |
| Bridge od independent lists (Most) | NI | 50,527 | 4.7 | | +4.7 | |
| Independent list Marijana Petir | NI | 47,385 | 4.5 | | +4.5 | -1 |
| Independents for Croatia (NZH - HSP) | NI | 46,970 | 4.4 | | +4.4 | |
| Independent Democrat Serb Party (SDSS) | NI | 28,597 | 2.7 | | +2.7 | |
| Croatians People Party-Liberal Democrats (HNS) | ALDE | 27,958 | 2.6 | | +2.6 | -1 |
| Party of anticorruption, development and transparency (START) | NI | 21,744 | 2.0 | | +2.0 | |
| Party of Labour and Solidarity (BM 365) | NI | 21,175 | 2.0 | | +2.0 | |
| We Can - Political platform (Možemo - Nova Ljevica - ORaH) | G-EFA | 19,313 | 1.8 | | +1.8 | -1 |
| Smart (Pametno) | ALDE | 15,074 | 1.4 | | +1.4 | |
| Others | | 47,521 | 4.5 | | | |
| Total | | 1,064,361 | 100 | 12 | | +1 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 29.86 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 29.9 | | | |

Note: Single national district with 11 (12 after Brexit) seats allocated according to d'Hondt formula. Voters cast a single vote either for a party list or as a preference. Preference votes can change the ordering of candidates on the list when 10% of the total votes cast for the party list indicate a preference vote for a candidate. Source: <https://www.izbori.hr/rezultati/index.html>

RESULTS

European parliament elections in Croatia are conducted under a PR system where eleven seats (twelve after the UK exits the EU) are allocated in a single national district using the D'Hondt method. Voters can also indicate a preference for a single candidate, but this can change the order of candidates on the party list only if 10% of voters cast a preference vote for a specific candidate.

Turnout in 2019 elections was just over 1.1 million voters, or 29.9%, which is a noticeable increase from 2014 EP elections when just over 950,000 voters participated in the elections (25.24%) or than special elections held in 2013, where just above 780,000 voters participated (20.84%). Seats were won by six lists of individual parties, coalitions or political platforms. However, the result still left more than 31% of the voters unrepresented in the EP, which was likely a consequence of high party system fragmentation.

Apart from the large share of “wasted votes”, the election saw a significant drop in the share of the two largest parties to just above 41%. Though two parties had fought several previous EP and national elections in wider coalitions, this level of support is their lowest recorded since the first multiparty elections in 1990. For the SDP, which has suffered a precipitous drop in support since the 2016 parliamentary elections, 18.9% of the vote and four seats was actually an increase compared to indications in pre-electoral polls. For HDZ the result of 22.9% was lower than polls had predicted. Winning four seats was less than the party expected, and as a share of votes it is the worst result in the party's history in nationwide elections. Apparently, the risky strategy of the party leader and prime minister Andrej Plenković – aimed at promoting new names from the centrist wing of the party – did not appeal to the core of the party base. This was an ominous sign given the strong party organization which even at the height of HDZ unpopularity managed to turn out more voters. SDP's result might just be a consequence of the fact that the party has the oldest electorate of all parties, which translated into a turnout advantage.

The alliance of conservative and nationalist parties called Croatian Sovereignists won 8.6% of the votes, and this success is in large part likely due to MEP Ruža Tomašić, who won around 76% of the preference votes cast for the list, and the largest number of preference votes of all candidates. The biggest winner, perhaps, is the independent candidate Mislav Kolakušić, a former judge of the commercial court running on a fairly populist message, who managed to gain 8.0% of the votes despite being the only publicly known figure on the list. Somewhat less successful were *Živi Zid*, a Croatian version of the Italian Five Star Movement, and a group of seven centrist, left and liberal parties called the Amsterdam coalition, winning one seat each, but failing to gather as many votes as expected and underperforming in comparison to predictions in the pre-electoral polls. Around nine lists won more than 1% of the votes, including another three nationalist or conservative groups with a combined vote share of around 13%, and six parties or lists broadly on the left with around 12% of the votes. The elections saw a surge in support for more radical conservative and nationalist parties which gained around 14% of the votes. The elections also demonstrated the strength of in-

cumbency, with all MEPs who managed to maintain some visibility during their term in office securing sizable support, even if not all of them won seats.

CONCLUSION

The elections demonstrated increasing fragmentation of the Croatian party system, where splits in established parties and inability of new actors to join forces or form a viable political organisations created parties with few members, almost no organisation, and scarcely any figures or policies capable of attracting public attention. These parties could not pass the electoral threshold and were either forced to join a coalition with similarly small and weak parties or end up collecting “wasted” votes. If this process continues, electoral volatility and turnover of parties is likely to increase, as most new actors have insufficient appeal, organisation or leadership to stabilise their support. Furthermore, the elections may indicate that after almost three decades of successfully incorporating nationalist and conservative groups within HDZ, new parties representing these groups are emerging to the right of HDZ, significantly reducing the electorate available to the party. The fragmentation of the party systems is also likely to make the formation of governing coalitions at the national level more difficult in the future. It may be that this process could lead to the formation of new parties from the fragments of the current party system under pressure of election results. However, the near future is likely to be characterised by higher volatility and party turnover.

Cyprus: An election of ‘soft’ phenomena: apathy, incumbent punishment and far right consolidation

GIORGOS CHARALAMBOUS

Main comment: this author mostly discuss results in absolutes votes, whilst basically everybody else did it (also) in percentages. He also has a penchant for elegant language, using words that may not be understood by non-native speakers (much as I enjoyed them).

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 European election in the Republic of Cyprus came three years after the last legislative elections of 2016, and one year after the presidential elections of 2018 that saw the right-wing governing party, DISY, and President Nicos Anastasiades renewing their mandate for another five years. In the surfeit of campaign news and electoral results that lie before us, one can observe a number of realignments in the patterns of political competition. Although each of them carries significance, their overall relevance in the island’s political evolution is certainly not analogous to a major transformation of domestic politics. Rather, a series of phenomena that can be called ‘soft’ have been witnessed, whereby apathy and far-right consolidation have become the new normal and a swing against the government has emerged, which, however, has not altered the political dynamics very significantly.

CAMPAIGN ISSUES: A LASTING CLEAVAGE STRUCTURE

Campaigning in the European elections is usually centred around national-level issues rather than EU-wide or even EU-relevant ones. Cyprus constitutes a clear example of this ethnocentric approach to the Union’s electoral process whereby political competition revolves chiefly around the Cyprus problem and the economy. This is a pattern evident since the first European elections of 2004 (Teperoglou, 2012) which continues to this day, in a way very similar to the rest of the continent.

The Cyprus problem both trampled the EU as an issue of public political debate and was incorporated into questions relevant to the EU. For example, the Turkish Cypriot academic Niazi Kizilyurek’s candidacy, on the left-wing AKEL’s ballot, was challenged by journalists and politicians who questioned his intentions about voting inside the European Parliament (EP) on ‘crucial issues’ of government and state policy such as direct trade between the EU and the internationally unrecognised TRNC (‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’), in the island’s northern part.

Most polls showed that the Cyprus problem, the economy and to a lesser extent corruption were the main criteria declared by the public as driving the vote. These were also the most salient issues within public opinion, to which the media both responded and contributed with their own ethnocentric framing (Trimithiotis, 2019). The crisis unfolded in various directions, such as discussions about the government's selling of the previously state-owned Cooperative Bank to one of the main private banks, and the handling of the transfer by the Finance Minister. Visible sleaze, compounded by the Left's allegations that Anastasiades and DISY were elitist, authoritarian and corrupt, also eroded the incumbent's profile. Issues of 'new politics' that go beyond the traditional cleavages in the country – such as women's rights within the EU or outside of it, LGBT rights issues, environmental protection, climate change, or urban planning – were marginal. Some additional issues were also already being addressed within the domain of the ethnic cleavage, through the everydayness of Cyprus problem politics.

The internal dynamics of parties determined their electoral strategy and, consequently, their ballot composition. The Left, inside which a clear pro-solution [to the Cyprus divided state] stance has been projected since about 2014, included for the first time a Turkish Cypriot on its ballot for a public post in the Republic of Cyprus. His nomination was both symbolic of the reunification struggles and practical, as it was the first time that AKEL ran an organised and extensive pre-electoral campaign in the northern part of the island, which on voting day evolved into help with the transportation and attendance of Turkish Cypriot voters at the electoral polls.

AKEL's move was at the same time electorally rational, as Kizilyurek's candidacy was intended to limit or reverse the party's 2 percentage points 'losses' to the reunification bi-communal lists of 2014, Jasmin and Drasy-Eylem. In the European elections of 2019, the Turkish Cypriot vote was expected to account for approximately between 2% and 4% of AKEL's overall vote share, depending on abstention. The higher the abstention among Greek Cypriots, the more determinative of the result the Turkish Cypriot vote, hence the more responsive to the Turkish Cypriot vote AKEL (and others) would likely be.

For right-wing DISY, the presence of the extreme right ELAM required candidates addressing ultranationalist, conservative and neo-fascist elements, but these had to be balanced with those reflecting liberal, open and bi-communal views. Its ballot thus reached a compromise between the popular, lower and middle-class tendencies of the Right, both religious and nationalist, and the cosmopolitan, capitalist strata and professional classes which are liberal and pro-European. Although DISY's strategy may have prevented worse damage, it was not enough to avert outflows towards either AKEL's bi-communal ballot or ELAM's outright hostility to reunification.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS: SOFT PHENOMENA

Six men were elected, two from the two main parties, AKEL and DISY, and one by the so-called in-between space, DIKO and EDEK. The four pillars of the pre-crisis party system in Cyprus entered the EP, but electoral shifts and evolving dynamics were evi-

dent (Table 1). In the immediate aftermath of the election, media coverage again revolved around the slogan ‘Abstention was the winner’. In absolute votes abstention rose to 352,968 from 340,025 in 2014. A dramatic fall in the turnout rate happened already in 2009, and then again in 2014, on the occasion of the second and third European elections in Cyprus. By today, apathy has been at stable levels, hence it is now all the more difficult to reverse – neither party-instigated polarisation, nor the growth of the far right have persuaded more voters to cast a ballot. Turkish Cypriot turnout was 6.93% (5,604 voters), approximately double that of 2014, largely because of Kirzilyurek’s nomination, but still very low. Increasing abstention rates and broader apathy are traits that have existed since before the early 2010s, and the onset of the economic crisis, thus cannot be exclusively linked to economic difficulties and their politicisation (see Charalambous, 2014).

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Cyprus

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Democratic Rally (DISY) | EPP | 81,539 | 29.2 | 2 | -8.6 | |
| Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) | GUE/NGL | 77,241 | 27.5 | 2 | +0.5 | |
| Democratic Party (DIKO) | S&D | 38,756 | 13.8 | 1 | +3.0 | |
| Social Democratic Movement - EDEK (EDEK) | S&D | 29,715 | 10.6 | 1 | N/A* | |
| National, Popular Front (ELAM) | NI | 23,167 | 8.3 | | +5.6 | |
| Democratic Line-up (DIPA) | NI | 10,673 | 3.8 | | | |
| Ecologists/Citizens’ Movement | G-EFA/ALDE | 9,232 | 3.3 | | N/A* | |
| Jasmin (Yasemi) | NI | 4,786 | 1.7 | | N/A* | |
| Others | | 6 | 2.1 | | | |
| Total | | 280,935 | 100 | 6 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 45.0 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 1.8* | | | |

*N/A because EDEK run on a joint ballot with the Ecologists in 2014; Citizens’ Movement run alone; DIPA did not exist at the time; Yasemi’s leader ran as an independent.

*The threshold by law is 1.8% but in practice for six seats (with Cyprus counting as a single constituency) it is 16.6%.

Nevertheless, some change has already happened. In clear contrast to the European elections of 2014, where the then newly elected President's honeymoon period (Anastasiades was elected in 2013) allowed the Right to avoid significant losses and present itself as a winner (Charalambous, Papageorgiou and Pegasiou, 2015), by 2019 dissatisfaction with the government had increased significantly. A considerable share of citizens with negative opinions about DISY shifted into abstention, so the party lost almost 9 percentage points (a total of around 16,000 votes). This may signal the beginning of the end of DISY's hegemony. However, considering the high electoral fluidity, this trend might be reversed or contained at the legislative elections in 2021. Compared to the vote shares of the parties participating in the EPP (European People's Party), DISY's losses still allow it a place approximately seven percentage points above its 'sister parties' EU average. Its result is thus not disastrous (at least in comparative terms), but its wave has receded, and its electoral future appears challenged.

The far right achieved a result establishing it as one of the five biggest parties in the Republic of Cyprus. Specifically, ELAM gathered 23,167 votes, slightly higher than it polled at the Presidential elections of 2018, but more than three times (in real numbers) its 2014 European elections result. Although the Greek Cypriot far right did not manage to enter the EP, its real electoral strength now seems to lie between 6% and 8% of the vote. The days of discussing how to deter the rise of the extremists are now over; this is the period of their consolidation and mainstreaming.

The fluidity of political competition has also been clear for some time but the results, again, are not transformative. From Table 2, one can see that vote switching occurred between most political parties, but for the most part only between ideologically proximate parties or platforms; voters moved from one to another choice, largely based on at least one or more ideological or political convictions with a historical reflection in terms of either or both of traditional socio-economic issues and the Turkish/Greek ethnic cleavage.

Table 2 - Vote consolidation and vote switching at the 2019 Cyprus European elections (compared to the 2016 legislative elections)*

| PARTY | VOTE CONSOLIDATION (\approx %) | MAIN INFLOWS FROM | MAIN OUTFLOWS TO |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| AKEL | 89 | Turkish Cypriots, DISY liberals | EDEK and abstention |
| DISY | 79 | ELAM | ELAM, abstention |
| DIKO | 72 | Solidarity** | EDEK, DIPA |
| EDEK | 80 | DIKO, Ecologists/Citizens' Movement, AKEL | Very limited |
| DIPA | 90 | DISY, DIKO, AKEL, new voters, abstention | N/A |
| Ecologists/ Citizens' Alliance | 35/35 | N/A | EDEK, Abstention |
| ELAM | 80 | Solidarity**, new voters, abstention, DISY | DISY |

* Approximate figures, based on multiple exit polls.
** Solidarity is a centre-right, nationalist party, which ran on DIKO's ballot in 2019. Its leader, Eleni Theocharous came second and was not re-elected.

AKEL's candidate list, which included a Turkish Cypriot liberal academic (who was elected with more than 25,000 votes), attracted voters on the pro-reunification side within DISY or the broader centre-right space. The left also attracted a considerable number of Turkish Cypriots, as intended - around two thirds of those who voted. These two forces have increased AKEL's vote for the EP that, along with a return to the party of voters who had abstained in 2014, added to the Left around 8,000 voters compared with five years ago. Still, and although AKEL's vote consolidation has increased and is high, a number of voters choosing the party until 2009, before the effects of its experience in executive office (2008-2013), seem to have been lost forever - mostly, although not exclusively, to abstention.

DISY lost some of its former votes to its right competitor, the extremist ELAM, especially in the district of Famagusta, where material interests in tourism and construction that could be damaged by reunification tend to favour an explicitly hard-line policy on the Cyprus problem - and ultra-nationalism. The 'centrist', nationalist space emerged equally divided as before. Citizens' Alliance is exiting as a relevant actor, and DIKO's splinter, DIPA, is becoming a serious competitor. DIKO increased its share by approximately 3%, partly due to the inclusion of Solidarity on its ballot. The social democratic EDEK attracted voters who were adamant on keeping ELAM out of the EP, many of whom came from the Ecologists/Citizens' Movement and, guided by polls, opted for EDEK to avoid casting a 'lost vote'.

The crisis years are not yet over in Cyprus, especially on the path towards the negotiated and official partition of the island (see Ioannou, 2019), but also concerning the public's response to the previous European elections. Various signs of economically driven political disaffection are there: increase in the left's vote consolidation, switches from the Right to the Far Right by ultra-nationalist lower- and middle-class supporters who have been negatively affected by state favours or policy, and the centrality of economic institutions in the campaign, such as co-ops and banks.

In most respects, the election signalled the continuation of developments that had appeared with the European elections of 2009 and 2014 or the legislative elections of 2016; this year's electoral contest consolidated pre-existing tendencies inside Cypriot society rather than generating phenomena that are entirely new in their own right.

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Czech Republic: No country for old parties

VLASTIMIL HAVLÍK

INTRODUCTION

Three contextual factors are important for understanding the results of the election in the Czech Republic. The party system has changed dramatically in the last decade, revealing the unprecedented decline of the old political parties and the emergence of different anti-establishment challengers after a series of corruption scandals, government instability coupled with the Great Recession (Balík and Hloušek, 2016). The EP election took place in times of exceptional economic prosperity. The Czech Republic has experienced a record increase in salaries and has been enjoying the lowest level of unemployment among the EU member states. Last but not least, the public has been characterised by a very low level of trust in the European Union, making Czechs one of the most Eurosceptic nations in the EU. The most important message of the election is confirmation of the dominance of the new political parties and the continued decline of the established political parties.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

According to the polls, up to nine different political parties and electoral coalitions seemed to have a good chance of crossing the threshold, reflecting the increased level of party system fragmentation.

Various anti-establishment political parties (none of which had parliamentary representation before the 2013 national election) were predicted to be successful in the election: the technocratic populist ANO led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, the Czech Pirate Party, and the populist radical right Freedom and Direct Democracy. Not surprisingly, the support of the once stable established parties including the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia – KSCM (running under the label of the electoral coalition the United Czech Left), right-wing conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the centrist Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU – ČSL) remained far below their electoral performance of the past. Also, the polls indicated possible success of the centrist liberal electoral coalition Allie for Europe formed by TOP 09 and Mayors and Independents (STAN).

Generally speaking, several intertwined issues dominated the electoral campaign which was far less visible than usual due to the limited effort (and limited financial investments) of political parties. Although the intensity of the refugee crisis did not reach the level of previous years (and the number of asylum-seekers and/or immigrant from non-European countries is very low in the Czech Republic), the issue strongly resonated in the campaign.

Rejection of immigration framed mostly as a potentially serious security and cultural threat for the Czech Republic was the dominant issue for the radical right SPD. The party also presented itself as part of the radical right Eurosceptic group Europe of Freedom and Democracy. The anti-immigration attitude of ANO was less nationalist but more nationalist and protectionist claiming the party to have succeeded in protection of the Czech Republic from immigration (e.g. by voting against the quotas that became a symbol of the discussion on immigration in the context of the EU). Not surprisingly, the EU and the European elites (alongside the “liberal”, “multiculturalist”, “Prague café” and NGOs in the Czech Republic) were blamed for the immigration crisis.

The strong criticism of the EU, usually depicted as an external actor for the Czech Republic (and to a lesser extent the appraisal of the European integration), prevented the EP election from being labelled as a pure example of “second order national elections”. While the SPD called for Czexit, ANO and ODS stressed the need to defend Czech national interests by reinforcing the position of the member states in the institutional structure of the EU. The position of ANO towards the EU was symbolised by a red baseball cap with the slogan “strong Czechia” worn by Babiš and apparently copied from Donald Trump.

ODS abided by its long-term Euroscepticism, rejecting federalism on the EU level and proposing a multi-speed model of European integration. The notion of the national interest was also common for moderately pro-European political parties such as the Christian Democrats or ČSSD. One of the European issues that resonated in this context was the need to guarantee the same quality of products sold in the old and new members. Milka chocolate, Coca-Cola or detergents became symbols of the discussion. Clearly pro-European parties such as the Allies for Europe or the Pirates were the exception, stressing the inevitability of the Czech membership in the EU and the strategic and economic advantages of it.

Last but not least, national politics became an important part of the campaign reflecting the change in party politics related to the success of the populist parties in general and the formation of the government led by Babiš’s ANO in particular. To put it into the context, Babiš – sometimes called the Czech Berlusconi or Czech Trump – is one of the richest businessmen in the Czech Republic. Babiš’s agro-chemical business benefits a lot from both European and national subsidies, which places Babiš in a permanent conflict of interests (Štětka 2013). In addition, the leader of ANO owns important media outlets. On top of that, he is listed as a collaborator with the Secret Police during the communist regime, and at the time of the EP election, he was accused of EU-subsidy embezzlement.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the opposition parties (most visibly ODS and ČPS) presented the election as a tool to stand against Babiš's – as it was described elsewhere – “highly centralised, strongly majoritarian version of a democratic polity with little desire for either horizontal or vertical separations of power” (Havlík, 2019). On the other hand, ANO framed the EP election as another opportunity to reject the “corrupt”, “so-called democratic”, “incompetent” established political parties, also pointing to the extraordinary rise of the Czech economy under Babiš's premiership (he served as the Minister of Finance between 2013-2017).

RESULTS

The level of electoral turnout was one of the biggest questions of the elections and the crucial determinant of the electoral results with varying level of voters' identification with different political parties in the context of one of the lowest levels of public trust in EU and interest in EU-related affairs. The already-low turnout in 2004 and 2009 (in both cases 28%) reached another low in 2014: barely 18% of voters turned out (the second lowest turnout after Slovakia). Although the turnout of 28.7% in 2019 is the new record high, it can be in no way considered as good news for the legitimacy of the EU in general or for Czech MEPs in particular.

ANO got the best result, but 21% is far below its result in the last national election. This might be a consequence of the ongoing investigation of Babiš and of the lower level of party identification among ANO supporters. The greatest rise of support was recorded by the Pirates and SPD, while the result of ODS indicates that the party has undergone partial recovery after its catastrophic recent fall in electoral support. For the first time since 2004, ČSSD lost its representation in the EP, having suffered from the withdrawal of traditionally “warm” supporters, from government participation alongside ANO and from long-term internal ideological disputes between the traditionalists and the modernizers. The results obtained by traditional centre-right pro-European parties indicates the decline of their support, but also showed a way for possible future collaboration (such as the coalition of TOP 09 and STAN).

All in all, the election results seem to confirm the transformation of the Czech party system in the second decade of the 21st century. The established old political parties received only one-third of votes, the rest being cast for various political parties using populist or anti-establishment appeals and offering alternatives to the way in which politics was conducted by the old political parties. It is also clear that the vast majority of voters chose to support a political party representing some type of critical evaluation of the European integration process. On the other hand, it seems that there is little support for Cxexit and voting for soft Eurosceptic parties is far more common.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to determine the biggest winner of the election. However, it is clear that the established political parties that were the backbone of the party system since ear-

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Czechia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| ANO 2011 | ALDE | 502,343 | 21.2 | 6 | +5.1 | +2 |
| Civic Democratic Party (ODS) | ECR | 344,885 | 14.5 | 4 | +6.9 | +2 |
| Czech Pirate Party (Piráti) | G-EFA | 330,884 | 14 | 3 | +9.2 | +3 |
| Allies for Europe (TOP 09 + STAN) | EPP | 276,220 | 11.7 | 3 | -4.3 | -1 |
| Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) | EFD | 216,718 | 9.1 | 2 | +6.0 | +2 |
| Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) | EPP | 171,723 | 7.2 | 2 | -2.7 | -1 |
| Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) | GUE-NGL | 164,624 | 6.9 | 1 | -4.0 | -2 |
| Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) | S&D | 93,664 | 4 | | -10.2 | -4 |
| Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) | S&D | 93,664 | 4 | | -10.2 | -4 |
| Voice (HLAS) | ALDE | 56,449 | 2.4 | | | |
| ANO, we will troll the Europarliament | Not affiliated | 37,046 | 1.6 | | | |
| Free (Svobodní) | EFD | 15,492 | 0.7 | | -4.6 | -1 |
| Total | | 2,370,765 | 100 | 21 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 28.7 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5% | | | |

ly 1990s have been losing ground. All the same, various anti-establishment actors seem to have become the most attractive option for an electorate disappointed by the performance of the old political establishment. Another possible reading of the electoral results shows that most of the votes were cast for political parties with critical attitudes towards the EU, either stressing the need to protect Czech national interests or calling for termination of the membership of the Czech Republic in the European Union. Finally, despite its increase, electoral turnout is still one of the lowest among all the member states of the EU, and there is little sign of any significant renewal of democratic processes.

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Denmark: The surprising success of pro-European mainstream parties

JULIE HASSING NIELSEN

INTRODUCTION

A National Parliament election was called in Denmark in early May 2019. Hence, much of the focus that would otherwise have been devoted to the European Parliament (EP) election went to the national election campaign. Nevertheless, the two elections thematically overlapped. The overall focus was on the climate crisis and, secondly, immigration. This focus secured a successful EP election for green-leaning parties – the Socialist People’s Party (SF) and the Danish Social-Liberal Party (RL). But the mainstream parties, particularly the Liberals, also enjoyed increases in their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), which was mainly at the expense of the right-wing Eurosceptical Danish People’s Party (DF).

THE CAMPAIGN SUMMARIZED: CLIMATE, CLIMATE, AND IMMIGRATION

When the Danish PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen (the Liberals) called a national election to be held on 5 June 2019, the EP election campaign was deemed to yet again become second order. Placing core national events, including national elections, on top of EP elections always challenges the opportunity to put European politics on the agenda (e.g. Hix and Marsh, 2011). Competition for scarce electorate attention is fierce – and, most often, attention to the national election context wins. After all, the EP election remains second order – even in a country famous for its high voter turnout also in the EP election (e.g. Nielsen and Franklin, 2017).

Consequently, the focus on the EP election in national news came very late. As usual, national and European topics were overlapping. On top of this, the climate crisis gained critical attention from the voters, continuously ranking highest when Danes were asked about their top priorities in European and Danish polls (e.g. Eurobarometer 90.3). Amongst other topics that received attention were immigration, both from other European countries and from third countries outside the EU, fighting

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international tax evasion, and avoiding social dumping. Since Denmark reinstated border control at the Danish-German border in January 2016, as a response to the immigration crisis, this move has been heavily disputed. The border patrol and, thus, Denmark's suspension of the Schengen agreement continues to be a salient issue in Danish politics. Meanwhile, the economic aspects of the EU, including the future of the Eurozone, are low of low salience in Denmark, which has an opt-out from the third phase of the Euro (e.g. Nielsen, 2015).

Despite their reputation as being Eurosceptical, Danes remain fond of their EU membership. In academic terms, they are soft Eurosceptics (i.e. reluctant to integrate some political aspects of EU integration) or EU pragmatics (e.g. Raunio, 2007; Nielsen, 2017; Nielsen and Franklin, 2017). Danes have, however, never been hard Eurosceptics (i.e. never wished to leave the EU altogether) (Nielsen, 2017). Nevertheless, Danes have obtained this reputation because of strong referendum traditions on critical EU questions where a small minority has occasionally turned down, for example, full participation in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) or the Euro (2000). Figures published just weeks before EP election day, 26 May 2019, showed that 77% of Danes would vote to stay within the EU if presented with a referendum similar to the 2016 Brexit referendum. The European average was 68%. In general, whether Denmark should join the UK in a so-called "Dexit" has been an idea loosely circulated both amongst left- and right-wing Danish parties. Yet, as the Brexit negotiation increasingly shed light on the complexity of leaving the Union, the Danish EP election debate was not dominated by Dexit discussions.

Because Denmark only has thirteen MEPs – a number which increases to fourteen MEPs after the expected Brexit – the Danish MEPs rely strongly on European allies and alliances to make their voice heard. In the 2019 EP election campaign, two strands of pan-European cooperation were closely followed by the media. The dominating focus went to the Italian deputy PM Matteo Salvini's (Lega) new alliance consisting of right-wing anti-European parties, which included, amongst others, parties from Finland (The True Finns), Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*), and Austria (The Freedom Party). From Denmark, the Danish People's Party, which belongs to the ECR group in the EP, was an early adherent of Salvini's alliance. One of DF's top candidates – Anders Vistisen – was portrayed side by side with Salvini at the meeting announcing the alliance in Milan in early April 2019. Secondly, on the left, the Danish anti-establishment party the Alternative (*Alternativet*) joined the first pan-European party list European Spring on an agenda predominantly focused on the climate crisis. This list, however, did not attract as much attention as Salvini's alliance.

ELECTION RESULTS:

THE SURPRISING SUCCESS OF PRO-EUROPEAN MAINSTREAM PARTIES

The Danish EP election witnessed four broad trends. Firstly, contrasting with the tendency in most European countries, mainstream Danish parties witnessed strong support (see Table 1). The mainstream liberal party (the Liberals), which also heads the current minority coalition government with Lars Løkke Rasmussen as PM, enjoyed

an increase in vote share from 17% (2014) to 24% (2019), thereby doubling their MEPs from 2 (2014) to 4 (2019). One of these liberal MEPs is the so-called “fourteenth mandate”, which Denmark will obtain when the seats from the British MEPs are divided amongst the remaining EU27 Member States after Brexit. Since Brexit has been postponed to October 31st, the fourteenth Danish Member will only become a full MEP at that time. The mainstream opposition party *the Social Democratic Party* also had a better election than predicted. They went from 19% (2014) to 22% (2019), maintaining their three MEPs. Finally, the mainstream center-party *The Danish Social-Liberal Party* (RL) secured a stronger representation in BXL and doubled their mandate from one (2014) to two MEPs (2019).

The second trend is the success of left-wing green parties. While the Alternative did not manage to obtain a seat for its lead candidate, the Socialist People’s Party (SF) acquired an extra mandate, going from one (2014) to two MEPs (2019). In addition, the left-wing Red-Green Alliance managed to secure one MEP. However, while the SF indeed secured a successful election outcome, a scandal broke out only days after the election when it became clear that one of its prominent candidates had decided to turn down the MEP spot in favour of a potential seat in the national parliament. This event highlights the ongoing controversies associated with an election system that enables candidates to run for office both at the EU and the national level simultaneously.

Thirdly, Danish voters went against an otherwise firm European trend of increasing support for right-wing populist parties. The main loser of the election was the Danish People’s Party (DF), which went from four MEP’s (2014) to one (2019). Another right-wing anti-immigration party *Nye Borgerlige* attracted attention in the last days of the EP campaign when its leader announced she would not vote in the EP election.

Lastly, the EP 2019 election results in Denmark witnessed a decrease in support for the traditional left Eurosceptic parties. While the soft Eurosceptic left-wing party – The Red-Green Alliance – for the first time secured one MEP, the Movement against the EU, which has for decades been a critical Eurosceptical Danish voice in the EP, did not get re-elected.

As in a majority of other EU countries, Denmark also witnessed a dramatic increase in voter turnout. While Denmark has always enjoyed high levels of voter turnout, which has constantly been higher than the European average, 2019 witnessed an increase of 10 percentage points in voter turnout from 56% (2014) to 66% (2019). This increase has been attributed in particular to the enhanced focus on the climate crisis. The Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg headed a widely popular climate march in Copenhagen on May 25th 2019 – one day prior to the election – which manifested many Danes’ commitment to this agenda.

RESULTS

The Danish EP 2019 results beg two questions: why did the Eurosceptical right-wing parties not obtain the support that such parties gained in other EU countries? And

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Denmark

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|-----------|-------------|
| The Liberals | ALDE | 648,203 | 23.5 |
| The Social Democratic Party | S&D | 592,645 | 21.5 |
| The Socialist People's Party | EFA | 364,895 | 13.2 |
| Danish People's Party | ECR | 296,978 | 10.8 |
| The Danish Social-Liberal Party | ALDE | 277,929 | 10.1 |
| The Conservative People's Party | EPP | 170,544 | 6.2 |
| The Red-Green Alliance | | 151,903 | 5.5 |
| The People's Movement against the EU | GUE-NGL | 102,101 | 3.7 |
| The Alternative | | 92,964 | 3.4 |
| The Liberal Alliance | | 60,693 | 2.2 |
| Total | | 2,758,855 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 66.1 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> |

Source: www.euoplysningen.dk *the 14th Danish MEP will join as full MEP when Britain leaves the EU.

why did the mainstream parties enjoy such unusually high support when governing parties tend to be specially punished in EP elections?

The answers to these questions may be many, but one obvious answer to the first question is the fact that, unlike previous EP elections, the climate crisis was on top of the Danish agenda. Climate is traditionally a left-wing concern, and the right-wing

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 4(3)* | | | +2.0 | |
| | 3.0 | | | | |
| | 2.0 | | | +1.0 | |
| | 1.0 | | | -3.0 | |
| | 2.0 | | | +1.0 | |
| | 1.0 | | | | |
| | 1.0 | | | +1.0 | |
| | | | | -1 | +1 |
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parties did not prioritise this concern in their campaign. Furthermore, responding to the manifest complexity of Brexit negotiations, the Danish fondness for EU membership has increased. While it is too early to say whether Brexit should be credited with this evolution, EP 2019 in Denmark nevertheless signalled strong support for a cosmopolitan Europe championed by the mainstream parties.

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Estonia: A scene set by the preceding national election

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CONTEXT

The 2019 EP elections in Estonia took place in a heated political atmosphere that prevailed in the aftermath of the general election held less than three months earlier. In a “remarkable failure of mainstream politics” (Walker, 2019), two liberal parties, Reform and Centre (both members of the ALDE group in the EP), failed to cooperate in the process of government formation. Having rejected an invitation by the victorious Reform Party to start coalition talks, the incumbent Centre Party formed a coalition with two right-wing parties, including a moderate Pro Patria and an illiberal, xenophobic, and Eurosceptic Estonian Conservative People’s Party (EKRE). The inclusion of a far-right populist party in the government caused an alarmed reaction both at home and abroad. It was seen as a threat to liberal values, Estonia’s progressive international reputation, and to alliance ties on which the small country’s security so heavily depends. By the time of the EP election, the new government had been in office for less than a month. It had been off to an extraordinarily bumpy start, marked by a variety of scandals associated with EKRE, the coalition’s *enfant terrible*. Against this backdrop, voting choice in EP elections was strongly influenced by one’s evaluation of domestic political developments since the March 3rd national election.

Estonia has six seats in the EP. The exit of the United Kingdom will increase the number of MEPs elected from Estonia to seven. The entire country is a single constituency. This, combined with an open-list electoral system that entails voting for a specific candidate as opposed to a party list as a whole, makes EP elections in Estonia highly candidate-centred.

CONTENDERS AND CAMPAIGNS

Altogether, nine political parties competed in the 2019 EP election, including five that are represented in the national parliament. The largest is the Reform Party, a

1. The research that informs this chapter has benefited from project IUT20-39 financed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research

liberal pro-market party with a strong commitment to the EU and to NATO membership. Despite emerging as a winner in the national election of March 2019, this party remained in opposition after the Centre Party's unexpected alliance with Pro Patria and EKRE. At the top of Reform's candidate list for the European election was Andrus Ansip, Prime Minister of Estonia in 2005-2014 and Vice President of the European Commission. Reform's list included other candidates of clout such as former Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas and former minister and MEP Urmas Paet. The second largest contender, the Centre Party, had been the prime ministerial party since late 2016. While pursuing a catch-all strategy, the Centre has been the party of choice for the vast majority of Russian-speakers in Estonia. The Centre's leading candidate at the EP election was Yana Toom, MEP and spokesperson for the Russian minority, who has caused controversy with her criticism of Western sanctions against Russia, US attacks on Syria and her dismissive statements about the Estonian language and culture.

The Social Democrats (SDE) entered the race from their position as a smallish opposition party. However, their list was headed by another eminent politician, Marina Kaljurand, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, diplomat and contestant in the Estonian presidential election in 2016. Kaljurand demonstrated a significant lead compared to all other candidates in opinion polls prior to the EP election. Finally, two conservative coalition parties, Pro Patria and EKRE, scored lower in pre-election polls. EKRE in particular appeared to make little effort to nominate candidates with a genuine interest and a realistic prospect of taking up a seat in the EP, instead putting their bets on the party's popularity more generally. EKRE is also the only political party in Estonia that has embraced hard Euroscepticism. However, in the context of very high levels of public support for the EU in Estonia (European Commission, 2019), the party refrained from condemning EU membership, and limited its rhetoric to criticizing European federalisation and decrying member states' decreased sovereignty. Overall, the election campaigns were characterised by low intensity and a lack of funding following the highly contested national election just a few months prior. Moreover, opposition parties explicitly framed EP elections as an opportunity to voice protest against the inclusion of far-right populists in the government. As such, the election was set out to be classically second-order, used by voters to punish the political incumbents (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

RESULTS

Turnout was 37.6% – virtually the same as in the 2014 EP election (36.5%). Electoral participation was highest in two largest cities and the area surrounding the capital, while reaching only 24.3% in the North-Eastern Ida-Viru county where Russian-speakers constitute a majority. The low turnout among Russian-speakers was widely attributed to their growing alienation from the Centre Party which had, for nearly two decades, served as the party of choice for Estonia's ethnic minorities. This alienation has to do with Russian-speakers' disapproval of the Centre Party's decision to enter a coalition with the far-right EKRE, as well as recent scandals involving

the local party branch in the Ida-Viru county. Almost half (47.2%) of all votes in these elections were cast electronically, signalling strong trust in Estonia's remote internet voting system which has been used in local, national and EP elections since 2005 (see also Vassil et al., 2016).

The two parliamentary opposition parties – Reform Party and the Social Democrats – were the main winners of these elections. The Reform Party took 26.2% of the vote, securing two mandates. The SDE got 23.3% of the vote, also filling two seats. SDE's Marina Kaljurand appeared as the brightest star of this election, receiving 65,549 personal votes out of 332,104 votes cast in total. Her extraordinary result provided the much-needed boost to the second-placed SDE candidate, former foreign and defence minister Sven Mikser (2,886 votes), securing him a seat. Andrus Ansip, top candidate on the Reform Party's list, was the second-biggest vote magnet in these elections (41,017 votes). As a prominent critic of the Centre-EKRE-Pro Patria coalition, he capitalized on protest against the new government, while his credentials as Estonia's longest serving PM and a European Commissioner guaranteed strong backing. Another well-known Reform politician, Urmas Paet, attracted 30,014 votes.

The incumbent Centre Party was the biggest loser of the election. Its 14.4% of the vote (corresponding to one mandate) stood in stark contrast to its vote share (23.1%) in general elections less than three months prior. Over a half of all votes cast for the Centre Party went to Yana Toom, a spokesperson for the Russian-speaking minority and a leading representative of the “internal opposition” of the Centre Party who had spoken out against her party's alliance with EKRE. The Centre's defeat after a mere month of leading a new government sent a clear signal that the party's voters considered a coalition with EKRE to be a major mistake. This interpretation is confirmed by 20,640 votes (6.2%) collected by independent candidate Raimond Kaljulaid, a former highly popular Centre Party politician and Tallinn municipal official, who quit the party prior to EP elections over the coalition with EKRE. All in all, the Centre's poor performance confirms the perception that by clinging on to power at the cost of accommodating the far-right, PM Jüri Ratas has alienated the party's traditional vote base and caused long-term damage to the party's electoral prospects.

The two junior government parties performed better than the PM's party. With 12.7% of the vote and one mandate, EKRE was the fourth most popular party. This result is a relapse compared to the March 2019 general election where EKRE won 17.8% of the vote. EKRE's sole mandate went to Jaak Madison (22,819 votes) who has been proactive in liaising with other far-right forces in Europe. Pro Patria placed fifth with 10.3% of the vote, which will give the party a mandate if Brexit materializes. Riho Terras (21,477 votes) will then be the only Estonian MEP in the EPP group. Several commentators have pointed out that being represented in the EP's largest political group is desirable for a small country.

About 13% of the vote went to small extra-parliamentary parties and independent candidates, none of which won a seat in the EP. Eesti 200, a liberal newcomer, received 3.2% of the vote. In contrast to their peers in several other countries, the Estonian Greens have failed to mobilize voters – the party gained just 1.8% of the vote.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Estonia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|---|------------|-----------|-----------|
| The Estonian Reform Party | ALDE&R | 87,160 | 26.2 |
| The Social Democratic Party (SDE) | S&D | 77,375 | 23.3 |
| The Center Party | ALDE&R | 47,799 | 14.4 |
| The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) | MENL | 42,265 | 12.7 |
| Pro Patria | EPP | 34,188 | 10.3 |
| Raimond Kaljulaid (independent candidate) | | 20,640 | 6.2 |
| Estonia 200 | | 10,700 | 3.2 |
| Estonian Greens | Greens/EFA | 5,824 | 1.8 |
| Others | | 6,153 | 1.9 |
| Total | | 3,321,04 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 55.5 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 37.6 |

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 2 | 2 | +1.9 | | |
| | 2 | 2 | +9.7 | +1.0 | +1 |
| | 1 | 1 | -8.0 | | |
| | 1 | 1 | +8.7 | +1.0 | +1 |
| | | 1 | -3.6 | -1.0 | |
| | | | +6.2 | | |
| | | | +3.2 | | |
| | | | +1.5 | | |
| | | | N/A | | |
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CONCLUSION

All in all, the Estonian results speak of continued domination of mainstream liberal political forces: three of Estonia's six (or in the case of Brexit, seven) seats went to ALDE, two to the Socialists and Democrats group, one to the European People's Party (conditional on Brexit), and one will boost the ranks of a future Eurosceptic group in the EP. While reactions to the inclusion of a populist far-right party in the national government was the key determinant of vote choice in the 2019 EP elections, it would be wrong to conclude that the European dimension was entirely absent. In fact, the domestic and the European/international seem intractably interwoven, as the rise of EKRE was seen by many as undermining the firm westward orientation that had been a mainstay of Estonian politics since the restoration of independence.

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Finland: European Elections in the aftermath of national elections

HENRIK CHRISTENSEN AND MARCO SVENSSON LA ROSA

INTRODUCTION

The elections for the European Parliament in Finland took place in the aftermath of the national parliamentary elections that were held on 14 April 2019. In this election, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), with 17.7% of the votes, narrowly outperformed the right-wing populist Finns party (PS, 17.5%) and the conservative National Coalition Party (KOK, 17%).

Because of the proximity of these two elections, the election campaign for the European Parliament elections was rather short. The Eurosceptic PS party was in the spotlight, since it was expected to ride on the wave of Eurosceptic parties in European elections (De Vries, 2018).

The closeness of national and European elections was expected to decrease turnout in the latter, which in 2014 was 41.0% (Mattila, 2003). Finland had one of the lowest turnouts (10%) of young voters (18-24) in 2014, second only to Slovakia (6%), although there were signs that turnout in this group would increase this time around.

Due to the limited number of candidates, even major changes in vote shares were unlikely to lead to parties winning or losing more than a single seat. However, in Finland's open-list proportional system, where voters rather than party elites decide what candidates gain a seat (von Schoultz 2018), for most parties it was unclear which individual candidates would gain those seats.

PARTIES AND ISSUES

Figure 1 shows the slogan used by the SDP in the European elections campaign (*We don't Brexit. We Fixit*). This slogan clearly refers to the good result obtained by the SDP at the national parliamentary elections one month earlier, and at the same time attempts to position the party as the dominant voice in the Finnish EU Presidency which starts in July 2019.

Figure 1



WE DON'T BREXIT. WE FIX IT.

Meillä kun on tapana korjata, ei rikkoa.

However, most polls suggested that the SDP would end third or even fourth in the European elections, only getting two seats in the new European Parliament. With rare exceptions, such as the former party leader *Eero Heinäluoma*, it had few prominent candidates.

In addition to the SDP, KOK and the Centre party (KESK) are traditionally the three main parties in Finnish politics. Both KOK and KESK were expected to lose votes, although it was uncertain whether this would translate into a loss of seats. KOK was expected to lose votes but to remain the largest party. Three current MEPs for this party ran for re-election, but former Prime Minister *Alexander Stubb*, who was a popular candidate in the 2014 elections, did not run this time. The rural-liberal KESK risked losing one of three seats it had won in 2014, echoing the loss they had suffered in the national elections. Two of the current MEPs were running but were challenged by prominent party cadres.

Two parties challenged the dominance of the three main parties: the right-wing populist Finns Party (PS) and the Green League. Some polls indicated that the PS would become the second-largest party in terms of votes, thereby gaining a third seat in the EP. PS's list included several prominent candidates, including six newly elected national MPs. The Green League (VIHR) was also expected to win votes, and some polls suggested it could become the second largest party in terms of votes and win three seats in the process. The candidates included veteran MEP *Heidi Hautala* and former party leader *Ville Niinistö*.

The leftist Left Alliance (VAS) was expected to keep their only seat. They had *Merja Kyllönen* running for re-election, but she had publicly stated that if elected, she would not take up the position since she preferred to work in the national parliament, where she had recently won a seat.

RKP is a minority party that mainly represents the linguistic minority of Swedish-speaking Finns. Polls suggested they were unlikely to win a seat, and even if the party's results are consistently underestimated in pre-electoral polls, RKP needed to rally most Swedish speakers to vote for them if they were to successfully defend their seat in the EP. Current MEP *Nils Torvalds* spearheaded a list that, for the rest, included mostly young candidates.

While integration was certainly an issue in the debates, much of the campaign focused on genuine European topics rather than national issues, as is otherwise often the case (Schmitt and Toygür, 2016). Three European topics were particularly salient: economic growth, climate change and immigration policies. Table 1 shows the position of the parties.

| PARTY | MAIN ISSUES |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Social Democrats (SDP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic integration to ensure sustainable economic growth. - EU minimum level corporate tax. |
| The Finns (PS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll back European integration. - No binding EU measures to combat climate change. |
| National Coalition Party (KOK) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fiscal responsibility among all member states. - Sustainable economy and deeper economic integration. |
| Centre Party (KESK) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common measures at EU level to combat climate change. - Support Common Agricultural Policies (CAP). |
| Centre Party (KESK) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common measures at EU level to combat climate change. - Cooperation to ensure respect for human rights outside of EU. |
| Left Alliance (VAS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common measures at EU level to combat climate change. - Avoid harmful tax competition. |
| Swedish People's Party (RKP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common measures at EU level to combat climate change. - Common EU immigration policies. |

The economic debate focused on tax evasion and business competition. SDP, VAS and VIHR argued that corporate tax competition constituted a threat to the welfare state and a minimum community tax would address the problem. The other parties argued that the EU should not take decisions in matter of tax policy.

The role of the EU in fighting climate change was also a heated topic during the campaign, with the PS taking issue with all other parties. PS adopted the same strategy as in the national elections by questioning the need for immediate actions, and especially the need for Finland to lead the way. While there were differences in how much it was emphasised, all other parties were in principle in favour of coordinated European measures to address climate change.

The debate on immigration revolved mostly around a compulsory quota system for member states. Most parties (SFP, KOK, VIHR, VAS, RKP) were in favour of the

Table 2 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Finland

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|-----------|-------------|
| National Coalition Party (KOK) | EPP | 380,460 | 20.8 |
| Green League (VIHR) | G-EFA | 292,892 | 16.0 |
| Social Democratic Party (SDP) | S&D | 267,603 | 14.6 |
| Finns Party (PS) | ECR | 253,176 | 13.8 |
| Centre Party (KESK) | ALDE | 247,477 | 13.5 |
| Left Alliance (VAS) | GUE-NGL | 126,063 | 6.9 |
| Swedish People's Party (RKP) | ALDE | 115,962 | 6.3 |
| Christian Democrats (KD) | EPP | 89,204 | 4.9 |
| Others | | 57,208 | 3.1 |
| Total | | 1,830,045 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 42.7 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> |

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 3 | 3 | -1.8 | | |
| | 2 | 3 | +6.7 | +1 | +2 |
| | 2 | 2 | +2.3 | | |
| | 2 | 2 | +1.0 | | |
| | 2 | 2 | -6.1 | -1 | -1 |
| | 1 | 1 | -2.4 | | |
| | 1 | 1 | -0.4 | | |
| | | | -0.4 | | |
| | | | | | |
| | 13 | 14 | | | +1 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

quota system, while KESK argued that this proposal was irrelevant since it would never be accepted by other member states. PS opposed it.

The debate among the top candidates for the European Commission Presidency held in Brussels on May 15th gathered some attention by national media. Several major media outlets provided a commentary and it was generally perceived to have been a quiet event where no major disagreements emerged.

RESULTS

Advance voting is popular in Finland. As about 21% of all registered voters had voted by May 21st, it became clear that the turnout would have been about the same as in 2014. In the end, the turnout slightly increased, by 1.6 percent, compared to 2014. In 2019 42.7% of all eligible voters cast their vote.

When the results of the advance voting were announced, it appeared clear that pre-election expectations would largely be fulfilled. Three hours after the closing of the polling stations, the preliminary results were available for the whole country. In the end, the outcome confirmed the expectations that KOK would remain the first party with 20.8% of the votes (three seats). However, even more successful were the greens (VIHR), which became the second largest party with 16.0%, a 6.7 percentage points increase in comparison to 2014, gaining a second seat. SDP also gained votes in comparison to 2014 (+2.3%) and received 14.6% of all votes (two seats), however, this result was below the one they obtained in national elections. PS gained 1 percentage point compared to 2014, but the 13.8% result was disappointing for them, considering the 18% forecasted before the elections. KESK was the major loser, as it only received 13.5% of the votes, 6.1 percentage points less than in 2014 (and losing one of its previous two seats). VAS gained 6.9% of the votes and kept their only seat. The most important development during election night was that RKP increased their share of the votes to 6.3% and climbed the list to cling on to the thirteenth seat.

The battle for the fourteenth seat that will become available when UK leaves the EU was very close, and the prediction of which party would win the reserve seat changed several times. In the end, it went to the Greens.

CONCLUSION

Considering the pre-electoral poles, the result may be considered a cautious win for the pro-EU side. Although a turnout of 42.7% is by no means impressive, it is satisfactory considering the context and the proximity to national elections.

Furthermore, the widely-projected win for the Eurosceptic forces did not occur in Finland, where the most successful parties all championed pro-integration agendas for ensuring economic growth, and preventing climate change. Although PS gained votes, they failed to win an additional seat and clearly underperformed compared to the predictions. By contrast, Finland contribute to the European wave of support for green parties, as voters seemed to expect European institutions to engage in clear efforts to fight climate change.

The final results are similar to those in the national elections. Therefore, the Finnish electoral landscape now has several mid-sized parties, instead of three big parties and several small ones. The 2019 European election was one of the rare occasions where most parties found reasons to be satisfied with the outcome. Even KESK, the only party that lost a seat, was relieved that the loss was not even more pronounced.

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France: Setting the stage for 2022

ROMAIN LACHAT

The European Parliament elections took place in metropolitan France on 26 May (overseas departments had already voted the day before). Seventy-four seats were to be filled, with an additional five seats on reserve in the event of a Brexit. The election is based on a proportional system, with a five per cent minimum threshold: only lists that pass this threshold obtain representatives in the European Parliament. The party lists are closed, meaning that citizens vote for one list, but cannot express any preference for specific candidates within that list. While this electoral rule was similar to the one used in 2014, the division of electoral districts changed, passing from 8 regional constituencies to a single national electoral district.

THE CAMPAIGN

This election represented an important test for French President Emmanuel Macron and his party *The Republic on the Move* (LaREM), as this was the first national poll since his victory in the presidential and legislative elections of May and June 2017. Furthermore, this campaign followed months of people's protests by the Yellow Vests (*Gilets Jaunes*). This movement started in October 2018, initially as a protest against an increase in fuel prices. It grew rapidly, largely spreading via social media, and led to massive, weekly demonstrations all over France. While the claims of this movement were quite diverse, they centred around issues of social and fiscal justice, the rise in the costs of living, and a demand for new forms of participation, such as the introduction of a citizens' initiative referendum. More generally, this movement expressed a profound discontent with mainstream parties and with the government's policies.

The unofficial launch of the campaign was perhaps represented by Emmanuel Macron's letter to European citizens, an opinion piece published in newspapers across all EU member states in early March 2019.¹ He proposed a series of reforms for a "European Renaissance" and warned that "retreating into nationalism" offered no alternative. This call for European unity and for further European integration echoed some of the central themes of his 2017 presidential campaign. It also framed the

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/04/europe-brexit-uk>.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – France

| PARTY | EP GROUP ^a | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|---|-----------------------|------------|-----------|
| National Rally (RN) | ENF | 5,281,576 | 23.3 |
| The Republic on the Move! (LaREM)/ Democratic Movement (MoDem) | | 5,076,363 | 22.4 |
| Europe Ecology - The Greens (EELV) | G-EFA | 3,052,406 | 13.5 |
| The Republicans (LR) | EPP | 1,920,530 | 8.5 |
| France Unbowed (LFI) | GUE-NGL | 1,428,386 | 6.3 |
| Socialist Party (PS), Public Place (PP), New Deal (ND) | S&D | 1,401,978 | 6.2 |
| France Arise (DLF) | | 794,953 | 3.5 |
| Generation.s | | 741,212 | |
| Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) | ALDE | 566,746 | 2.5 |
| French Communist Party (PCF) | | 564,717 | 2.5 |
| Animalist Party (PA) | | 490,570 | 2.2 |
| Ecology Generation (GE)/ Independent Ecological Movement (MEI) | | 411,793 | 1.8 |
| Popular Republican Union (UPR) | | 265,957 | 1.2 |
| Others | | 657,037 | 2.9 |
| Total | | 22,654,224 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 50.1 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5.0 |

Source: <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Elections-europeennes-2019/Resultats-des-elections-europeennes-2019>. The 2014 results for the PS-PP-ND list are the joint results of the separate lists of PS and ND. For UDI, they correspond to the result of its joint list with MoDem. No results are reported for the PCF in 2014, as it formed part of a coalition with other parties, including the forerunner of LFI (a joint list that obtained 6.6% of the vote and 4 seats).

^aAs changes in EP groups are expected, an EP group is only indicated for parties with incumbent MEPs.

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 22 | 23 | -1.6 | -2 | -1 |
| | 21 | 23 | | | |
| | 12 | 13 | +4.5 | +6 | +7 |
| | 8 | 8 | -12.3 | -12 | -12 |
| | 6 | 6 | | | |
| | 5 | 6 | -10.7 | -8 | -7 |
| | | | -0.3 | | |
| | | | -7.4 | -7 | -7 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | +0.7 | | |
| | | | +0.8 | | |
| | | | | | |
| | 74 | 79 | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
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| | | | | | |

European election as a contest between pro-Europeans progressives and liberals, on the one hand, and Eurosceptic parties and populist movements, on the other.

This opposition dominated the French campaign, setting the *Renaissance* list (LaREM and MoDem, the *Democratic Movement*) of the president's party and its allies against the *National Rally* (RN, formerly the *National Front*) of Marine Le Pen, in a replay of the 2017 presidential runoff. Emmanuel Macron's personal involvement in the campaign, particularly during the final days, was unusual for a president. Also, Marine Le Pen was not the leading candidate of her party (she took one of the last positions on the list). However, the competition between them contributed to giving the election a plebiscitary character: an anti-Macron referendum for Le Pen, and a vote for or against Europe for Macron.

A record number of 34 lists (12 more than in 2014) were competing. While most of these had no chances of reaching the five per cent threshold, this multiplicity of lists testifies to the continuing fragmentation of the French partisan landscape. On the left, five lists of parties with incumbent European MPs (MEPs) were competing: *France Unbowed* (LFI), the party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who finished in fourth position in the first round of the last presidential election, the *French Communist Party* (PCF), the *Socialist Party* (PS), *Generation.s*, the movement of Benoît Hamon, candidate of the *Socialist Party* in the 2017 presidential election, and *Europe Ecology – the Greens* (EELV). On the right, the *National Rally* faced competition from the *Republicans*, which has traditionally been the main right-wing party, and by other far-right lists, such as *France Arise* and *The Patriots*.

RESULTS

Contrary to fears of a high level of abstention, which were often expressed during the campaign, the election was marked by a significant increase in voter turnout. It reached 50.1%, an increase of almost nine points compared with the previous European election (42.4% in 2014). It is the first time in the last 25 years that turnout at a European election in France passed the 50% threshold.

The RN won the head-to-head contest with the *Renaissance* list, finishing first with 23.3% of the vote (see the detailed results in Table 1). The margin of victory was quite small, less than 1%, and the RN vote share actually diminished compared with its historic success in the 2014 European election (Russo, 2014). Nevertheless, this result represents an important symbolic victory for Marine Le Pen, as both leaders had clearly set a goal of finishing in first place.

Obtaining almost 46% of the vote (and 58% of seats), the two frontrunners left their competitors far behind. The third most supported list was EELV. This was an unexpected success for the Greens: With a vote share of 13.5%, they clearly outperformed the campaign polls, which never had put them above 10%. In contrast, the traditional governing parties, the PS on the left and LR on the right, produced their lowest scores ever in a European contest. The *Socialists'* vote share is even less than the already low score achieved in the 2017 presidential contest. They lost more than half of their seats in the European Parliament. While this only confirmed the

Socialist's recent electoral defeat, the election outcome was more of a surprise in the case of the *Republicans*. With 8.5% of the vote (and eight seats), they scored significantly below expectations, as opinion surveys conducted during the final weeks of the campaign promised them a vote share of about 13%. The final list that passed the threshold of representation was LFI, who won 6 mandates, with a vote share similar to that of PS. This was also a disappointing result, given the strong showing of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party in the 2017 elections.

CONCLUSION

The results of the European elections confirm the profound transformation of the French partisan landscape, which was initiated by the 2017 presidential and legislative contests (Perrineau, 2017). While French politics have been dominated for decades by a left-right divide between the *Socialists* and the *Republicans* (or its predecessors), the recent electoral contests were marked by the opposition between a nationalist and a progressive pole. This transformation process is even compounded by the strengthening of the Greens. Like many of their European counterparts, they benefited from the increased salience of environmental topics and the heightened awareness on climate change. But their success also contributes to the decline of the traditional mainstream parties and to the waning of the left-right divide.

With a highly fragmented left-wing camp, and a strongly weakened right, the contest between the progressive and nationalist parties is likely to remain the dominant axis of political competition in coming years. The electoral victory of the RN was not that resounding, but it is sufficient to sustain Marine Le Pen's claim of representing the main force of opposition. It also strengthens her leadership against the critiques that were raised following her 2017 defeat. On the other hand, while LaREM did not win the election, its score is not much lower than Macron's result in the first round of the 2017 presidential election. Governing parties frequently face electoral losses in European contests, particularly when they take place in the middle of the national electoral cycle (Hix and Marsh, 2011), as was the case for this contest. Even if this did not give Macron the breath of fresh air he had hoped for after months of popular protest, the defeat was not sufficiently bitter to force him to change his course. This is what Édouard Philippe, the Prime Minister, stressed when reacting to the election results. He called them "disappointing," but noted that this score should not be seen as a sanction, and that the government would continue its reforms.² The stage seems to be already set for the 2022 presidential election.

2. <https://www.france24.com/en/20190526-french-far-right-shows-renewed-strength-macron>.

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Germany: Second order but still groundbreaking?

HEIKO GIEBLER

INTRODUCTION

Concurrent to regional-level elections in the state of Bremen and local election in nine out of sixteen states, Germany elected its share of representatives for the ninth legislative term of the European Parliament (EP) on May 26th. With 96 seats, Germany contributes the largest number of politicians to the EP. These parliamentarians are elected based on a proportional electoral system and in a single constituency. Plus, for the second time, there is no legal threshold for parties to win seats. This means that, due to the large number of seats available, around 0.6% of the votes could already be enough to win at least one seat. Taken together, these factors lead to high party fragmentation, much higher than in the national or regional parliaments, the majority of which implement a legal threshold. Moreover, it provides a huge incentive for small and micro parties to run in EP elections; in 2014, twenty-five parties competed, fourteen of which won at least one seat.

Traditionally, and quite similarly to other member states, elections to the EP receive much less attention than elections to the national parliament; in terms of campaign intensity, media coverage, public interest or turnout (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Marsh and Mikhaylov, 2010; Giebler and Wüst, 2011; Giebler and Lichteblau, 2016). While this second-order nature also holds true for the 2019 EP elections in Germany, the results might still prove ground-breaking as recent trends – losses for mainstream-centre parties, the rise of the Greens and a stabilisation of right-wing populist success especially in East Germany – converge into very clear patterns.

INITIAL SITUATION AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

For several years, the German party system – once one of the most stable party systems in the world – has undergone significant changes with drastic increases in party fragmentation and electoral volatility. In particular, the centre-right, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and their Bavarian sister party Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), and the centre-left, Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) are losing voters in droves, while the Greens, who have recently moderated their positions, have established themselves successfully as an alternative to these older mainstream parties. Since 2013, the rapid rise of the right-wing populist Alternative for Ger-

many (AfD) has brought the German party system in line with typical Western European party systems (Arzheimer 2015), further exacerbating problems for the centre parties and stymieing coalition formation. All these developments seem to be linked to more general societal changes leading to major shifts of political competition and cleavages with more and more focus on socio-cultural and identity-related policy issues (Franzmann et al. forthcoming).

These societal developments are accompanied by major internal challenges for many of the German parties. For example, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that she would not seek an additional term after 2021, and she gave up party leadership in December 2018, which caused internal power struggles in the CDU. This internal power struggle was further complicated by the fact that the CSU continues to cater more and more to the (populist) right, even after receiving the worst electoral result in a Bavarian state-level election since 1950. The SPD is in even worse shape after breaking their promise not to enter another Grand Coalition and continuing to suffer from leadership changes at the top of the party. Meanwhile, the AfD was hit by several scandals, many of them related to potentially illegal party donations and strong links of some politicians to far-right networks. Lest we think this is a problem only for right and centre parties, the socialist Left was harmed by Sahra Wagenknecht's – one of the party's most important and most visible politicians – efforts to form a left-wing movement similar to the “Yellow Vests” in France. The only parties that have managed to avoid serious internal struggles in recent months are the Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

In a situation of political change and internal party struggles, in which other primarily national factors were so important, it would have been surprising had the 2019 elections constituted an exception to the general patterns of second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Even Manfred Weber's (CSU) candidacy as Spitzenkandidaten (with a substantial chance of becoming the President of the European Commission) did not ignite a more intense public debate about European issues.

Looking to the major parties' campaigns, CDU and CSU published a common and rather short electoral manifesto with a pro-European core. Primarily, they proposed to maintain the European Union (EU) as it currently stands – campaigning against redistributive efforts and interdictions from the left as well as against right-wing (populist) challenges. Controlling migration into the EU was a very central topic as well. The SPD, instead campaigned for a fairer tax system for large companies, for more development aid, and for better controls at its external border in order to decrease migration into Europe. The Greens, led by The Greens–European Free Alliance's (GEFA) Spitzenkandidatin Ska Keller, focused on more EU-wide regulations to fight, among other things, climate change and tax evasion. Somewhat similarly, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) campaigned for a common law on migration and asylum, as well as for strengthening the process of drafting a common constitution. At the same time – as expected for a liberal, economy-focused party – they supported open markets as one of the EU's central pillars. The Left meanwhile concentrated on issues like solidarity and more social justice, and linked these issues to ecological challenges. Finally, the AfD gave up their opposition on Germany's membership in the

EU for the duration of the campaign, while at the same time clearly speaking against the creation of any substantive competencies on the supra-national level. Additionally, they denied climate change (or any negative consequences of it) and recognized as the EU's only merit its guarantee of free trade. In a nutshell, all parties campaigned rather close to their ideological core, and low media attention did not encourage much public debate among the parties. The result was, unsurprisingly, a rather underwhelming and unexciting electoral campaign.

However, while the 2019 EP elections may not have sparked a tide of interest in European issues, opinion polls do suggest that the interest in EP elections has substantially increased in comparison to 2014 (infratest dimap, 2019). With the “Fridays for Future” movement picking up speed in Germany, and an hour-long video of YouTube influencer Rezo criticising the CDU in particular for their failures regarding economic inequality and environmental politics garnering more than eleven million views by election day, there seems to be some politicisation going on in the younger generations and beyond.

Especially in the final months before the election, climate crisis, environmental issues, and sustainability became very dominant topics. In May 2017, about 30% of the population stated that environmental issues are one of the most important problems in Germany while it was only 10% at the beginning of the year (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2019). Traditionally, the Greens are associated with these topics and – in the eyes of the population – have high competencies to deal with them, which clearly helped them on election day as many other parties were unable to present convincing ideas on how to deal with these issues.

RESULTS

While the election to the EP was not central to public discourse – and perhaps not even to all the parties competing – it nevertheless took place in interesting and rather polarised as well as politicised times. All in all, forty-one parties competed in the EP – sixteen parties more than in 2014 and seven more than in the 2017 federal election. The electoral outcomes are presented in Table 1. They are based on the preliminary results published by the Federal Returning Officer (2019). Turnout increased substantially and reached 61.4%– 13.3 percentage points more than in 2014, and the highest turnout since the 1990s. It seems to be indeed the case that politicisation helped mobilise citizens to cast a ballot. Still, significantly fewer people participated than in the federal election 2017 (76.2%) which is typical for second-order elections (Giebler, 2014; Giebler and Wagner, 2015).

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Germany

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Christian Democratic Union (CDU) | EPP | 8,437,093 | 22.6 | 23 | -7.5 | -6 |
| Alliance 90/The Greens (Greens) | G-EFA | 7,675,584 | 20.5 | 21 | +9.8 | +10 |
| Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) | S&D | 5,914,953 | 15.8 | 16 | -11.4 | -11 |
| Alternative for Germany (AfD) | EFD | 4,103,453 | 11.0 | 11 | +3.9 | +4 |
| Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) | EPP | 2,354,817 | 6.3 | 6 | +1.0 | +1 |
| The Left (Linke) | GUE-NGL | 2,056,010 | 5.5 | 5 | -1.9 | -2 |
| Free Democratic Party (FDP) | ALDE | 2,028,353 | 5.4 | 5 | +2.1 | +2 |
| The Party | G-EFA/NI | 898,386 | 2.4 | 2 | +1.8 | +1 |
| Free Voters (FW) | ALDE | 806,590 | 2.2 | 2 | +0.7 | +1 |
| Human Environment Animal Protection | Other | 541,984 | 1.4 | 1 | +0.2 | |
| Ecological Democratic Party (ÖDP) | G-EFA | 370,006 | 1.0 | 1 | +0.4 | |
| Family Party of Germany | ECR | 273,755 | 0.7 | 1 | +0.0 | |
| Volt | Other | 248,824 | 0.7 | 1 | | |
| Pirate Party Germany | G-EFA | 243,363 | 0.7 | 1 | -0.8 | |
| National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) | NI | 101,323 | 0.3 | | -0.8 | -1 |
| Other | | 1,334,737 | 3.6 | | | |
| Total | | 37,389,231 | 100 | 96 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 61.4 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | none | | | |

Germany will be represented by fourteen parties in the EP – exactly the same number as in 2014. The pro-European party *Volt* is the only new party winning parliamentary representation – picking up the seat vacated by the radical right National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). The NPD lost its seat as its voters moved to the AfD – a trend already observed in other recent elections. Of the major parties, there is only one real winner: The Greens, who nearly doubled their vote and seat shares. Clearly, this is in part driven by the increased salience of the party's core issues. However, the party has also managed to become more attractive for (socio-economically) centrist voters in general and, in comparison to other German parties at this point in time, the party presents itself as rather homogenous and free from internal struggles. While the AfD, the CSU and the FDP also won more votes than in 2014, they lost in comparison to the last federal election. Especially the AfD, which in 2014 mobilised many Eurosceptic voters (Wagner et al. 2015), did not really benefit from their programmatic shift away from European issues and towards topics like immigration and Islam (Giebler et al. 2019).

Without a doubt, the CDU and especially the SPD, traditionally the two largest parties in Germany, suffered heavy defeats. It is quite common that (large) parties in government lose votes in EP elections, and that such losses are the highest in the middle of the national election term (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). In fact, when EP elections took place in 2004, right the middle of the national term, losses for the then government (SPD and the Greens) were even more substantial. Nevertheless, the two parties can only be described as the biggest losers of May 26th, as their results represent a long progressive trend of de-alignment from the two centre parties. Moreover, it seems that the reasons behind this decline are manifold, ranging from unpopular policy positions, inadequate assignment of salience to certain issues, communication problems and substantive problems of party leadership. To a certain degree, this also applied to the Left – the only smaller party present in the Bundestag which lost votes not only in comparison to the last federal, but also to the 2014 EP election.

Seven small parties managed to gain seats due to the absence of a legal electoral threshold. These parties have vote shares that vary from 0.7% (Pirate Party Germany) to 2.4% (The Party, founded by the editors of a German satirical magazine). Most of these parties managed to increase their vote share, and two of them (The Party and Free Voters) even managed to win an additional seat in comparison to 2014. This might be the clearest sign that, on the one hand, electoral systems indeed influence electoral behaviour and, on the other hand, that EP elections are second-order elections: about 13% of the voters would have been left without parliamentary representation if the 5% threshold used at the federal level would have been applied.

Finally, there are two interesting features at the level of the electorate, one concerning age and one territorial. The Greens are the favourite party among voters younger than 60 (roughly 25%), but only 13% of citizens older than 60 voted for them. The CDU, CSU and SPD are more popular among the older generations – as is the AfD. This trend is not new, but it has never been so pronounced.. Secondly, while the AfD did not perform that well overall – or, at least, not as well to justify the populist tide rhetoric so often used in public discourse (and especially by the media)

– they won the most votes in two states in East Germany, and are close or above 20% in all East German states except Berlin. In contrast, the AfD only won more than 10% of the votes in one West German state (Baden-Württemberg). The pattern is inverted for the Greens, which do much better in West Germany.

CONCLUSION

The EP election provided some very interesting insights into the ongoing upheaval of the German political sphere. First of all, turnout increased significantly, which is a good sign for democracy and probably also some indication that EP elections, or at least, international issues, bear some relevance to voters. However, the election was primarily influenced by ecological issues – whose importance is obviously not limited to the European level – which speaks in favour of a continuing substantive impact of the national arena on citizens' party choice.

As interesting as these results are, they are not surprising. The downwards trend of the CDU and SPD, as well as the all-time high of the Greens, has been foreseeable when looking to public opinion trends since 2017. The AfD did not strengthen in comparison to the last federal election but has nevertheless stabilized its vote share and is building up strongholds in East Germany.

This election was another clear indication that the German party system, as well as parties' attachments to specific societal groups, is changing. As the new patterns abovementioned have never before been so prominent, this election might still be characterised as second order but is also, to a certain degree, ground-breaking. Parties will have to react to these developments, and Germans will have to get used to much higher party fragmentation and rather broader ideological coalitions on different political levels. With Angela Merkel no longer available for another chancellorship, the 2021 federal election has clear potential to not only produce interesting and surprising results, but also results with far-reaching consequences.

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Greece: A story of government punishment and party-system stabilisation

EFTICHA TEPEROGLOU

In Greece the 2019 European Parliament elections took place on May 26th, together with municipal and regional elections. The governmental party of the radical left SYRIZA suffered severe losses, whilst the centre-right party of New Democracy (ND) increased its electoral strength and gained a plurality for the first time since the 2012-2015 period. The outcome of the election had immediate consequences for the national electoral arena. On the night of the election, the Greek PM Alexis Tsipras called for snap elections (four months ahead) to be held on 7 July 2019.

THE CONTEXT

The 2019 European election in Greece was the first contest after the national elections in September 2015. It arrived after a very busy political timeline, as from 2012 to 2015 there were four consecutive national elections, the 2014 EP election and the referendum of 2015 on acceptance or rejection of an EU/IMF lending proposal (the third bailout agreement since 2010). The majority of citizens still share high levels of Eurosceptical attitudes towards the EU (e.g. only 25% have a positive image towards the EU according to the standard Eurobarometer 90 in autumn 2018, while the European average is 43%) – a reflection on the economic crisis.

From the 2014 to the 2019 European elections, the country experienced a tense period both in economic and socio-political terms. Under the first coalition government between SYRIZA and the nationalist right-wing party of Independent Greeks/ANEL (formed in the aftermath of the January 2015 national elections), the country entered a phase of sharp economic instability. SYRIZA won again the September 2015 snap election and formed another coalition government with ANEL. During this second term, the government had to implement a harsh economic programme which created disillusionment among its supporters. Moreover, the coalition government agreed with the creditors on the third and last bailout programme which expired on August 20th 2018. Overall, during the last year before the European elections one could say that the Greek economy had been stabilised. However, social and political dissatisfaction was very high. Unemployment rates went down, but these were still high (18.5% in February 2019), and more severe taxes have been imposed especially on the middle/upper class. Additionally, there was a sense of growing dissatisfaction of citizens with the perceived ineffective and sometimes dangerous

sly inept administration of SYRIZA (e.g. the fires in the summer of 2018 in the Attica region with more than one hundred deaths). The coalition government formally ended in February 2019 due to disagreement between the two parties over the Macedonia name dispute. On June 12th 2018, an agreement was reached between Greek PM Alexis Tsipras and his counterpart Zoran Zaev, whereby the name *Republic of North Macedonia* would be adopted. It was an international issue that had remained unsolved for more than twenty years, but according to the majority of Greeks (and especially those living in the Greek region of Macedonia) the agreement was a bad one for Greece and the PM himself was often labelled as a traitor by nationalist opposition groups. Therefore, part of the explanation for the losses by SYRIZA can be attributed to this issue, especially in Northern Greece.

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN: EUROPEAN ELECTIONS WITHOUT EUROPE

The debate between the two main parties, SYRIZA and ND, overshadowed any other aspect of the campaign. National issues – especially the future of the Greek economy and the Macedonia dispute – were predominant. The election was a typical referendum contest with a very high level of polarisation. The socialist party of PASOK tried to mobilise part of its old electorate, and positioned itself as an alternative political solution. It was part of the centre-left coalition Movement for Change (KINAL), which was founded in March 2018. Some new parties participated in these elections. Among them the Course of Freedom by Zoe Kontantopoulou, a former SYRIZA MP, the new pan-European party European Realistic Disobedience Front (DiEM25) formed by Yanis Varoufakis, a former MP of SYRIZA and ex-minister of Economics, as well as Greek Solution by Kyriakos Velopoulos, an ex-parliamentary member of the nationalist Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) who had also been a member of ND from 2012 to 2015. Overall, forty parties participated, ranging from the communist left to the extreme right. A proportional electoral system with a 3% electoral threshold and open lists (since 2014) was adopted. The latter feature produced a personalised electoral campaign with EP candidates running individual campaigns throughout Greece. A major issue was the mobilisation of younger voters. A significant change compared to previous elections was the passage of a new electoral law by the SYRIZA government, in which the eligible age for voting was reduced from 18 to 17 years old.

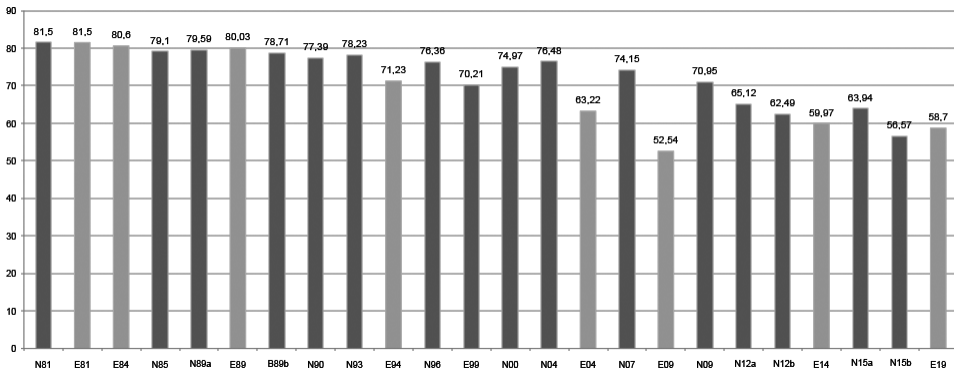
SYRIZA claimed that this election had to be seen as a vote of confidence on the government after the end of the bailout programmes. Its main slogans were “*We have the power, we do not go back*”, “*We join our forces. For the Greece of the many, for a Europe of the peoples*”, “*The time of the many has arrived!*”. The party blamed ND for supporting the candidacy of Manfred Weber, from the European People’s Party, as next President of the European Commission. Weber is widely perceived as a champion of austerity for the countries of Southern Europe. On the other hand, ND highlighted the necessity for change: “*On 26 May we vote for political change*”. Its leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis promised an economic programme with a restructuring of the taxation system aiming to reduce taxes. SYRIZA pushed for welfare and pension benefits, as well as favourable payment plans for taxpayers with arrears, in the run-up

to the contest. Almost no political actor talked about European issues. This is particular striking given the fact that in both the economic and ongoing refugee-immigration crises, Greece is very much involved and affected.

TURNOUT

Greece is a country where, in principle, voting is compulsory. However, the relevant penalties for not voting are never imposed. Participation reached 58.7%, as shown in Figure 1 – a reduction of 1.27 percentage points compared to the 2014 European election – but an increase compared to the previous national elections of September 2015 (+2.13 percentage points, which translates into 352,507 more voters). Nevertheless, when observing this increase, it is important to take into account that, compared to 2015, 161,289 additional citizens were entitled to vote because of the lowering of the voting age (from 18 to 17).

Figure 1. Turnout % in National (N) and European (E) elections in Greece 1981-2019



RESULTS

The election stands as another example of a momentous contest in the history of European elections in Greece. Back in 2014, there was a historical shift with SYRIZA winning the elections (Teperoglou et al., 2015). This time there is again a shift, but towards a new equilibrium. SYRIZA was severely punished (23.8% of the vote) and the opposition party of ND obtained 33.1 %. The difference in the vote share between the two parties (9.3 percentage points) is the biggest one ever observed in a Greek European Parliament election. The party of ND managed to increase its vote share compared to the national election of September 2015 (+5.03 percentage points) while SYRIZA lost much ground (-11.7 percentage points). According to the exit poll data (by Metron Analysis, Alco, Marc and MRB opinion poll companies), SYRIZA managed to hold 58% of its 2015 electorate, while the figure for ND was 85%.

The smaller coalition partner, ANEL gained only 0.8% of the total vote (a decrease of 2.89 percentage points compared to 2015). Overall, the punishment of the coalition is a classic example of “voting with the boot” (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996)

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Greece

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| New Democracy (ND) | EPP | 1,873,080 | 33.1 | 8 | +10.4 | +3 |
| Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA) | GUE-NGL | 1,343,788 | 23.8 | 6 | -2.8 | |
| Movement for Change (KINAL) | S&D | 436,735 | 7.7 | 2 | -0.3 | |
| Communist Party of Greece (KKE) | NI | 302,677 | 5.4 | 2 | -0.8 | |
| Popular Association-Golden Dawn (GD) | NI | 275,822 | 4.9 | 2 | -4.5 | -1 |
| Greek Solution-Kyriakos Velopoulos | others | 236,361 | 4.1 | 1 | | |
| Mera25 | | 169,286 | 3.0 | | | |
| Course of Freedom | | 90,859 | 1.6 | | | |
| The River | S&D | 86,003 | 1.5 | | -5.1 | -2 |
| Centre Union | | 82,072 | 1.5 | | +0.8 | |
| Greece-the other way Notis Marias | | 70,286 | 1.2 | | | |
| Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) | | 69,524 | 1.2 | | -1.5 | |
| Independent Greeks (ANEL) | ECR | 45,149 | 0.8 | | -2.7 | -1 |
| Other parties | | 574,480 | 10.2 | | | |
| Total | | 5,656,122 | 100 | 21 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 58.7 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 3% | | | |

against government policies, given also the fact that the European election took place late in the first-order national electoral cycle. The concentration of votes for SYRIZA and ND – a total of 56.9% – (compared to 49.3% in 2014) confirms a shift in the Greek party system towards a more modest form of two-partyism which has gradually been restored in the post-crisis period, with SYRIZA replacing PASOK as the major left-of-centre party.

A point worth mentioning is the decrease in vote share for the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party (-2.1 percentage points compared to 2015, and -4.5 percentage points compared to the 2014 European election). This decline could be due to internal conflicts and ongoing legal troubles for the party's leadership, but also to vote-switching in favor of ND and "Greek Solution". The electoral performance of KINAL remained stable, but the coalition became the third largest political actor because of the decline of Golden Dawn. The performance of the communists remained stable too, while the party The River did not manage to repeat its electoral success of 2014. The breakthrough of the newly formed nationalist "Greek solution" party is perhaps a typical example of elections that function as a "midwife assisting in the birth of new parties" (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). The party of DiEM25 failed by only a few hundred votes to reach the 3% required to elect an MEP.

Because of the losses by incumbent parties and its referendum character, this election could be classified as a second-order national election (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), even though turnout was higher compared with the previous national election. The results were not favourable for smaller parties, with the exception of the newly formed nationalist party.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 European election - similar to the one of 2014 – could serve as a prelude of a shift in the balance of power in the forthcoming national elections. This time, presumably, the party of ND will win the national elections of July 7th 2019. The first major lesson of this election is that a second-order election prefigures changes in first-order electoral politics, rather than the other way around (Schmitt and Teperoglou, 2018). A second lesson is that the Greek party system has entered a new period of stabilisation.

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Hungary: A paradoxical episode under electoral euthoritarianism

GÁBOR TÓKA

May 26th 2019 saw an electoral paradox in Hungary: a long-serving government won big on a record-high turnout, yet the winners looked frustrated whilst the losers were positively re-charged. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz-KDNP electoral alliance took well over 52% of the popular vote and 62% of the country's twenty-one seats in the European Parliament (EP). That is one seat and 1 percentage point of the vote up compared to the 2014 EP elections, and just one seat and 4 percentage points of the vote less than their all-time best in 2009. But Fidesz' leaders appeared disappointed, and the government shortly announced unexpected policy concessions (Balogh, 2019).

The opposition received a lower vote share than in any one of the 2010, 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections.¹ The numbers appear unpromising because in those three races Fidesz won a two-thirds majority in the only chamber of Parliament, enough to change constitutional rules and fill positions on high courts, prosecution services, and all public agencies. Yet, the 2019 results made the opposition appear re-energized. Outside of government propaganda outlets, the apparently dismal results probably even increased the credibility of the opposition challenge in the fall local elections, for which unprecedentedly broad opposition alliances are expected to sweep some of the country's biggest municipalities.

Orbán's campaign used a dramatic narrative and vast resources. With his opposition demoralized and toothless after the 2018 national elections, the proudly "illiberal" prime minister put himself forward as the champion of a new style coalition of the European People's Party with anti-immigration far-right parties in the European Commission after the 2019 election.² He expected this change to result

1. Local parlance denotes as opposition an ideologically colorful set of parties pledged to redemocratize the authoritarian political system that emerged under Orbán's successive governments since May 2010. Of the parties running in the EP election, it excludes Fidesz and its satellite the KDNP, as well as the explicitly pro-government Mi Hazánk and Munkáspárt. For lack of political significance, the KDNP, Munkáspárt, MKKP (Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, a Dadaist opposition collective satirically mocking government and opposition alike) and Párbeszéd (the electoral alliance partner of MSZP) will not be discussed here.
2. See Orbán's speeches between June 2018 and May 2019, translated into multiple languages on <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches>. The quotes are from Orbán (2018).

from illiberal parties increasing their vote across Europe after campaigning on a strict anti-immigration stance, and the EPP shifting to the right. The political agenda of the new Commission would then go against multiculturalism and social liberalism; it would have friendlier relations with Russia and Turkey, and it would give EU member states “the right to defend the nationally strategic economic sectors and markets”, as well as veto rights on “the most important issues” in the EU. His campaign narrative argued that Europe’s “exclusively liberal” leaders proved “unable to defend Europe against immigration” because “instead of a Europe resting on Christian foundations, it is building a Europe of ‘the open society’ ... [where] European people can be readily replaced with immigrants; the family has been transformed into an optional, fluid form of cohabitation; the nation, national identity and national pride are seen as negative and obsolete notions; and the state no longer guarantees security in Europe.” The “liberal elite” pursues the “Soros-plan” to bring to Europe and naturalize so many Muslim immigrants that the “Christian Democratic” side can never again win over the “left liberals” in Europe’s national elections. According to this plan, “those groups preserving Christian traditions will be forced out of politics, and decisions about the future of Europe will be made without them.”

The Hungarian government and Fidesz spared no resources on promoting this message, even fielding a 28-nation multi-year survey series to monitor its reception across Europe. Back home, a continuous government advertising campaign started on all conceivable platforms in 2016 to argue that immigration, allegedly promoted by Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros, poses an imminent threat to Hungary, and it is supported by the European Commission. The billboards posted in the first three months of 2019 alone cost nearly forty million Euros (Jandó, 2019), the total EP campaign expenditure of the two biggest Swedish parties, and that was just one medium in a short period of the entire campaign. Government advertising was supplemented with Fidesz’ well-honed get-out-the-vote efforts that reach out with highly targeted and repeated personal contacting to over half the potential Fidesz electorate.

The opposition campaigns had miniscule financial resources in comparison, no meaningful contact lists of supporters, and a meagre activist pool of a few thousand altogether.

The largest opposition party, the formerly far-right Jobbik (“Movement for a Better Hungary”), clearly, if inconsistently, has shifted to more moderate rhetoric and policy positions since 2013, fully embracing EU membership, inter alia. From 2015 on, however, Fidesz’ growing popularity, fed by an economic upturn and an anti-immigrant stance, pushed *Jobbik* down to a 20% vote share in the 2018 national election (Tóka, 2018). The frustrated hopes of emerging as a viable single-party challenger to Fidesz prompted a further move by Jobbik to political coordination with the rest of the opposition, and the exodus of the party’s far-right and pro-government faction into the *Mi Hazánk* (“Our Homeland”) splinter party in summer 2018. *Mi Hazánk* launched a conspicuously well-founded campaign for the EP election, while Jobbik was paralysed by arbitrary fines meted out by the National Audit Office for campaign law violations. Unable to conduct an election campaign before the May 2019

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Hungary

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Fidesz Hungarian Civic Alliance - Christian Democratic People's Party joint list (Fidesz-KDNP) | EPP ^a | 1,824,220 | 52.6 | 13 | +11.1 | +1 |
| Democratic Coalition (DK) | S&D | 557,081 | 16.1 | 4 | +6.3 | +2 |
| Momentum Movement (Momentum) | RE | 344,512 | 9.9 | 2 | +9.9 | +2 |
| Hungarian Socialist Party - Dialogue Party joint list (MSZP-P) | S&D (MSZP), G-EFA (P) | 229,551 | 6.6 | 1 | -11.5 | -2 |
| Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) | NI | 220,184 | 6.3 | 1 | -8.3 | -2 |
| Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk) | | 114,156 | 3.3 | | +3.3 | |
| Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) | | 90,912 | 2.6 | | +2.6 | |
| Politics Can Be Different (LMP) | G-EFA | 75,498 | 2.2 | | -2.8 | -1 |
| Workers' Party (Munkáspárt) | | 14,452 | 0.4 | | +0.4 | |
| Total | | 3,470,566 | 100 | 21 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 43.5 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5 | | | |
| ^a Membership is in fact suspended since March 2019. | | | | | | |

election, Jobbik's 6.3% vote share was barely more than half the support it had in opinion polls.

Neck and neck with Jobbik in most pre-election polls was MSZP (the Hungarian Socialist Party), a moderate successor of the party ruling the country prior to democratization in 1989-1990. From 1994 until 2010 MSZP was the main government party in social-liberal coalitions except for four years in opposition to Orbán's first

right-wing government in 1998-2002. As a result of the unpopularity of Ferenc Gyurcsány's 2006-2009 government, the party lost over half of its former vote by the time of the 2010 election. Its survival as by far the biggest opposition party left of the newly emerged Jobbik was a credit to its well-entrenched organization and earthy political pragmatism, but has often been seen as more of an obstacle to than a resource for an effective left-wing challenge to Fidesz' rein. Their lacklustre 2019 campaign lacked identifiable messages, and was hampered by scandals and a controversial ranking of candidates for the EP.

All this may explain the staggering swing of votes from MSZP to DK (Democratic Coalition) towards the end of the EP election campaign. The rather liberal DK (Democratic Coalition) was created in 2011 by former socialist premier Gyurcsány together with some of Fidesz' most determined liberal and conservative opponents. For many years, DK struggled to make an impact except as a junior member of electoral alliances with MSZP. The 2019 EP election's list PR system was DK's one-off opportunity to take over the MSZP before crucial bargains between the opposition parties for the fall 2019 local elections, and they went all-in with their resources. Their campaign smartly invested in a social media presence and focused on a politically gifted ticket leader who, being Mr. Gyurcsány's popular wife, could push the divisive party leader into the background while retaining the loyalty of his supporters. The loudly oppositional and pro-EU campaign of DK could capitalize on a subdued MSZP campaign and the fact that previous electoral alliances made the two parties' electorates mutually interchangeable. DK thus ended up with 16%, and the MSZP-Párbeszéd joint list with just 6.6% of the vote.

The liberal Momentum, winning just 3% of the vote in their first election in 2018, merely needed to show up for the 2019 campaign to take over much of the previous LMP electorate and more. LMP (Politics Can Be Different) is a green party that emerged in 2009, with its identity still rooted in the opposition to Gyurcsány and the MSZP as much as to Orbán's policies. This ambiguity threw the party into a crisis after the 2018 election, as the party's views regarding electoral alliance options came into open conflict with the visible majority of its electorate. Momentum offered an obvious alternative that the socially liberal urban electorates readily accepted, landing LMP at 2.2%, and Momentum at 9.9% of the vote in 2019.

Thus, the paradoxes reflected surprises. An audacious bid did not pay off for Orbán, unlike many such previous bids, because of his overambitious international goals. Lively competition among the opposition parties, which undermines them in majoritarian elections, spared them a public relations disaster for once. The credibility of Jobbik, LMP and MSZP as effective vehicles for political change was badly damaged in previous national elections. With only another fiasco on offer at the EP election, they kept their best for the local elections. For DK and Momentum, May 2019 meant everything: show your viability now or your frustrated supporters may move elsewhere in search for a party that can challenge the regime. The opposition supporters rewarded a visible will to fight the regime, and won hopes of greater success in the future.

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Ireland: Something for almost everyone

MICHAEL MARSH

The 2019 European Parliament election in Ireland was notable in many ways. First, we saw the main party in government improving on its performance in 2014 (when it was also in government) and on its 2016 general election vote. *Fine Gael* won 30% of the vote (up seven points), and will send five EPP MEPs to Brussels in the Irish complement of eleven or thirteen. (Ireland has eleven seats, but this will rise to thirteen if the UK leaves the EU.)

A second feature was a notable increase in support for the Green Party, now apparently forgiven for its participation in the government in power when the economic crash and subsequent ‘bailout’ occurred. The party won 11% of the vote, and its candidate topped the poll in the Dublin constituency. Its MEPs will take their seats in the G/EFA group. One immediately and a second after Brexit.

The third was a poor showing by Eurosceptic (or more outspokenly euro critical) parties, notably *Sinn Féin* and parties of the far left, but this was more than balanced by the success of three anti-establishment independents (including one incumbent), all of whom will sit in the GUE group. *Sinn Féin* lost two of its three seats and saw its vote drop to a little over half of the 2014 figure. Independents4Change, a label of convenience for two independent TDs (members of the *Dáil*, Irish lower house), saw both candidates elected.

The fourth feature was the failure of the main opposition party, *Fianna Fáil*, to fulfil its potential in European elections. In 2014 it was unable to turn its vote in seats, finishing up with just one, and while it did get two MEPs this time (who will sit with ALDE), its vote was well down on 2014. Fifth was the continued success of independents in Irish politics. There is no sign of their popularity receding, and there are now three MEPs who are independent of traditional parties as opposed to two in 2014 (one in ALDE, one in S&D), neither of whom stood this time.

Fifth was the absence of anything like the right-wing populist parties seen elsewhere. The one candidate who did make a point of talking about immigration in negative terms was an independent who had made a good showing in the 2018 Presidential election after a series of negative remarks about Irish travellers (an indigenous itinerant minority ethnic group). He won only 10% of the vote in his constituency and was not elected.

A final feature was the big contrast in voting between these European elections and the local elections held at the same time. Most notably, *Fianna Fáil*’s local vote

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Ireland

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Fine Gael | EPP | 496,457 | 29.6 |
| Fianna Fáil | ALDE | 277,703 | 16.5 |
| Sinn Féin | GUE-NGL | 196,078 | 11.7 |
| The Green Party | G/EFA | 190,814 | 11.4 |
| Independents 4 Change | GUE-NGL | 124,046 | 7.4 |
| Labour | S&D | 52,746 | 3.1 |
| Solidarity/People Before Profit | | 38,763 | 2.3 |
| Social Democrats | | 20,331 | 1.2 |
| Independents | GUE-NGL | 264,085 | 15.7 |
| Others | | 17,055 | 1.0 |
| Total | | 1,678,078 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 49.7 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> |

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 4 | 5 | +7.3 | | +1 |
| | 1 | 2 | -5.7 | | +1 |
| | 1 | 1 | -7.8 | -2 | -2 |
| | 2 | 2 | +6.5 | +2 | +2 |
| | 2 | 2 | +7.4 | +2 | +2 |
| | | | -2.2 | | |
| | | | -1.0 | | |
| | | | +1.2 | | |
| | 1 | 2 | -4.1 | -2 | -2 |
| | | | -1.6 | | |
| | 11 | 13 | | | +2 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

was ten points higher than its European one, and *Fine Gael's* five points lower. My analysis of the RTE Exit poll indicates that only half of all voters chose the same party (or voted independent) in both elections, a drop of at least 10 percentage points on such behaviour in previous sets of elections back to 2004 (Marsh, 2019b).

Full results are in Table 1.

The campaign was uneventful, and mercifully free from overly negative campaigning, or sinister material on social media. As always, there was ample decoration of all available poles with candidate posters, and extensive door-to-door canvassing by candidates and campaign teams. There was good coverage on radio and television, with debates on more than one channel between the candidates in the three constituencies within which the thirteen seats were allocated. Such debates were inhibited by the number of candidates with twenty-three standing in the largest constituency, representing many small parties as well as independents. Not everyone could feature, but all had the opportunity to make recorded statements that were broadcast and available on line.

For once the main issue was not the economy. Growth is strong, employment continuing to rise and unemployment below 5%. The major domestic issues are continuing crises in housing and health but neither featured much in debates. There was no discussion of the next Commission leader. The issues that did get talked about included climate change and carbon taxes, Brexit – and its likely impact on the border with Northern Ireland and the food industry – immigration, moves in the EU to harmonise defence (a European Army) and its implications for Irish neutrality, and the importance of Ireland's low corporation tax rate. These debates undoubtedly introduced the candidates to many voters unfamiliar with them. A strong performance in a May 21st debate, and subsequent twitter storm, saw the odds against an unknown and inexperienced young Green candidate's taking a seat fall from 50-1 to 4-1, although she eventually just missed out.

Candidates are important in all Irish elections. This is in part because of the small scale of contests and the preferential electoral system. It is also because the focus on individuals rather than parties and ideologies has been encouraged by the nature of competition within the political system (Marsh et al., 2007; Courtney and Weeks, 2018). This may be particularly true in European elections (Marsh, 2019a). Voters typically cite candidate-centred reasons for their choice when asked in the exit poll about the factors behind motivations and, without taking this purely at face value, the responses are striking. 37% cited the candidates' stances on issues, 31% their ability to stand up for ordinary people, 29% their personalities/qualities and just 23% the party that candidate represents. 25% cited national and local issues, and 16% issues at European level. Just 9% were protesting against the government.

Some of the more successful candidates were predictably so. In *Fine Gael*, a vice president of the EPP was running in one constituency and a former Justice Minister in another; a well-known government spokesman ran from *Fianna Fáil*; and there were several sitting TDs. The exceptions were arguably the Green candidates. Their voters were most likely to mention stances on political and social issues and the candidate's party as important in their choice.

Gender played a part in voter behaviour. Once again, a majority of MEPs will be women in 2019. 42% of candidates were female, well up on Dáil and local elections, and women were slightly more likely to vote for a woman than were men. Analysis of the exit poll suggested 50% of women chose a woman as opposed to 42% of men (see Marsh, 2019a). The gap existed to varying degrees for all parties.

The implications of the election remain to be seen, but they can be expected to be significant. One question was whether results might prompt an early national election. The current minority government has persisted for more than three years because it has a confidence and supply arrangement with *Fianna Fáil*, and because of Brexit-related uncertainty. This has already been extended once. Both parties would like an election, but neither will risk one without some clear evidence that they will improve their position. Arguably, the European result would encourage *Fine Gael* into an early election, but the local results, a better guide to individual voting behaviour, would caution strongly against that. This position is complicated by the fact that the election of MEPs who are sitting members of the Dáil will prompt four by-elections (which must be held by the start of 2020), something that could erode the government's position and which could certainly cause an embarrassing distraction.

The second potential impact arises from the swelling of the Green vote, particularly in Dublin. Already, government ministers (and all other party leaders) are making friendly noises about Greens and positive noises about tackling climate change, conveniently on the back of an all-party committee report. (This was the basis for the Dáil declaring a Climate Change Emergency last month). Meanwhile the Green Party will be seeking candidates to fight the next general election in the confident hope of pushing its current number of deputies well above the two it has currently and perhaps above the seven it held in 2007.

The election will prompt self-analysis in Sinn Féin, the third largest party in the Dáil and holder of three seats in 2014, who saw its vote cut by 8 points. As with the small parties to its left, it will blame reduced turnout in key areas. Overall this was down only 2%, but 2014 was fought in the middle of a long, well supported protest about domestic water chargers which mobilised working class urban areas, and in which *Sinn Féin* was heavily involved. The party has stalled in the polls since 2016 and its hopes of replacing *Fianna Fáil* now seem decidedly unrealistic.

Some uncertainty hangs over the two extra seats that, after Brexit, will go to the runners-up in the South and the Dublin constituencies, a Green and a *Fianna Fáil* candidate respectively, with *Sinn Féin* next placed in both. Under the Irish electoral system of single transferable vote the definition of a runner-up is problematic (Gallagher, 2019). Although the government amended the electoral law to address this problem, the issue could still end up in the Supreme Court (O'Malley, 2019).

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Italy: Complete overturn among government partners – League doubled, M5S halved

IRENE LANDINI AND ALDO PAPARO

Italy was among the countries going to the polls for the European Parliament (EP) 2019 elections on Sunday, May 26th. The electoral system comprises five constituencies, which, however, are not relevant for seat allocation among parties, as this is done purely on the basis of votes received nationwide. Furthermore, there is a 4% legal threshold.¹ In addition to the European Parliament (EP) elections, municipal elections were held in just under half of the 7,915 Italian municipalities – involving roughly a third of Italian voters.²

CAMPAIGN AND COMPETITORS

A total of eighteen lists competed in the European Parliament (EP) elections. The main contenders were identical to the recent general elections, held in March 2018 (Paparò, 2018). Besides the government parties, three other parties were expected to meet the 4% threshold – the Democratic Party (PD), *Forza Italia*, and Brothers of Italy (FDI). Of all other parties, only More Europe (+EU) was considered to be in credible contention for EP seats.

The most salient issues during the electoral campaign were the future of the European Union (EU), management of migrants and asylum seekers, unemployment, and redistribution. However, to put the EP election in context, we should also mention that in June 2018, after the non-decisive results of the general elections, M5S and League formed a coalition government – the first mainstream-free cabinet in all of EU history (Chiaramonte et al., 2018). In the months preceding the EP elections, numerous conflicts emerged. The tensions between the government allies and the prospect of survival of the government itself were also very prominent during the electoral campaign.

Focusing on the main parties, the League represents a particularly interesting case. Formerly an ethno-regionalist party of the North (Tronconi, 2009), in the past five years – under Salvini's leadership – it has turned into a nationwide radical right-wing

1. We must mention that the threshold does not apply to parties representing linguistic minorities, which is the case for the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP).
2. Moreover, regional elections were held in one of the twenty Italian regions – Piedmont.

party (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). This turn proved successful in the 2018 general elections, when the party scored a historic 17.4%, and polls indicated a continuing positive trend. The League is now part of the Europe of Nations and Freedom group (ENF), and it shows the most critical position towards the EU among the main Italian parties. During the campaign, it supported stronger sovereignty for nation States and a sort of pre-Maastricht cooperative model between EU member States – centered on mere economic cooperation. As in 2018, migrant repatriation and stricter rules to secure EU external borders were salient issues in Salvini's campaign. Fiscally speaking, the League proposed overcoming the economic rigidity imposed by the Fiscal Compact and reducing taxation by means of a low-rate flat tax.

The M5S (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, EFDD) also represents a peculiar case in comparative terms (Tronconi 2015; 2018). In 2019, it campaigned mainly on welfare issues, namely the implementation of an EU minimum wage system, stronger welfare provisions for European citizens in need, and a more accessible education system. While the party cannot be defined as completely pro-Europe, it advocated for giving stronger powers to the EP in order to bring the Union closer to its citizens.

The PD (Socialists and Democrats, S&D) approached the EP elections with a newly appointed leader – Nicola Zingaretti. It is one of the most pro-European parties in Italy, and it advocated for a stronger European political and economic leadership at the international level. Besides, the party supported increasing public investments to foster employment, and welfare measures to help disadvantaged groups – such as a European minimum wage. On immigration, the PD stressed solidarity and burden-sharing among EU member states in hosting new arrivals.

Forza Italia (European People's Party, EPP), once again with Silvio Berlusconi as its main candidate, shared some proposals with the PD – such as the desire for a stronger European leadership on the world stage and increased investments to foster employment. It also agreed with the League on reducing taxes and implementing the flat tax.

Tax reduction was proposed by FDI (European Conservatives and Reformists, ECR) as well. The party also campaigned on abandoning austerity measures and for refocusing Italian economic policies on supporting Made in Italy production. On immigration, FDI supported military controls of European external borders and a “Marshall Plan” for African countries.

Finally, More Europe (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE) is the most pro-European party in Italy. In its manifesto, Europe was seen as a ‘bastion’ of civil and social rights. The platform also dealt with social issues, especially the proposal of a European system of unemployment subsidy, and the implementation of green economy measures.

RESULTS

In contrast to what emerged in many EU countries, voter turnout in Italy decreased – from 58.7% at the 2014 EP elections to 56.1%. This is in line with the half-a-point-

per-year decline observed since the mid-70s due to generational replacement. Still, this also represents the new historical low for turnout in an Italian nationwide election.

The indisputable winner of the elections was the League. Salvini's party received 34.3% of the votes, nearly doubling the unprecedented result of the 2018 Italian general elections. Compared to the previous EP elections, the League has gained 28 percentage points and twenty-three EP seats (Table 1).³

In contrast, its government ally M5S has been downgraded from being the largest party in Italy (in the 2018 general elections) to third place, almost halving its result— from 32.7% to 17.1%. Moreover, the party also lost compared to the 2014 EP elections, by 4 percentage points and three seats.

The M5S's decline is paired with the “comeback” of the PD (CISE, 2019). While in the 2018 general elections the PD suffered a historic defeat (18.8%), it has now grown back to 22.3%, thus becoming the second-largest party in Italy. Yet, it did not increase its vote total in absolute terms. Moreover, compared to the historic success obtained in the 2014 EP elections (Maggini, 2014), the PD has lost over 18 percentage points and twelve seats.

Forza Italia continues its electoral decline. Berlusconi's party is basically halved in comparison with the 2014 EP elections (from 16.8% to 8.8%), and it lost seven seats. Already in 2018, FI was no longer the largest party within the center-right field, but at 14% it was close to the League (17.4%), which in turn now has virtually quadrupled its votes.

Conversely, a surprising result was achieved by FDI, managing to grow in spite of the rise of the League. FDI gained 2.8 percentage points compared to the previous EP elections, moving from 3.7% to 6.5% — therefore surpassing the electoral threshold and obtaining five EP seats. This result also represents an increase compared to the 2018 general elections, where it reached 4.4%.

The remaining fifteen parties running in the elections did not overcome the electoral threshold. Among those, three deserve some attention. Although slightly gaining compared to 2018, More Europe merely succeeded in being the largest party to miss the threshold, with 3.1%. Green Europe can claim a marginal victory as well, having received 2.3% of the votes, more than twice its 2014 result. By contrast, The Left (an electoral coalition of left-wing parties) got 1.7%, a disappointing result compared to the result of a similar cartel in 2014 (4% and three MEPs).

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of the 2019 EP elections confirm the turmoil that characterizes the Italian party system. Compared to 2014, electoral volatility is at 37.3, marking

3. The additional seats will become twenty-four when Brexit will be effective. Italy is assigned three of the twenty-seven Brexit seats. A total of seventy-six seats has been allocated according to the electoral results, but only seventy-three will be effective until Brexit has been finalized. The League, FI, and FDI are the winners of the three Italian Brexit seats.

Table 1 – Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Italy

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|------------|-----------|
| League (Lega) | ENF | 9,153,638 | 34.3 |
| Democratic Party (PD) | S&D | 6,050,351 | 22.7 |
| 5 Star Movement (M5S) | EFD | 4,552,527 | 17.1 |
| <i>Forza Italia</i> (FI) | EPP | 2,344,465 | 8.8 |
| Brothers of Italy (FDI) | ECR | 1,723,232 | 6.5 |
| More Europe (+EU) | ALDE | 822,764 | 3.1 |
| Green Europe (EV) | G-EFA | 609,678 | 2.3 |
| The Left (SIN) | GUE-NGL | 465,092 | 1.7 |
| South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) | EPP | 141,353 | 0.5 |
| Others | | 799,862 | 3.0 |
| Total | | 26,662,962 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 56.1 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 4 |

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 28 | 29 | +28.2 | +23 | +24 |
| | 19 | 19 | -18.1 | -12 | -12 |
| | 14 | 14 | -4.1 | -3 | -3 |
| | 6 | 7 | -8.0 | -7 | -6 |
| | 5 | 6 | +2.8 | +5 | +6 |
| | | | +2.4 | | |
| | | | +1.4 | | |
| | | | -2.3 | -3 | -3 |
| | 1 | 1 | +0.0 | | |
| | | | -2.3 | -3 | -3 |
| | 73 | 76 | | | +3 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

the second extremely volatile EP elections in a row (Emanuele et al., 2019). As described above, electoral change is also remarkable in comparison with the 2018 general elections.

The most impressive outcome is the complete reversal of fortunes, in electoral terms, between the two government partners. The change in the electoral geography is also particularly noteworthy. While maintaining its strongholds in the North (where it is above 40%), the League now receives above 20% in all Southern regions (De Sio, 2019a). These results represent the ultimate success of Salvini's strategy to transform the Northern League into his League, namely a nationwide radical right-wing party. In 2018 the North was represented by the League; and the South, represented by the M5S. Now, Salvini's party has become the center of gravity at both governmental and territorial level. The challenge will now be to actually reconcile and satisfy the demands and needs of both the North and the South.

Paradoxically, the League is now more nationalized than its governmental ally. In fact, the M5S lost more (roughly 50%) in the Northern regions, where it was already weaker in 2018. Minor losses are registered in the South, where the party had about 45% in 2018 and lost approximately a third of its support. In 2013 M5S was the most geographically uniform party in Italian history (Emanuele, 2015), with almost the same results throughout the different regions of Italy. The party now scores just 10% in the North and its supporters are mainly confined to the least economically productive areas of the country (Emanuele and Maggini, 2019). Historically, all Italian parties undergoing a similar process, experiencing a strong decline in the long run.

Finally, the PD has clearly improved its position within the Italian party system, although it is still weaker in the South – slightly below 20%. As the second-largest party in the country, it now represents the most viable option for those who do not want Salvini in office. Therefore, it may attempt to form a coalition with other parties in the center-left field – such as Green Europe and More Europe. Nevertheless, in light of the EP election results, something else appears to be required in order for Salvini not to win the next general elections – either a coalition with the M5S, or the ability to attract large numbers of M5S voters (De Sio 2019b).

CONCLUSION

The consequences of the 2019 EP elections will be relevant for the whole Italian party system. In brief, Salvini achieved a “triple victory” (CISE, 2019). First, in mere numerical terms, the League represents the center of gravity of the current governmental coalition. Secondly, from a geographical perspective, it now has quite homogenous electoral support across the whole country. Finally, from a strategic point of view, Salvini now has multiple alternative options. He may consider bringing down the current government to pursue an alternative government coalition – after new general elections. He can either pursue the classic center-right alliance with FI and FDI, or a smaller coalition with FDI only. The latter could win a majority of parliamentary seats as well, provided that the EP elections results were replicated. Hence, the

leader of the League is now the arbiter of Italian politics. His strategic choices in the next few months, and how the other parties react, will determine not just his own fate, but the future development of the Italian party system as a whole.

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Latvia: European expertise matters

JĀNIS IKSTENS

Latvia was one of the few EU countries that went to the polls on Saturday 25 May, although advance voting was also available for three days. According to the Central Elections Commission (CEC), there were 1,411,955 Latvians eligible to vote – a decrease of 4% compared with 2014. A party list system is used to choose eight MEPs, and voters can express either a positive or a negative preference for each candidate on a list that they vote for. As in all countries, there is a threshold of 5 per cent in order to access the European Parliament, although the effective threshold (due to the small number of seats) tends to be higher. Whilst national elections in Latvia divide the country into five electoral districts, for the European elections the whole country constitutes single electoral district.

THE CAMPAIGN

Both registered political parties and their alliances having no fewer than five-hundreds members are allowed to field candidate lists in European elections in Latvia. The CEC registered sixteen candidate lists representing both coalition and opposition parties in the national parliament. along with parties that did not clear the electoral threshold in the 2018 *Saeima* elections, and organisations that did not participate in those elections.

Electoral performance of new parties only recently elected to the Latvian national parliament were a matter of some interest during the campaign. Both the New Conservative Party and the KPV LV party (*Kam pieder valsts?*, which means: Who owns the State?) mobilised their supporters by heavily criticising the government, and by accusing the political establishment of corruption and of mismanaging public administration. As a result of a complicated coalition building process, both parties became part of the ruling coalition headed by Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš of New Unity (center-right). That, however, coincided with an ebbing of popular support for the KPV LV party, which prompted some pundits to conclude that its accession to the governing coalition had not been politically beneficial for this populist party. Moreover, the KPV LV faced intensive political infighting among its political leaders that arguably contributed the decline of the party's support. The New Conservatives, however, stood united and suffered almost no loss of public support.

Nevertheless, it was the Social Democratic Party *called* Harmony, a main advocate of political interests of Slavic minorities, that experienced the most turbulent campaign. The party was largely caught by surprise in February when MP Vjačeslavs Dombrovskis was removed as the party's top candidate to be replaced by Nils Ušakovs, a long-serving Mayor of Riga, and Andris Ameriks, former Deputy Mayor of Riga and a close ally of Ušakovs, against the backdrop of corruption charges brought against a number of managers of the largest municipal transportation company. The meaning of this sudden overhaul became more apparent in May when the Anti-corruption Bureau searched premises of the Riga Tourism Development Office (RTDO) a few weeks before the elections, and the media reported financial transactions implicating the use of RTDO funds to finance the 2018 national election campaign of Harmony. After this news emerged, Ušakovs disappeared from public view, exemplifying Harmony's inclination to avoid public discussions throughout this campaign.

Manifestos of major contestants seemingly paid more attention to European issues (as compared to earlier campaigns) and to increasing the percentage of gross national income to be redistributed via the EU budget. While more funding for higher education and research in the next multiannual financial framework was broadly supported, centrist parties such as Development/For! and the Progressives were keen to redistribute the support provided by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This was opposed by several right-of-the-centre parties, most notably the Union of Greens and Farmers who, on the other hand, emphasised fostering bioeconomics, reducing waste and transitioning away from fossil fuels. Centrists took the lead in offering EU-related solutions to social problems in Latvia – creating a pan-European pension fund, setting a uniform minimum wage formula, or even introducing a uniform tax system across the EU. To this end, they were joined by the pro-Slavic Harmony party that *inter alia* pledged to fight nationalism and xenophobia and called for municipalities' direct access to EU funding. This take on devolution was further elaborated by the Russian Union of Latvia calling for a federal Europe and extensive cultural autonomy of ethnic minorities in the EU.

The New Conservative Party and the National Alliance, in turn, wanted to increasingly allocate EU funding for vocational education and life-long learning to meet the demands of labour market. The two parties saw the EU as yet another mechanism to provide security from Russia by means of battling misinformation, improving cyber security and supporting select EU Eastern neighbourhood countries. These two parties spoke about the EU as a union of nation states, while the ideologically proximal New Unity argued in favour of a strong and united EU that discourages any transfer of ownership of strategic European companies to 'unfriendly third countries'. The populist KPV LV party offered a catch-all platform emphasising both social security, economic development, CAP and transparency of EU governance, as well as an inclusive society that supports the culture of smaller nations.

According to data provided by the parties, overall financial investment in the electoral campaign was lower than in the 2018 national elections. Harmony and Development/For! were the top spenders, followed by New Unity and the Russian Union of Latvia. Moreover, media strategies of parties differed. While Harmony invested

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Latvia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|----------------|------------|----------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| New Unity (JV) | EPP | 124,193 | 26.4 | 2 | -19.8 | -2 |
| Social Democratic Party 'Harmony' | S&D | 82,604 | 17.6 | 2 | +4.4 | +1 |
| National Alliance 'All for Latvia' 'For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK' (NA) | ECR | 77,591 | 16.5 | 2 | +2.2 | +1 |
| For Development/For! (A/P) | NI | 58,763 | 12.5 | 1 | | +1 |
| Russian Union of Latvia (LKS) | EPP | 29,546 | 6.3 | 1 | +0.1 | |
| Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) | ALDE | 25,252 | 5.4 | | -2.9 | -1 |
| Regional Alliance of Latvia (LRA) | NI | 23,581 | 5.0 | | +2.5 | |
| New Conservative Party (JKP) | NI | 20,595 | 4.4 | | | |
| Progressives (P) | NI | 13,705 | 2.9 | | | |
| Political Party KPV LV (KPV) | NI | 4,362 | 0.9 | | | |
| Latvian Nationalists (LN) | NI | 3,172 | 0.7 | | | |
| Centre Party (CP) | NI | 2,312 | 0.5 | | | |
| Awakening (A) | NI | 2,242 | 0.5 | | | |
| Social Democratic Workers' Party of Latvia (LSDSP) | NI | 922 | 0.2 | | -0.1 | |
| New Harmony (JS) | NI | 829 | 0.2 | | | |
| Party of Action (RP) | NI | 791 | 0.2 | | | |
| Total | | 470,460 | 100 | 8 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 33.5 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5 | | | |

Source: <https://epv2019.cvk.lv/pub/velesanu-rezultati>

heavily in TV advertising, Development/For!, Regional Alliance of Latvia and the New Conservative Party prioritised radio advertisements. The Progressives and the New Unity were geared towards outdoor billboards but KPV LV relied on social media that had worked to its favour in 2018.

Election administration was plagued with problems after Arnis Cimdars, a long-standing Chair of CEC, was removed from office in March. The media reported that up to 700,000 eligible citizens may have not received an official letter indicating the polling station at which they are to vote. Although measures were taken to fix the problem, not all eligible voters received the correct information. The government announced that people could go to any polling station on the three days of advance voting. However, this option was closed for parts of the second and third day of advance voting due to a technical problem. Because of these setbacks, the Mayor of Daugavpils, Andrejs Elksniņš, argued that these elections were illegitimate.

RESULTS

Voter turnout rose by a little more than three percentage points in comparison to the previous EP elections, reaching 33.5%. This increase follows a trend observed in many EU countries. Although the technical problems abovementioned were occasionally blamed for keeping voter activity low this year, one could argue that media coverage of this issue increased awareness of the elections and that the option to vote at any polling station for a few days actually increased turnout.

New Unity received more than a quarter of all votes cast. However, this represented a sharp decline compared with 2014, when this party garnered support from nearly a half of voters. In contrast, the Harmony party improved its performance by four percentage points and one MEP seat, as compared with 2014. The National Alliance also gained one more MEP seat. The Russian Union of Latvia reaped the fruits of a notable investment in the election campaign as it managed to retain one MEP seat in a fierce competition with Harmony. Finally, the Union of Greens and Farmers continued to lose public support and failed to obtain representation in the European Parliament.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 EP elections in Latvia suggested the importance of the candidates' experience of European affairs. New Unity benefitted from the presence on the party's candidate list of Valdis Dombrovskis, the Vice-President of the European Commission, and several seasoned MEPs. Roberts Zile, a long-serving MEP representing the National Alliance (NA), likely mobilised voter segments that would otherwise not support NA. Tatjana Ždanoka of the Russian Union of Latvia, another experienced MEP, helped her party secure representation in the EP.

In line with the theory of second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), several smaller parties performed well (New Unity, Russian Union of Latvia). However, opposition parties showed mixed results – while Harmony increased its vote sha-

re, the Union of Greens and Farmers lost their EP representation. Similarly, new parties had divergent fortunes. While Development/For! obtained one EP seat, New Conservatives and KPV LV did not clear the electoral threshold. For the populist KPV LV this crushing defeat followed excellent results in the national elections eight months earlier. This could be a consequence of serious conflicts within the party's leadership, accompanying gradual disillusionment of KPV voters, that will likely result in a disintegration of this party before the 2021 municipal elections.

Slavic parties (Harmony and the Russian Union of Latvia) mobilised their supporters in greater numbers and increased their combined representation in the EP. Some political rivals have hastily claimed this resulted from a low turnout. Based on official returns, this appears to be a candidate visibility (Ušakovs) effect. Moreover, sending Ušakovs to the EP will likely affect not only his public visibility and support, but it may also trigger both more profound changes within the Harmony party and competition for the position of Mayor of Riga.

While EP election results are rarely taken as an indication of party support at the national level in Latvia, some politicians have voiced a proposal to choose the next EU commissioner on the basis of party performance in the elections. This approach is not favoured by several participants of the current coalition, and therefore the next commissioner will likely be a result of a broader political compromise involving other important decisions.

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Lithuania: Defeat of Eurosceptic parties in the shadow of a presidential campaign¹

MAŽVYDAS JASTRAMSKIS

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) election in Lithuania was overshadowed by a simultaneous direct presidential election. Three main contenders were close in the polls during the preceding months. The second round between the two frontrunners, Ingrida Šimonytė and Gitanas Nausėda, was held two weeks after the first one, simultaneously with the EP vote. The overlap of two elections raised the otherwise (potentially) low turnout in the EP election (53.1% of Lithuanians voted), but it also meant that less attention was given to the EP campaign by the main political parties.

CONTEXT AND CAMPAIGN

European Parliament elections in Lithuania conform quite closely to the second-order theory by Reif and Schmitt (1980): voters choose on the basis of national-level questions and sympathies, instead of voting according to specific EU-related topics. When held without a concurrent national election in 2014, the European election received very little attention (in 2009, the turnout was 21%). The competition is skewed in favour of the pro-European political powers, as Lithuania is one of the most EU-trusting countries in the union: in the Eurobarometer of Autumn 2018, 65% of Lithuanians tended to trust EU with only 21% tending not to trust it (European Commission, 2018).

Except for the debates carried by the public broadcaster LRT (in the two weeks before the election), as well as a number of posters and social media advertising, the electoral campaign was barely visible. The two largest parliamentary parties tried to enhance their electoral prospects by giving high positions in their lists to popular figures that have no experience in politics whatsoever. The right-wing, opposition Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) gave their number-one position to the academic Liudas Mažylis, who became famous two years ago for discovering the document of the 1918 Lithuanian declaration of independence. The largest government party, Lithuanian Farmers and Greens (LVŽS), gave the second spot in their list to former basketball player Šarūnas Marčiulionis.

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In contrast with 2014, the election lacked a salient European issue for the parties to campaign “for” or “against” (which, in the previous EP election, had been the introduction of euro), as immigration is very low in Lithuania. However, there still are differences on the European dimension, according to the Lithuanian voting advice application “Mano balsas” (2019). Among the parliamentary parties, the Order and Justice (PTT) is moderately sceptical of European integration and authority. Similar views are held by the party of the Polish ethnic minority, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance (LLRA-KŠS). The main governing party (winner of the 2016 parliamentary election), LVŽS, along with their coalitional partner, Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP, founded in 2018 in a split from LSDP) are in the centre of the pro-/anti- European axis. The remaining parties of traditional centre right and left are moderately pro-European in the matters of EU integration and authority: TS-LKD, Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS) and Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP).

The number of electoral lists increased from ten to sixteen due to the decision to allow public electoral committees to compete. The main difference between a committee and a political party is that the latter needs a minimum membership of 2000, and is eligible for state financing. Committees have been taking part in local Lithuanian elections since 2011. Five national public committees participated in this EP election, alongside eleven political parties.

RESULTS

With no active campaign, the election resembled a referendum on the LVŽS - LSDDP government. LVŽS obtained two members of the European parliament (MEPs) – one more than in 2014. However, they came in third place in terms of votes: obviously a disappointing result for the largest parliamentary party. This was foreshadowed by the first round of presidential elections where Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis also finished third, not entering the second round. This EP election proved again that, quite similarly to the other post-communist countries (Roberts, 2008), the Lithuanian electorate is prone to hyperaccountability. It is worth mentioning that all the previous Lithuanian governments lost the EP elections, with an exception of 2009 where the turnout was so low that TS-LKD capitalised on the loyalty of their voters (Ramonaitė et al. 2014). Currently, LVŽS MEP Bronis Ropė belongs to the Greens–European Free Alliance.

The LSDDP experienced a fiasco, receiving only 2.2% of votes (5% are needed for a seat) and losing the battle for left-leaning voters to LSDP. These elections witnessed a recovery of the LSDP that used to be the main party of the centre-left but came third in the 2016 parliamentary elections, suffered a split and stagnated since then. The party finished second with 15.1% of votes and gained two MEPs (the same result as in 2014). Their performance was probably enhanced by the leader of list – Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, one of the most active MEPs from Lithuania. LSDP belongs to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Lithuania

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) | EPP | 245,918 | 18.6 | 3 | +2.1 | +1 |
| Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) | S&D | 199,220 | 15.1 | 2 | -1.2 | |
| Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) | G-EFA | 157,603 | 11.9 | 2 | +5.7 | +1 |
| Labour Party (DP) | ALDE | 112,985 | 8.5 | 1 | -3.6 | |
| Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS) | ALDE | 81,916 | 6.2 | 1 | -9.4 | -1 |
| Public Electoral Committee “Train of Aušra Maldeikienė” (AMT) | EPP (provisional) | 80,683 | 6.1 | 1 | +6.1 | +1 |
| “Bloc of Valdemar Tomaševski” – Coalition of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance and Russian Alliance (LLRA-KŠS) | ECR | 69,262 | 5.2 | 1 | -2.4 | |
| Lithuanian Centre Party (LCP) | | 64,091 | 4.8 | | +4.8 | |
| Public Electoral Committee “Movement of President Rolandas Paksas” (PRPJ) | | 50,129 | 3.8 | | +3.8 | |
| Public Electoral Committee “Vytautas Radžvilas: Let’s Get Back the State!” (VRSV) | | 41,859 | 3.2 | | +3.2 | |
| Party “Order and Justice” (PTT) | EFD | 34,298 | 2.6 | | -10.9 | -2 |

| (continued) Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Lithuania | | | | | | |
|---|----------|---------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
| Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP) | | 29,591 | 2.2 | | +2.2 | |
| Lithuanian Greens Party (LŽP) | | 28,126 | 2.1 | | -1.3 | |
| Lithuanian Freedom Union (liberals) (LLS) | | 23,828 | 1.8 | | +0.4 | |
| Public Electoral Committee “Strong Lithuania in United Europe” (SLVE) | | 16,671 | 1.3 | | +1.3 | |
| Public Electoral Committee “Decisive Leap” (LŠ) | | 14,195 | 1.1 | | +1.1 | |
| <i>Spoilt votes</i> | | <i>71,661</i> | <i>5.4</i> | | | |
| Total | | 1,322,036 | 100 | 11 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 53.1 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>5 per cent from all votes</i> | | | |

Quite similarly to 2014, this election was won by the largest parliamentary oppositional party, right wing TS-LKD (which belongs to the European People’s Party in EP). It received 18.6% of votes and three MEPs. Voting for TS-LKD was probably reinforced by a second-placed presidential candidate Ingrida Šimonytė – a non-partisan who is affiliated with the party (she won the primaries of TS-LKD and also belongs to the party’s parliamentary grouping).

Eurosceptic parties suffered a defeat. In 2014, the populist right PTT gained two MEPS, the same as the other three pro-European election winners. In this election PTT received only 2.6% of votes, 10.9 percentage points down. Several factors possibly contributed to this. Firstly, the campaign lacked a salient European issue to campaign against (in 2014, the PTT campaigned against the introduction of the euro).

Secondly, it suffered from a split: former leader Rolandas Paksas founded his own committee and participated separately in the election. Thirdly, some of their votes could have gone to another Eurosceptic list, the committee “Vytautas Radžvilas: Let's Get Back the State!”. Together these three lists received 9.6% of votes, but separately none of them climbed over the five per cent threshold needed for at least one MEP. The only moderately Eurosceptic power that received a MEP (5.2% of votes) was the Bloc of Valdemar Tomaševski, the Coalition of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance and Russian Alliance (LLRA-KŠS). The leader of the coalition, Tomaševski, is expected to join the European Conservatives and Reformists, as previously.

One new political force entered the EP from Lithuania: the electoral committee Train of Aušra Maldeikienė, led by charismatic and explicitly pro-European politician Maldeikienė, which received 6.1% of votes and gained one MEP. The remaining two seats went to the centre-populist Labour Party (8.5% of votes) and the liberals LRLS (6.2% of votes). Maldeikienė announced that she will join European People's Party, please correct the text accordingly.

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Luxembourg: The permanent downfall of Luxembourg's dominant party?

PATRICK DUMONT, RAPHAËL KIES AND DAN SCHMIT

THE CONTEXT

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections were held only a few months after the October 2018 parliamentary elections. Surveys for the latter elections had predicted that the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) would win votes and return to government after being an opposition party during 2013-2018, the second time since World War II. In the end, the CSV lost 5.2 percentage points, of the national vote, compared to 2013, and two of its parliamentary seats. The government coalition of the liberal DP, the social democratic LSAP and the Greens kept a majority of seats (thirty-one out of sixty) and stayed in power.

In the previous European elections in 2014, the parties of the newly formed governing coalition had lost votes, while the CSV obtained its best result in any European election. Two main reasons were identified to explain these results. First, a substantial proportion of the electorate considered that the coalition parties had by-passed the largest party CSV when forming a government, which was considered unfair. This was due to the fact that, unlike all EP elections since 1979, the 2014 ones did not coincide with the national elections in Luxembourg: a governmental crisis in October 2013 had led to the first early elections in Luxembourg since the 1960s and the DP, LSAP and Greens had the numbers to unseat the usual and incumbent senior government party. Possibly unconvinced by the first months of this unusual coalition, a number of voters had chosen to punish the coalition parties in the 2014 EP election. Secondly, Jean-Claude Juncker – while not being on the ballot for the 2014 EP elections himself – was one of the candidates for the post of the European Commission president, which is assumed to have helped his party, the CSV (Dumont and Kies, 2014).

For the 2019 European elections, the context was different. The DP, LSAP and Greens coalition had been confirmed after five years in power while the CSV had suffered substantial losses at the preceding national elections. Furthermore, Jean-Claude Juncker decided that he would not be a candidate for a second term as Commission president and the three MEPs elected in 2014 did not stand for re-election. The only incumbent of the CSV was Christophe Hansen, who had only taken over Viviane Reding's seat after her election to Luxembourg's parliament in the October 2018 na-

tional election. For these reasons, it was generally expected that the CSV would lose votes compared to its 2014 high.

There was, however, great uncertainty about the election outcome due to the absence of survey data or other reliable predictors.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

A total of ten parties competed for the six Luxembourgian seats in the European parliament. Although most parties knew that they would not have a chance of winning one of these few seats, campaigning for the European elections was anyway critical for them, as public party finance is determined by a party's performance at the parliamentary and European elections.¹ For those parties that did not have a realistic chance of passing the threshold to receive any party finance, the main aim was visibility. The ten parties included the seven parties represented in Luxembourg's parliament since 2018: the Christian Democratic CSV, the liberal DP, the social democratic LSAP, the Greens, the sovereigntist ADR, the Left Party, and the Pirate Party, which had won their first parliamentary seats at those elections. The Conservatives and the Communist Party, which both stood for the 2018 elections, also presented candidate lists. In addition, the "pan-European" party VOLT presented a list for the EP elections in Luxembourg.

Except for the ADR, the Left Party, the Communist Party and the Conservatives, all parties expressed a clear pro-European message. As the largest Eurosceptic party, the ADR campaigned for a European Union with strong nation states rather than a centralisation of competencies in European institutions.

A lot of attention has been paid to the selection of candidates. Except for the Pirate Party and the Conservatives, all parties nominated three men and three women as candidates. This increase in female candidates was a consequence of party finance legislation that requires electoral lists to be fully gender balanced for the European elections if a party is to receive its full funding.²

Only three incumbent MEPs (Charles Goerens (DP), Christophe Hansen (CSV) and Tilly Metz (The Greens)) stood for re-election, while Georges Bach and Mady Delvaux-Stehres decided to retire from public office, and Frank Engel decided to focus on his new role of national president of the CSV.

1. Basic requirements for party funding is the presentation of full lists in all four constituencies for the national election and in the country-wide single constituency for the European election and reaching at least 2 percent of the vote in each of those elections. Once this threshold is met, a lump sum is awarded but parties can also receive a fixed amount for each additional percentage point of votes received in national and European elections.
2. Parties only receive the full additional funding linked to their electoral performance (above the minimum of 2 percent) if they their electoral lists contain at least 40% of candidates of each gender for the national election and a 50%-50% balance for the EP election (for instance they would only receive 25% of that funding if they presented only six male – or female – candidates for the European elections), see the Journal officiel du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, Mémorial A, 264, 2016, <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2016/12/15/n2/jo>.

Another characteristic of these elections was the decision of the four largest parties to nominate two rather than one *Spitzenkandidaten* for their lists. For the CSV these were incumbent MEP Christophe Hansen and Isabel Wiseler-Santos Lima, wife of the party's leader in the recent national campaign. The liberal DP nominated MEP Charles Goerens and Monica Semedo, who was primarily known for her earlier career as a television anchor in Luxembourg. The lead candidates for the LSAP were former minister Nicolas Schmit (who had been designated as future Luxembourgian commissioner during the 2018 coalition negotiations), and the 24-year old Lisa Kersch. Finally, the Greens nominated the incumbent MEP Tilly Metz (who had only taken over the Green EP seat one year earlier, when her predecessor and vice-chairman of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the EP, Claude Turmes, joined Luxembourg's cabinet after the death of a junior minister), along with her parliamentary assistant Meris Sehovic.

Overall, the campaign focussed a lot on candidates, which is arguably due to Luxembourg's electoral system, which puts a lot of importance on preferential votes. A particularity of the voting system is the possibility of spreading one's votes across candidates from different parties, a practice usually referred to as *panachage* (Dumont et al, 2008; Farrell, 2011).

Except for the parties' global message, which was predominantly pro-European among the largest parties, there was no particular topic dominating the campaign. Generally, despite being only the second time an EP election was not held simultaneously with the national one, the electoral campaign was perceived as almost non-existent.

A question debated in the campaign was whether the principle of unanimity in the council of ministers should be abolished in favour of qualified majority voting in the area of fiscal policy. The liberal DP and the sovereigntist ADR insisted on maintaining unanimity because of the importance of the financial sector in Luxembourg.

Data on the usage of the Luxembourgian voting advice application (VAA - *smar-twielen.lu*) has shown that the interest in the European election campaign was extremely low until a few days before the election, when a larger proportion of the electorate (voting is compulsory in Luxembourg) started seeking information by using the website.

The main incident during the EP elections campaign was triggered by an article on the Pirate Party on the news website *reporter.lu*. The article discussed the changes that occurred in the party since its creation, and how the current MP Marc Goergen and the leading EP candidate Daniel Frères were taking over the party and transforming it into a populist party. Goergen reacted to the reporting by labelling it as "fake news". His reaction backfired, as it was seen as backing up the arguments made in the *reporter.lu* article.

RESULTS

After getting its best result ever in the 2014 European elections, this time the CSV scored by far its worst result, as it lost 16.6 percentage points. With 21.1% of the votes – the party had never received less than 30% since 1979, the first direct elections

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Luxembourg

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Democratic Party (DP) | ALDE | 268,910 | 21.4 | 2 | +6.7 | +1 |
| Christian-Social People's Party | EPP | 264,665 | 21.1 | 2 | -16.6 | -1 |
| The Greens (DG) | G-EFA | 237,215 | 18.9 | 1 | +3.9 | |
| Luxembourgian Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP) | S&D | 152,900 | 12.2 | 1 | +0.4 | |
| Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR) | ECR | 125,988 | 10.0 | | +2.5 | |
| Pirate Party (PPL) | | 96,579 | 7.7 | | +3.5 | |
| The Left (DL) | GUE-NGL | 60,648 | 4.8 | | -0.9 | |
| VOLT (VOLT) | | 26,483 | 2.1 | | +2.1 | |
| Communist Party Luxembourg (KPL) | | 14,323 | 1.1 | | -0.4 | |
| The Conservatives (DK) | | 6,652 | 0.5 | | +0.5 | |
| Total | | 1,254,363 | 100 | 6 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 84.1 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

In Luxembourg each voter has as many votes as their seats, i.e. a voter has 6 votes for EP elections. 240044 voters have submitted a ballot paper of which 217806 were valid. This means that on average voters used 5.7 votes.

of the EP – it also lost the third seat that it had regained in 2004, after two disappointing results in the 1990s.

The main winner from this dramatic shift was the Democratic Party with an increase of 6.7 percentage points. With 21.4% of the vote it obtained a second seat (it had only ever received two seats in the first directly elected EP 1979-1984) and became the strongest party in these elections. This is primarily the result of a high number of preferential votes cast for the candidates of the party and its lead candidate Charles Goerens in particular.

The other two coalition parties also increased their vote shares. Without Claude Turmes (who had joined Luxembourg's cabinet in 2018 after being the face of the Luxembourgian Greens on the European stage for years), the party obtained 18.9% of the votes, thus improving its result by almost 4 percentage points compared to 2014, and reaching its best score ever at European (or national) elections. The Social democrat LSAP got 12.2% of the votes, showing a slight recovery with respect to its historically lowest score at European elections in 2014.

Two other major winners were the Pirate party (which almost doubled its 2014 result, obtaining 7.7% of the votes), and the sovereigntist ADR (which received 10% of the votes). However, despite their good results, none of these parties were even close to receiving a seat.

The Left was supported by 4.8% of the electorate (down 1 percentage point compared to 2014).

The transnational movement VOLT received 2.1% of the votes at its first participation in elections in Luxembourg, while the Communist Party and the Conservatives received less than 2% of the votes.

Based on the party votes shares and the preferential votes each candidate received, the following six candidates were elected: Charles Goerens, Monica Semedo (both DP), Christophe Hansen, Isabel Wiseler-Santos Lima (both CSV), Tilly Metz (The Greens) and Nicolas Schmit (LSAP).

CONCLUSION

Dramatic increases or losses of vote share are rare in Luxembourg. In that sense the 16 percentage point loss of the CSV is already a significant occurrence in Luxembourgish politics. While it only means the loss of one European parliament seat, the long-term impact of that electoral result can potentially be serious for the party. In fact, it is the first time in post-war history that the CSV is not the strongest party in an election contested on the national level.

The CSV has always been considered a pillar of Luxembourg's party system, guaranteed to be the strongest party as well as to have a place in government. Having been beaten in this election and now being in opposition for the second period in a row, means the CSV has lost this special status.

These elections confirm the trend of increasing fragmentation of the party system in Luxembourg and they may mark the point from which the CSV has definitely ceased to be Luxembourg's dominant party.

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Malta: Unstoppable Labour?

RODERICK PACE AND MARCELLO CARAMMIA

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the general European trend, the Maltese Labour Party [*Partit Laburista* (PL), S&D] won the European election held on May 25th by a comfortable majority, and took four of the six European parliament seats allotted to Malta. It had also won a majority of votes in 2014, although only three seats (Carammia and Pace, 2015). While the opposition Nationalist Party [*Partit Nazzjonalista* (PN), EPP] failed to halt its electoral decline, the roots of which go back to 2004, it won the other two seats.

As in the previous three European elections, the Europhile parties won more than 96% of the valid votes cast.¹ This is consistent with the public opinion surveys conducted by Eurobarometer, which show that the majority of Maltese are supportive of the EU.²

The election result does not contradict the public opinion polls published by the leading national newspapers prior to the election, which predicted a PL victory between 55-57%.³

1. Partit Laburista (PL), Partit Nazzjonalista (PN), Partit Demokratiku (PD), Alternattiva Demokratika (greens, AD). Some of the independents particularly Mr Arnold Cassola, former AD leader, are also pro-EU.
2. According to the Standard Eurobarometer, no 90 of Autumn 2018, to the question of what image does the EU conjure, 43% of Maltese were totally positive (EU-28 average 43%), 10% were totally negative (EU-28 average = 20%), 43% were neutral (EU-28 average = 36%) and 4% answered “do not know” (EU-28 average = 1%). <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/survey-Ky/2215> (viewed 28.05.2019)
3. Times of Malta, 19 May 2019. online portal at <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20190519/local/labour-on-track-to-capture-55-per-cent-of-vote-poll-suggests.710181>; MaltaToday 19 May, online portal at https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/europe-2019/95082/maltatoday_survey_labour_set_for_another_landslide_in_european_elections#.XO-kHntS9PY

RESULTS⁴

The governing PL secured a comfortable majority of votes (54.3%), taking four of the six parliamentary seats allotted to Malta [Refer to Diagram]. The opposition PN won the other two seats with 37.9%, but its vote tally contracted by 2,174 while Labour's grew by 6,805 votes.

Contrary to European trends, Democratic Alternative's (*Alternattiva Demokratika*, AD, Greens) share shrunk from 7,418 (3% of valid votes) in 2014 to 1,866 (0.7%) – a drop of 5,552 votes. This must have been influenced by the fact that two of AD's star candidates, Arnold Cassola and Michael Briguglio, had changed party allegiance. Altogether, their votes almost equal the number of votes lost by AD in comparison with its 2014 result.

Diametrically opposite were the fortunes of the right-wing, anti-immigrant party Empire Europe (*Imperium Europa*, IE) which won 8,238 votes, overtaking AD as the third party after the PL and PN. Close behind it with 5,276 votes came the Democratic Party (*Partit Demokratiku*, PD) which contested the European election for the first time, but which had managed to win two seats in the national parliament in the 2017 election on the back of a short-lived electoral coalition with the PN.

TURNOUT AND THE CAMPAIGN

In 2019, voter turnout declined for a third consecutive time – although the fall was greater in traditional PN strongholds, prompting speculation that Nationalist voters may have shown their disgruntlement with the party leadership by staying at home.⁵ The 2019 turnout at 72.7% was still much higher than the EU average turnout of 50.5%. However, while the EU's turnout improved for the first time in two decades, the Maltese one continued to drop from its original very high levels (Hirczy, 1995).

Internal divisions and squabbling have become a way of life among the highest echelons of the PN and party rank-and-file. No policy proposals have so far attracted voters' attention and induced a sufficient number of them to begin shifting their allegiance from the PL. The PN's quixotic campaign on abortion wasted what little energy and desire existed for a positive, propositional campaign.

As for the PL, favourable economic fundamentals still convince the majority of voters to stick with it and surprisingly, the strains of rapid economic growth such as rising prices in the housing market, the expanding urban spread, environmental deterioration and growing social challenges are not taking their toll (Pace, 2017). Nor have serious allegations of corruption, rule of law deficiencies and the erosion of democracy dented the party's popularity. The chickens may one day come home to roost, some hope; but for the time being they have still not hatched.

4. All figures quoted here are the official ones published by the Electoral Commission, Malta at <https://electoral.gov.mt/ElectionResults/MEP> (viewed 28.05.2019).
5. Turnout in the 2004 election was 82.4% below the national election level which stood at ; in 2009 it dropped to 78.8%, then 74.8% in 2014 and 72.2% in 2019.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Malta

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Labour Party (PL) | S/D | 141,267 | 54.3 | 4 | +0.9 | +1 |
| Nationalist Party (PN) | EPP | 98,611 | 37.9 | 2 | -2.1 | -1 |
| European Empire (IE) | - | 8,238 | 3.2 | | +0.5 | |
| Democratic Party (PD) | - | 5,276 | 2.0 | | | |
| Democratic Alternative (AD) | G-EFA | 1,866 | 0.7 | | -2.1 | |
| Independent Candidate | - | 2,674 | 1.0 | | | |
| Others | | 2,280 | 0.9 | | | |
| Total | | 260,212 | 100 | 6 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 72.7 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

Note on the electoral system: the 'quota' for electing a candidate is based on the number of valid votes cast. The Droop Quota is used to establish the number of votes that candidates need to poll to secure a seat: $Q = ((\text{Valid votes}) / (\text{Total number of seats} + 1)) + 1$.
Source: Electoral Commission Malta <https://electoral.gov.mt/>.

Campaigning focused almost entirely on national issues. The PL concentrated on its record in office since it was elected to govern the country in 2013 and was re-confirmed in the 2017. The PN spent its energy scaremongering voters on abortion, claiming that as a member of the S&D, the PL would succumb to pressure to introduce it in Malta – where it is still illegal and unpopular. The PL criticised the incumbent PN MEPs with harming Malta's international image by raising rule of law issues in the European Parliament. However, its targets profited from this criticism and were re-elected for another term.

When the EU cropped up in the verbal campaign deluge, it was only to try and stir voters' emotions by giving the impression that the (whichever) party would fight for Malta's interests in the European institutions.

Immigration, which tops the list of citizens' concerns, was not a main campaign issue although the nationalistic, anti-immigrant parties like MPM and IE tried to profit from it.

Pre-election public opinion polls accurately predicted that the PL would win by a comfortable margin, and that the PN was unlikely to hold on to its third seat which it had won in 2014 by a meagre margin of 206 votes. The polls were mostly correct concerning which candidates were likely to be elected.

The media, both traditional and new, was heavily involved and manipulated by all sides. Social media has become the pivotal campaign tool in the attempt to sway voters. The dominance of the two large parties in all media sectors ensured the crowding-out of the smaller parties.

Although populism and nationalism did not make inroads in the form of little-known small radical parties displacing established ones, both ideologies featured prominently in the political discourse of the mainstream parties. This implies that the final chapter on this phenomenon in Malta may still be pending, and the threat has not been completely warded off.

The 2019 election was different from the previous three in some crucial ways. For the first time, sixteen-year olds were given the right to vote after the 2014 decision to give them the right to vote in local elections. They will also be eligible to vote in national elections, with the next one most likely to be called no later than 2023.

The other novelty was that a new electronic system was introduced to accelerate the vote counting, but the election results could only be published in the early hours of Monday some thirty hours after the closure of the polling stations.

Concurrently with the European elections, voting also took place to elect all sixty-seven local councils for a fresh five-year term. Previously, these councils enjoyed a three-year mandate and elections were held in successive years for three groups of councils. In 2015 Act XL, approved by Parliament, grouped all Local Council Elections together and scheduled them to take place on the same day of the European elections.⁶

The *déjà vu* were many, the most salient one being that the electoral campaign was mostly confined to domestic, national issues. The intensity and style of party campaigning was no less intense than in previous electoral contests. The main tussle was between the governing PL and the opposition PN. The PL billed this as a contest between its leader (and Prime Minister), Dr Joseph Muscat, and the leader of the opposition, Dr Adrian Delia.

This may be another major factor which discouraged people from voting, notwithstanding the "This time I am voting" campaign spearheaded by the European Parliament and supported by the European Commission.

The small parties came nowhere near to winning a parliamentary seat. Extremist, Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant parties performed better than they normally do in national elections, but at no time were they a threat to the mainstream parties.

6. The whole text of the ACT is available on the Justice Portal at <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=27225&l=1>

Following the electoral result, pressure increased to force PN leader Delia to resign. Another long bout of intra-party brawling looms on the PN's horizon.

THE MALTESE MEPS

Of the six MEPs elected, four are incumbents, and the leading candidates in both main parties were women. The first to be elected was Labour's Miriam Dalli, with 63,438 preference votes, who will lead the PL delegation over the next five years; and on the Nationalist's side it was Roberta Metsola, with 38,206 votes. Both incumbents were elected on the first count, in the slightly complicated Single Transferable Vote (STV) voting system (Katz, 1984) where voters mark their preferences (1, 2, 3, etc.) on the ballot sheet and are permitted to cross party lists, although few do so.

Five of the six MEPs are university graduates and hold a doctorate – four of them in law. Dr Alfred Sant is a former PL leader and Prime Minister. The rest have never been elected to the Maltese Parliament.

CONCLUSION

The European election in Malta had no surprises and followed closely an expected script. It lacked many of the splits present in the rest of the EU – although this is not to say that they were completely absent. Anti-EU and anti-immigration feelings simmer under the surface, held back by the weakness of their most vocal proponents, the so-called fringe or peripheral parties, and by the absoluteness of the dominant Europhile parties.

Malta's economic success has also helped in conjuring a positive image of the EU that keeps these forces in check. However, this situation is dynamic and may not last for ever, as indicated by the gains made by IE.

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Netherlands: A Timmermans (*Spitzenkandidaten*) effect?

ARJAN H. SCHAKEL

INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom were the first member states to hold European elections on Thursday May 23rd 2019, ahead of other European Union (EU) member states which followed on May 24th or later. One may have expected that the Netherlands and the UK would cast a ‘Eurosceptic’ cloud over the EP elections to be held in the remaining 26 EU member states, but this was not the case for the Netherlands. In fact, what happened was quite the opposite. The big winner was the pro-EU Labour Party (PvdA) which won the largest vote share (19.0 per cent), up 9.6 per cent compared with the 2014 EP elections. Newcomer and staunch anti-EU party Forum for Democracy (FvD) won 11.0 per cent of the votes, although its support was mirrored by a significant vote share loss of 9.8 per cent by the equally standfast anti-EU Party for Freedom (PVV) (Table 1). Frans Timmermans – First Vice President of the European Commission – was the lead candidate for the PvdA and was the *Spitzenkandidat* for the EP party group Socialist and Democrats (S&D). *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates for the position of President of the European Commission) are a novelty in the European electoral arena, and were introduced with the 2014 European elections in an effort to increase interest and participation in European elections (Braun and Popa, 2018; Hobolt, 2014). In this chapter, I will explore in how far the Dutch 2019 European election result can be explained by a ‘Timmermans’ or *Spitzenkandidaten* effect.

In the next section I will briefly discuss the European party manifestos of the parties and the campaign. In the third section I will compare the outcomes of the 2019 EP elections with previously held national (2012 and 2017), provincial (2015 and 2019), as well as European (2014) elections, enabling me to analyse to what extent the 2019 EP election results can be explained by increasing EU salience (vote share swings from pro- to anti-EU parties), ‘second-orderness’ of EU elections (vote share swings from parties in national government to opposition parties), or, indeed, a ‘Timmermans effect’. The final section offers a short discussion.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections: the Netherlands

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | |
|--|----------|-----------|--|
| Labour Party (PvdA) | S&D | 1,045,274 | |
| People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) | ALDE | 805,100 | |
| Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) | EPP | 669,555 | |
| Forum for Democracy (FvD) | ECR | 602,507 | |
| Green Left (GL) | G-EFA | 599,283 | |
| Democrats 66 (D66) | ALDE | 389,692 | |
| Christian Union (CU) -Reformed Political Party (SGP) | ECR | 375,660 | |
| Party for the Animals (PvdD) | GUE-NGL | 220,938 | |
| 50 Plus (50+) | | 215,199 | |
| Party for Freedom (PVV) | NI | 194,178 | |
| Socialist Party (SP) | GUE-NGL | 185,224 | |
| Volt Netherlands (VN) | | 106,004 | |
| Think (DENK) | | 60,669 | |
| Others | | 28,530 | |
| Total | | 5,497,813 | |
| Turnout (%) | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | |

Sources: European Parliament (2019), Kiesraad (2019), NOS (2019).

| | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|--|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 19.0 | 6 | 9.6 | +3 | +1 |
| | 14.6 | 4 | 2.6 | -1 | |
| | 12.2 | 4 | -3.0 | +1 | |
| | 11.0 | 3 | 11.0 | +3 | |
| | 10.9 | 3 | 3.9 | +1 | |
| | 7.1 | 2 | -8.4 | -2 | |
| | 6.8 | 2 | -0.9 | | |
| | 4.0 | 1 | -0.2 | | |
| | 3.9 | 1 | 0.2 | +1 | |
| | 3.5 | | -9.8 | | |
| | 3.4 | | -6.3 | | |
| | 1.9 | | 1.9 | | |
| | 1.1 | | 1.1 | | |
| | 0.5 | | -1.8 | | |
| | 100 | 26 | | | +1 |
| | 41.9 | | | | |
| | <i>none (effective threshold of 3.85%)</i> | | | | |

THE CAMPAIGN

Except for the PVV and the pan-European list VN, all parties produced lengthy party manifestoes for the European elections. The PVV is downright Eurosceptic, which is mentioned in one sentence on their one-page election manifesto: ‘The Netherlands independent again. So out of the EU.’ (*Nederland weer onafhankelijk. Dus uit de EU*) (PVV, 2019). Although FvD is similarly anti-EU, the party wishes to hold a referendum on EU membership (FvD, 2019). On the other side of the spectrum stands D66, which campaigned with the slogan ‘In Europe we make our future’ (*In Europa maken we de toekomst*) (D66, 2019), GL, which started its election manifesto with the sentence ‘The European Union is indispensable’ (*De Europese Unie is onmisbaar*) (GL, 2019), and the pan-European party VN (VN, 2019). All other parties can be placed in between these two extremes as they take a ‘Euro-realist’ approach (Vollaard et al., 2016). These parties are in favour of collaboration between EU member states on issues such as immigration, single market, and security (CDA, 2019; PvdA, 2019), although some of them are clearly against a widening and deepening of the EU (CUGP, 2019; SP, 2019; VVD, 2019). Other smaller parties are not anti-EU either, but would like to significantly reform the EU and for the EU to take action in particular policies such as animal welfare, the elderly, the environment, or the multicultural society (50Plus, 2019; DENK, 2019; PvdD, 2019).

It is not customary for Dutch political parties to choose key political figures to head their European election party lists (Vollaard et al., 2016). The 2019 EP elections were no exception, bar the PvdA whose list was headed by Frans Timmermans who, as a long-serving member of parliament and former state secretary and minister for foreign affairs (Parlement.com, 2019a), is a well-known politician in the Netherlands. Despite his political stature in the Netherlands and some attention paid to his participation in the *Spitzenkandidaten* debate held in Maastricht (NRC, 2019a; Trouw, 2019a; Volkskrant, 2019a), Timmermans did not receive much media coverage during the campaign. For example, one of the main daily newspapers featured interviews with the list-leaders for FvD and D66 in the final week of the campaign (De Volkskrant, 2019b, 2019c). Another example is the ‘head-to-head’ debate between minister-president Mark Rutte (VVD) and Thierry Baudet (FvD) which was broadcasted on TV on the evening before election day and which attracted 1.5 million viewers (AD, 2019; NU.nl, 2019). Despite receiving limited media attention, the PvdA became the clear winner of the 2019 EP elections (Table 1), which also makes the election outcome quite remarkable because this was not at all predicted in the public opinion polls (Ipsos, 2019a; NRC, 2019b; Volkskrant, 2019d; Trouw, 2019b).

THE ELECTION OUTCOME: INCREASING EU SALIENCE,
AN ANTI-GOVERNMENT SWING, OR A TIMMERMANS EFFECT?

Table 2 compares the 2019 European election results with the outcomes of the 2015 and 2019 provincial elections, the 2012 and 2017 national, and the 2014 EP elections. The comparison reveals the extent to which the 2019 European elections con-

trast with other types of elections and with overall electoral trends. The success of the PvdA in the 2019 EP elections puts the party close to the level of vote share it won in the 2012 national elections. It is too early to tell whether this is the start of a recuperation, the effective number of parties (ENP) – a measurement that indicates the extent to which the vote is fragmented across parties, taking the number and received vote shares of parties into account (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) – indicates that the vote has not become more splintered across parties. Instead, one needs to look at aggregate movements in voter preferences across elections to gain insight into the 2019 EP election outcome.

Table 2 - Election results since 2012

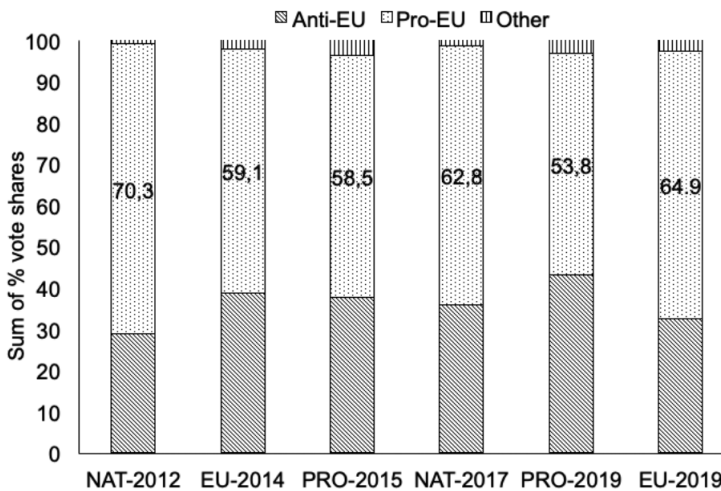
| | NATIONAL 12-SEP-12 | EUROPEAN 22-MAY-14 | PROVINCIAL 18-MAR-15 | NATIONAL 15-MAR-17 | PROVINCIAL 20-MAR-19 | EUROPEAN 23-MAY-19 |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| PVV | 10.1 | 13.3 | 11.7 | 13.1 | 6.9 | 3.5 |
| FvD | | | | 1.8 | 14.5 | 11.0 |
| CU-SGP | 5.2 | 7.8 | 7.5 | 5.5 | 7.6 | 6.8 |
| VVD | 26.6 | 12.0 | 15.9 | 21.3 | 14.0 | 14.6 |
| CDA | 8.5 | 15.2 | 14.7 | 12.4 | 11.1 | 12.2 |
| D66 | 8.0 | 15.5 | 12.5 | 12.2 | 7.8 | 7.1 |
| PvdA | 24.8 | 9.4 | 10.1 | 5.7 | 8.5 | 19.0 |
| GL | 2.3 | 7.0 | 5.4 | 9.1 | 10.8 | 10.9 |
| SP | 9.7 | 9.6 | 11.7 | 9.1 | 5.9 | 3.4 |
| PvdD | 1.9 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 3.2 | 4.4 | 4.0 |
| 50Plus | 1.9 | 3.7 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 3.6 | 3.9 |
| DENK | | | | 2.1 | 1.7 | 1.1 |
| Other | 1.0 | 2.3 | 3.7 | 1.5 | 3.2 | 2.5 |
| Turnout | 74.6 | 37.3 | 47.8 | 81.6 | 56.2 | 41.9 |
| ENEP | 5.9 | 8.9 | 8.9 | 8.4 | 10.4 | 8.9 |

Notes: ENEP = effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera (1979)). NAT = national; EP = European Parliament; PRO = provincial. Sources: European Parliament (2019), Kiesraad (2019), NOS (2019).

EU SALIENCE

EU salience theory would predict that vote share swings can be attributed to an increase in EU saliency, resulting in higher turnout and triggering a move from pro-EU to anti-EU parties except for Green parties, which should also win vote share (Viola, 2016). Figure 1 displays combined vote shares for anti-EU and pro-EU parties across national, provincial and European elections since 2012. In the 2019 EP elections, anti-EU parties won a combined vote share of 32.6%, which is rather similar – within six per cent deviation – to the combined vote shares these parties received in previous European, national, and provincial elections, except for the 2019 provincial elections. Another indication that an increase in EU salience is not a likely explanatory factor is given by the turnout rates displayed in Table 2. The 2019 EP elections were marked by the highest turnout in European elections over the past twenty years; however, in the Netherlands higher turnout is part of a general trend rather than an indication of increased EU salience. Turnout in the 2017 national election was 7.0 per cent higher than for the 2012 national election and turnout in the 2019 provincial election was 8.4 per cent higher compared to the 2015 provincial election. If anything, the mere 4.6 percentage points increased turnout for the 2019 EP election compared with the 2014 European election is an indication of low salience. Finally, the Green parties (GL and PvdD) did not significantly increase their 2019 European and provincial vote shares compared to the 2017 national election (Table 2).

Figure 1. Vote share for anti-EU and pro-EU parties since 2012.



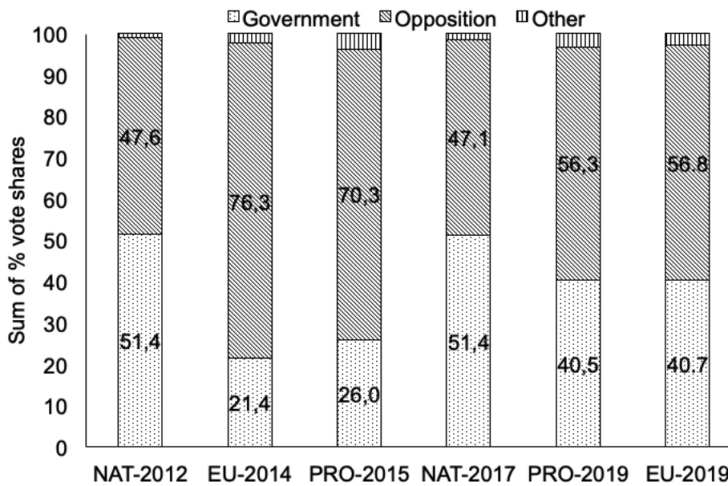
Notes: Anti-/pro-EU parties are classified according to expert ratings of the positions taken by party leaders in 2014 regarding whether the Netherlands had benefited from being a member of the EU (1 = benefited; 2 = neither benefited nor lost; 3 = not benefited). *Anti-EU parties* (average expert score above 2.5): CU-SGP, FvD, PVV, PvdD, SP, 50Plus. *Pro-EU parties* (average expert score below 1.1): CDA, D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, DENK. FvD and DENK are classified by the author. *Other parties*: same as for Table 1.

Source: CHES (2019).

ANTI-GOVERNMENT SWING

The vote share swings could result from an anti-incumbency swing, considering that the PvdA was in national government after the 2012 national election but in opposition after the 2017 national election. The ‘punishment vote’ for government parties in European and subnational elections is attributed to the second-order nature of these elections (Viola, 2016). First-order national elections are perceived by voters, parties, and the media as more important contests than European and subnational elections because more is ‘at stake’, given that national governments take decisions on essential issues such as taxes, the welfare state, and foreign policy (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Figure 2 displays combined vote shares for parties in national government and opposition parties across national, provincial and European elections since 2012. Government parties received only half of their 2012 national vote shares in the 2014 European and 2015 provincial elections, indicating that European and provincial elections are both perceived to be second-order elections. In this light, the 10 per cent vote share loss for government parties in the 2019 European and provincial elections compared with 2017 national election can be considered quite modest.

Figure 2. Vote share for government and opposition parties since 2012.



Notes: *Government parties* are parties that form the executive at the national level: VVD and PvdA in 2012 and VVD, D66, CDA, and ChristenUnie in 2017. *Opposition parties* won seats in the national parliament (*Tweede Kamer*) but did not participate in or provide support to the national government. *Other parties*: same as for Table 1.

Source: Parlement.com (2019b).

TIMMERMANS (SPITZENKANDIDATEN) EFFECT

Despite the close timing of the 2019 provincial and European elections, Table 2 reveals significant aggregate vote share swings between parties. The big winner of the 2019 provincial election was FvD, which won 12.8 per cent compared to the 2012 national election. Most likely, voters moved from the VVD which lost 7.3 per cent and the PVV which lost 6.1 per cent vote share compared to the 2012 national election. The 2019 provincial and European elections display quite comparable results except for the tremendous gain for the PvdA, from 8.5 to 19.0 per cent of the vote share. The main losers were FvD (-3.5%), PVV (-3.4%), and the SP (-2.5%), whose combined vote share loss of -9.5 percentage points comes close to PvdA's vote share gain of 10.5 percentage points. Are these vote share swings an indication of a *Spitzenkandidaten* effect whereby Timmermans was able to attract voters from across the whole political spectrum?

Table 3 presents vote shares for elections held since 2012 for the eight largest parties in the province of Limburg. This province is interesting because it is considered to be 'the home' of Timmermans. Frans Timmermans was born in Maastricht, the provincial capital of Limburg, went through secondary education in Heerlen (a city in Limburg) where he still has a house, and was an (unsuccessful) candidate to become Commissioner of the King of the Limburg province in 2011 (Parlement.com, 2019a). Frans Timmermans is known to be a polyglot and, apart from mastering Dutch and the *Limburgs* dialect, he also speaks English, French, German, Italian and Russian. He is an outspoken 'pro-European Unionist' and launched his campaign as the S&D *Spitzenkandidat* for the 2019 EP elections in Heerlen in the province of Limburg. Frans Timmermans clearly gave his campaign a Limburg-twist, this being a border province where numerous cross-border interactions with Belgium and Germany have historically taken place. For example, Timmermans started his acceptance speech as lead candidate with references to his grandfather and his great-grandfather who moved from Germany to Heerlen to work in the mines (Timmermans, 2019).

Table 3 shows that although the eight major parties were able to attract almost 95% of the vote during national elections, during European and provincial elections they collectively lose up to almost 7% vote share. This highlights the second-order nature of these contests whereby voters are inclined to support small and new parties because they move from strategic to sincere voting (Marsh and Mihaylov, 2010). As observed in Table 2, the 2019 European elections are remarkable because of the tremendous vote share gain for the PvdA compared to earlier elections. Voters in Limburg behaved similarly to other Dutch voters, but the aggregate vote share swings are larger in magnitude. What stands out in Table 3 is that when the 2019 provincial and European elections are compared to each other, vote share losses for the PVV (-7.1%), FvD (-2.4%), VVD (-0.8%), CDA (-2.5%), D66 (-1.4%), GL (-1.3%), and SP (-4.6%) total up to -20.1 percentage points which is very close to the 23.2% vote share gain for the PvdA. Despite the similar second-order election nature of both the European and provincial 2019 elections, a clear Timmermans (*Spitzenkandidaten*) effect can be observed. In response to the question to what extent the head of the party list was important for their vote choice, no less than 48% of PvdA voters in-

Table 3 - Election results (per cent vote share) for eight major parties in *Limburg*

| PARTY | NAT-2012 | EP-2014 | PRO-2015 | NAT-2017 | PRO-2019 | EP-2019 |
|-------|----------|---------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| PVV | 17.7 | 20.8 | 17.8 | 19.6 | 13.6 | 6.5 |
| FvD | | | | 2.0 | 14.6 | 12.1 |
| VVD | 22.7 | 20.8 | 11.5 | 17.9 | 10.2 | 9.4 |
| CDA | 9.7 | 12.2 | 22.9 | 14.9 | 18.7 | 16.1 |
| PvdA | 21.8 | 7.7 | 7.3 | 4.0 | 6.5 | 29.7 |
| D66 | 6.3 | 12.2 | 9.4 | 10.6 | 5.8 | 4.4 |
| GL | 1.8 | 0.9 | 3.9 | 10.6 | 8.4 | 7.2 |
| SP | 14.4 | 12.7 | 15.5 | 13.7 | 8.7 | 4.1 |
| Total | 94.4 | 87.2 | 88.4 | 93.3 | 86.4 | 89.5 |

Notes: NAT = national; EP = European Parliament; PRO = provincial.
Sources: Kiesraad (2019); nlverkiezingen.com (2019); NOS (2019).

icated that this was important, whereas the second highest percentage was a mere 18% recorded for PVV-voters (Ipsos, 2019b). Timmermans seems to have been able to attract voters from the whole left-right political spectrum, and his voters seemed less concerned about punishing parties in national government or to vote according to their opinion on EU issues (see also Ipsos, 2019b).

CONCLUSION

The analysis in this chapter clearly suggests that a Timmermans (*Spitzenkandidaten*) effect may underlie the outcomes of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament in the Netherlands. Table 3 reveals significant vote share swings in Limburg which are not observed for nationally aggregated data (Table 2). For example, the PvdA lost 14.1 percentage points vote share when the 2014 EP election is compared with the 2012 national election. The beneficiaries were D66 (5.8%) and the PVV (3.1%). Significant voter movements are also detectable when the 2015 provincial

election is compared with the 2014 European election. In this comparison the CDA is the clear winner (10.8%), whereas the VVD was the significant loser (9.2%). It seems that voters in Limburg (and in the Netherlands as a whole, see Table 2) from both the left and right of the political spectrum are floating, and that they can be attracted by an appealing candidate who reaches out to the voters by campaigning locally (see also Gatterman et al., 2016 and Schmitt et al., 2015). This would be an interesting hypothesis to explore further through election survey analysis, which would make it possible to tap into voter motivations underlying party vote choice.

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Poland: A skirmish before the decisive battle

MICHAŁ KOTNAROWSKI AND MIKOŁAJ CZEŚNIK

INTRODUCTION

Elections to the European Parliament (EP) in Poland took place on Sunday, May 26th 2019. As in 2014-2015, they were part of a long ‘election marathon’ during which Poles elected their representatives in local government (October-November 2018), MEPs (May 2019), MPs and senators to the national parliament (most likely October 2019) and the President (most likely May 2020). Such serial electoral contests have several precedents, as this is the fourth time it has happened in the history of EP elections in Poland. The circumstance is not without consequences.

The 2019 EP Polish elections are one of the skirmishes in the long ‘electoral war’ of 2018-2020 among the main protagonists of Polish politics. Because of this, these elections had primarily a national character. The political discourse was primarily concerned with domestic and internal issues (discussed in detail below); EU and European issues were invisible. In this sense, the 2019 European Parliament elections in Poland were typical second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Politicians defined them – and voters accepted this definition – as a tool of domestic politics, serving political accountability and aggregating the interests of particular segments of the electorate.

MAIN ACTORS AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

In the 2019 European Parliament Elections in Poland, only six national committees – which submit lists in all constituencies – were registered. This is the smallest number in the history of EP elections in Poland; never before have so few (national) electoral committees registered lists in all the constituencies. In 2004 there were fourteen national committees registered, in 2009 ten, and in 2014 nine.

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is the largest and strongest party that registered candidates in the 2019 EP elections in all districts. This party had been in power since 2015 as part of an informal, not fully institutionalised coalition with *Solidarna Polska* and *Porozumienie*. The party has been described in scholarly literature as populist and Eurosceptic (Stanley, 2019). Its ideology is an unusual combination of Christian democracy, social and national conservatism, solidarity and interventionism. Sin-

ce its founding, it has been advocating Poland's membership in the European Union and the expansion of the EU's structures. However, its politicians postulate is that the EU should be reformed. The European policy of PiS could be described as confederative and supporting the 'Europe of nations'.

In preceding months, prominent PiS politicians made several statements that diminished the significance of the EU for Poland. This led opposition parties and political commentators to accuse Law and Justice (PiS) of calling for PolExit. This could be politically harmful to PiS, due to high popular support for the EU. As a result, PiS presented itself in the election campaign as a definitely pro-European party. Furthermore, during the EP election campaign, PiS promised a lot of social transfers to disadvantaged groups – the same strategy it had followed in national elections. PiS, as a party in office, had several problems during the electoral campaign. The party was accused of employing its activists in lucrative positions in state-owned companies. A teachers' strike broke out in the period preceding the elections, which crippled the operation of state schools in Poland for a month. The strike was caused, among other things, by the chaos that arose after the introduction of educational reforms. The Prime Minister (M. Morawiecki) was accused of opaque land trading in the period before taking office. The last few weeks before the elections, Poland was shaken by an independent documentary on paedophiles in the Polish Catholic Church. One of the crucial themes of the film was the covering up of paedophile scandals by church hierarchy. It was speculated that this might weaken the PiS in elections because of the party's strong relationship with the Catholic Church.

Koalicja Obywatelska (KE) is the second largest organisation to run for EP elections in 2019 with candidates registered in all constituencies. KE is a coalition block consisting of Civic Platform (PO), Modern (N), Polish People's Party (PSL), Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD) and Zieloni (Greens). The coalition united political forces against PiS. It is a broad movement, therefore also very eclectic, composed of former communists and anti-communists, supporters of economic liberalism and state intervention in the economy, agrarian parties and green parties. The leaders of the electoral lists were former prime ministers coming from different political traditions. Apart from being an opponent of the PiS, it was difficult to identify a clear programme proposal. It also seems that MEPs elected from KE lists will join a variety of groups in the European Parliament (EPP, ALDE, S&D).

Two new and significant political forces appeared in time for the EP elections. The first one was *Wiosna* (Spring). It is a left-wing party with a social welfare agenda, which aims at introducing a real separation of church and state and a liberalisation on moral issues. In the context of a traditional and conservative society, it is meaningful that the leader of the party is Robert Biedroń – a person who is openly gay. *Wiosna*, since its foundation in January 2019, presented itself as the third political alternative to the duopoly PiS vs PO. Spring targets those voters who do not appreciate the authoritarian practices of PiS, but, on the other hand, are also not satisfied by simply voting for a non-ideological anti-PiS coalition.

Another new actor is a rather exotic coalition called the *Konfederacja - Korwin, Braun Liroy Narodowcy*. This group brought together several figures of the Polish ra-

dical right wing. They include Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a veteran of the Polish right, an anti-democrat, a supporter of radical economic liberalisation and at the same time a promoter of the traditional model of social roles, G. Braun, a monarchist who strives for the coronation of Jesus Christ as the king of Poland, Kaja Godek, a supporter of a total ban on abortion, and Liroy, a former rapper who supports the legalisation of marijuana. This party is also supported by a group of (mainly young) activists of national organisations. The group targeted the right flank of the PiS voters. Those who were dissatisfied with the conciliatory (according to them) actions of PiS, e.g. in the matter of the abortion ban and relations with the EU or Israel.

Finally, there was a populist, anti-establishment citizens' movement, set up in 2015 for the parliamentary elections, called KUKIZ 15. They attack the 'partiesocracy' (allegedly functioning in the Polish party system), arguing that the PiS-PO divide is a spurious cover for an entrenched cartel of professional politicians. Their key proposals include the introduction of a single-member majoritarian (FPTP) electoral system (to promote individual accountability to the electorate) and the replacement of the liberal-democratic political system with a system based on more extensive use of direct democracy.

According to pre-election polls, it was a close race between PiS and KE. Both parties had predicted support between 35% and 40%, and it was difficult to determine who would be the winner. The polls also expected significant support for Spring (about 8-10%) and *Konfederacja* (about 6-8%). The expected support for Kukiz15 was on the border of the electoral threshold (5%).

RESULTS

Voter turnout was 45.7% - a significant increase compared with the turnout of previous EP elections, (20.9% in 2004, 24.5% in 2009, and 23.8% in 2014). This increase was most likely caused by an intense political conflict dividing Polish society, which strongly mobilises voters.

The results of the election were surprising given what the polls predicted. The best result in the election was achieved by the ruling party PiS (45.4% of vote and twenty-seven seats in the EP). The second-best result was achieved by KE (38.5% and twenty-two seats). Spring had the third-best result, with 6.1% of the vote and only three seats. The remaining parties did not reach the electoral threshold. The KBLN Confederation (4.6%) and KUKIZ (3.7%) had a surprisingly poor result.

The election results suggest the apparent victory of the PiS. Such a victory was somewhat unexpected for several reasons, not only because of the polls. PiS has been in power for three and a half years. During this time, they have made many controversial decisions, including some that expose them to allegations of violating the constitution, anti-democratic actions and breaking the rule of law. However, during the election campaign, the party announced the introduction of new measures, such as a PLN 500 allowance for each child (previously only distributed from second child onwards) and the introduction of a thirteenth month pension for the retired.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Poland

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|-------------|------------|-----------|
| Law and Justice (PiS) | ECR | 6,192,780 | 45.4 |
| European Coalition - Civic Platform, Polish People's Party, Alliance of Democratic Left, Modern, Greens (KE - PO PSL SLD .N Z) | EPP and S&D | 5,249,935 | 38.5 |
| Spring (W) | S&D | 826,975 | 6.1 |
| Confederation (KKBLN) | | 621,188 | 4.6 |
| Kukiz'15 (K'15) | | 503,564 | 3.7 |
| Left Together | | 168,745 | 1.2 |
| Other | | 84,124 | 0.6 |
| Total | | 13,647,311 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 55.5 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5% |

The leaders of the eclectic KE had expected a win, also predicted by the liberal media. One of the reasons for the defeat could have been the aforementioned lack of ideological cohesion of the KE, in which the only binding force was the desire to remove PiS from power. Another problem for the KE is the lack of a clear leader as the former one, Donald Tusk, is now President of the European Council.

Support for Spring was also lower than expected. The KE camp criticised Spring for dismantling the anti-PiS block. The weaker than expected outcome of the Spring may paradoxically indicate the maturity of Polish democracy. It turns out that it is impossible to found a party a few months before the elections and achieve a dozen or so per cent of support.

Only these three election committees gained seats in the EP. The extreme right was very close to the threshold, reaching 4.6%. Their attempt to circumvent the PiS on the right and gain the support of the radical part of the PiS voters failed.

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 26 | 27 | +13.6 | +7 | +8 |
| | 22 | 22 | -9.87 | -6 | -6 |
| | 3 | 3 | -2.6 | -4 | -4 |
| | | | +3.7 | | |
| | | | +1.2 | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | 51 | 52 | | +6 | +7 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

These elections revealed many differences in the structure of voters supporting particular groups. The factor that sharply differentiated voters was their place of residence. In rural areas, PiS gained more than twice as much support as the KE (56% voted for PiS vs 28% for KE), while in large cities, the KE received almost twice the votes of the PiS (27% voted for PiS vs 50% for the KE). There was also a much higher increase in turnout in rural areas compared to the previous EP elections. It may mean that the victory of PiS was partly due to the mobilisation of the rural electorate.

Voting for PiS was also associated with lower education, being older, performing manual jobs, being unemployed or retired (Exit polls results: <https://www.tvn24.pl/wybory-do-euoparlamentu-2019/wyniki,450>). Apart from being metropolitan, the electorate of the KE also consists of specialists, entrepreneurs and better-educated people. The age group in which the KE had the greatest support was

40-49. Among the youngest voters (under the age of 30), PiS and KE had similar support. In this group, however, the extreme right *Konfederacja* gained most support.

CONCLUSION

This election had the highest turnout in the history of EP elections in Poland (46%) (Czesnik and Kotnarowski, 2014). Although Polish turnout is lower than the EU average (53%), it is higher than the turnout registered in many CEE countries. The election results indicated the dominance of two political blocs, as PiS and KE received 84% of the valid votes. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that there is a two-party system in Poland. The KE consisted of several groups, quite diverse in terms of their programmes. Therefore, it is not clear how long this coalition will last. Moreover, the victory of PiS in Poland does not mean that this party is of great importance in the European Parliament. PiS belonged to the European Conservatives and Reformists faction and will probably continue to do so. This faction is of little significance in the EP and, after Brexit, PiS will be the faction's largest national group.

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Portugal: Defeat for the right, challenges for the left

MARCO LISI

INTRODUCTION

During the last five years, Portugal has been regarded as a successful case in the European context from both an economic and political point of view (see Fernandes et al, 2018). On the one hand, the country has turned the page on its 2011-2014 crisis, when a financial assistance programme was implemented with painful austerity policies. On the other hand, unlike other Southern European countries, Portugal's party system has proved to be very resilient. Although mainstream parties have struggled to retain their electoral support, the Socialist Party (PS, *Partido Socialista*) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD, *Partido Social Democrata*) continued to alternate in government and to rally more than two thirds of the votes in the last national and European elections. The stability of the party system was also due to the strength of the two radical left parties, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP, *Partido Comunista Português*) and the Left Block (BE, *Bloco de Esquerda*), which channelled some popular discontent, especially during the austerity period. Nevertheless, no new parties – notably extreme-right populist ones - have entered parliament despite high levels of anti-party sentiments, institutional mistrust and growing disaffection (Jalali, 2019).

After the 2015 legislative elections, the two radical left parties decided to give the PS their parliamentary support. This was the first time since the establishment of democracy that left-wing parties had agreed to cooperate at governmental level (Lisi, 2016). This solution – called 'Geringonça' ('contraption') – aimed to revert austerity policies and increase internal consumption, while maintaining fiscal consolidation and controlled budget execution. The choice of the Socialist Minister of Finance as the President of the Eurogroup in December 2017 highlighted this successful trajectory.

THE CAMPAIGN

The Socialists have the most pro-European positions, defending the possible adoption of taxes at European level and the strengthening of European institutions' role vis-à-vis that of national governments. The two rightist parties (PSD and CDS) are

slightly less optimistic about the process of European integration, especially with regard to the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). On the other hand, the two radical left parties are clearly Eurosceptic despite displaying marked nuances. While the PCP is openly against the euro and the loss of sovereignty associated to EMU, the BE presents itself as pro-European, but against the process of European integration based on neoliberal policies.

Seventeen parties/coalitions were allowed to run in the 2019 European elections, one more than in the previous contest. Three completely new parties were formed and are standing in elections for the first time. The first is Alliance (*Aliança*), a new rightist party formed by an ex-PSD leader, Pedro Santana Lopes. Besides neoliberal positions on the socioeconomic front, the party takes a soft Eurosceptic line and defends traditional values in the cultural domain, thus trying to compete with the PSD to appeal to rightist and conservative voters. The second new party is the Liberal Initiative (*Iniciativa Liberal*), which combines a strong emphasis on liberal economic policies (lowering taxes) with an anti-establishment discourse. Finally, the third new player is the coalition PPM.PVC/CDC, whose main force (*Basta!*, literally 'That's enough') adopts a clear populist discourse, targeting primarily the political elite and immigrants.

The campaign was conditioned by a political crisis that emerged unexpectedly at the start of May. Prime Minister António Costa (PS) threatened to step down if the right supported a proposed bill from the two radical left parties that would grant teachers compensation for the freezing of their salaries during the crisis period. The Socialist leader accused both PSD and CDS-PP of being incoherent and presented the government as a responsible actor capable of combining financial stability with improved incomes. Although the crisis was overcome one week later, the debate definitely removed any pretence to discuss Europe-related issues. In addition, this event boosted the Socialist campaign and undermined the image of right-wing parties among moderate voters.

The European-elections campaign proved to be the first round of the national legislative elections, scheduled for October 2019. The PS highlighted the government's achievements, especially in terms of macroeconomic performance, international credibility and improving domestic demand. On the other hand, the two rightist forces pursued a strategy of criticising the government and associating the PS in with the other left radical party. The attempt to polarise the debate sought to gain more support among moderate voters and discontented socialist sympathisers. The influence of the national context on the campaign was also visible in terms of the slogans adopted (e.g. 'make the difference', adopted by PSD) and the strong involvement of the party leaders. The two radical left parties also tried to claim the credit for the improvement in living conditions, especially for the lower social sectors of the society. In addition, they avoided giving public support to anti-European stances; this was particularly the case of the PCP, which has defended leaving the euro since 2015.

Despite the low salience of European issues, two topics debated during the campaign were associated with the EU. The first was the environment. As in other European countries, all parties agreed with strengthening environmental standards at

the European level, as well as the implementation of incentives to improve more sustainable practices in everyday life. The second was the use of European funds in order to boost modernisation (especially in inland regions) and to strengthen welfare policies. These can be considered as 'valence issues', since no significant differences emerged between parties.

Overall, the two main parties were relatively close at the start of the campaign, according to opinion polls, but the PS clearly emerged as the frontrunner after the political crisis, leading by a margin of approximately 8-10 percentage points. The forecast vote for the remaining parliamentary parties was below two digits, while new parties seemed to have little chance of electing MEPs. According to pre-election polls, abstention will register a new record high.

RESULTS

The first word from all parties after the close of the ballot box was on the record-high abstention, which reached 69%, the highest score among Western European countries (and the fifth highest in Europe). The results of the 2019 European elections gave a comfortable relative majority to the PS; however, its score was only slightly higher than in the 2014 EP elections (33.4% and 31.5% respectively). This was interpreted as a victory not only because the government avoided punishment, but more particularly because of the distance between the Socialists and its main competitor. Indeed, the PSD had its worst result ever in either a European or a legislative election. The PSD lost heavily everywhere and failed to mobilise its own electorate. BE was undoubtedly one of the main winners of the election night, increasing the number of its MEPs (to one more than at the previous national elections) and coming close to its highest score in European elections (10.7% in 2009). The People, Animals and Nature party (PAN), a small environmentalist party, was another winner as it was able to elect its first MEP and to consolidate the results obtained in the 2015 legislative elections, when achieved 1.4% of the vote and elected one MP. The issue of climate change debated during the campaign boosted its performance, especially among electors voting abroad (notably in Europe) and the most populous cities (particularly Lisbon, Setúbal, Oporto and Faro). Contrary to the lack of media coverage of new parties, PAN also benefited from its institutional position and the image of its leader. On the other hand, the PCP (which ran in coalition with the Green Party, PEV, under the label CDU, Democratic Unitary Coalition) confirmed the bad performance obtained in the 2017 local elections, achieving only 6.9% of the vote and losing one MEP. This was also the case of the right-wing party CDS-PP.

The 2019 EP elections can be interpreted as a vote of confidence for the PS, which obtained positive results especially in the main urban districts. Despite the signs of wear on the government, the PS benefited from the recovery of the economy and financial stability, as well as from the strategy and involvement of the Prime Minister in the campaign. By contrast, the right was clearly penalized by its fragmentation and the lack of an alternative project to oppose to the PS.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Portugal

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Socialist Party (PS) | S&D | 1,106,345 | 33.4 | 9 | +1.9 | +1 |
| Social Democratic Party (PSD) | EPP | 727,207 | 21.9 | 6 | * | |
| Left Block (BE) | GUE-NGL | 325,534 | 9.8 | 2 | +5.2 | +1 |
| Democratic Unitary Coalition (CDU) | GUE-NGL | 228,157 | 6.9 | 2 | -5.8 | -1 |
| Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (CDS-PP) | EPP | 205,111 | 6.2 | 1 | * | |
| People, Animals, Nature (PAN) | none | 168,501 | 5.1 | 1 | +3.4 | +1 |
| Alliance (A) | none | 61,753 | 1.9 | | +1.9 | |
| Free (L) | none | 60,575 | 1.8 | | -0.4 | |
| PPM.PPV/CDC | none | 49,496 | 1.5 | | +1.5 | |
| We Citizens (NC) | none | 34,672 | 1.0 | | +1.0 | |
| Other | | 117,157 | 3.5 | | | |
| Blank and invalid | | 229,915 | 6.9 | | -0.1 | |
| Total | | 3,314,423 | 100 | 21 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 30.7 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

Note: * In the 2014 EP elections, PSD and CDS-PP run in the coalition AP (Portugal Alliance), obtaining 27.7% of the votes.

Source: <https://www.europeias2019.mai.gov.pt/>

CONCLUSION

The 2019 EP elections confirm two broad trends that characterise the evolution of the Portuguese party system. The first is the increasing level of fragmentation through the emergence of new parties, especially on the right side of the ideological spectrum. This fragmentation has contributed to eroding the concentration of the votes in the two main parties, which now get the support of barely half of the electorate. The 2019 contest also confirmed that EP elections are a favourable ground for the breakthrough of minor parties (see also Freire and Santana-Pereira, 2015). Yet Portugal still remains an outlier in the European landscape as no extreme-right populist party has been able to break the mould and Eurosceptic forces represent only a small minority of voters. In other words, the Portuguese party system seems to be very resilient to the process of electoral realignment experienced in other European countries. It is also remarkable that populist strategies continue to be electorally unsuccessful in the Portuguese political system (see Lisi and Borghetto, 2018).

At the national level, the 2019 EP elections marks the beginning of the campaign for the next legislative elections. From this viewpoint, it will be interesting to see whether the PS, in case of victory at those elections, will opt for a minority government or for some kind of alliance with other minor parties (BE, PAN or PCP). The bad results of the PCP were probably linked to the 'Geringonça', and this may make it think twice about renewing its support for the PS government. Therefore, the challenge for the left is to ensure government stability and to impede the success of new challenger parties, as well as to reverse the widespread political disaffection of Portuguese citizens.

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Romania: Between national politics and European hopes

SORINA SOARE AND CLAUDIU TUFIŞ

INTRODUCTION

Romania organised elections for the European Parliament (EP) for the third time since joining the European Union (EU) in 2007. This time the elections occurred during the Romania six-month rotating Presidency of the EU. During this Presidency, Romania organised various meetings with representatives of the member states, covered intensively by national media. As a result, the European agenda became more visible in the public debate, the peak being reached during the informal summit of EU heads of state or government held in Sibiu to discuss the EU strategic agenda for the post-election period.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Romania is regularly mentioned as one of the most pro-European countries in the post-communist area (Clapp, 2017). Since 1995, in the name of the national interest, there has been a strong convergence among all mainstream parties on pro-EU positions, implicitly inducing radical parties to moderate their stances (Pytlas and Kossack, 2015). Occasionally, critical voices have emerged within different parliamentary parties; however, parties' official positions have regularly been aligned on a stable pro-EU discourse. This positioning echoed the high level of endorsement of the EU within Romanian society. A closer look at the Eurobarometer pinpoints a decline in this support over time. By the early 2010s, the previous trans-party consensus had started to crack. In particular, the topic of Europe has been indirectly politicised by the 2018 referendum on changing the definition of family in Romania's Constitution. The campaign for the referendum featured the opposition between Romanian values based on Christian-Orthodox morality and cosmopolitanism and EU values. Progressively, the EU has become a confrontational theme with regard to the maintenance of the safeguard mechanism for Romania (the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism); with different intensities, the decision received criticism from all parliamentary parties. Note that numerous extra-parliamentary parties assumed hard Eurosceptic positions (Soare & Tufiş, 2019).

For this year's EP elections, twenty-three parties/alliances and seven independent candidates initially registered. After checking eligibility, only thirteen par-

ties/alliances and three independent candidates hit the campaign trail for the thirty-two Romanian seats in the EP (plus one, after Brexit). The initial increase in the number of parties is connected to the 2015 changes in party regulations, which decreased the minimum number of members necessary for the registration of a party from 25,000 to three members, without any territorial diffusion criteria (Popescu and Soare, 2017)¹. If we compare the 2014 and 2019 effective number of parties/alliances and independent candidates, there are no significant changes to be reported.

However, the supply of parties in competition has changed in a relevant manner. Among the new competitors, there are the Union Save Romania (USR), a pro-European new party created in 2015 with a platform focused on the fight against corruption, and the Party for Freedom Unity and Solidarity (PLUS) founded by the former Prime Minister and former European commissioner for Agriculture and rural development, Dacian Cioloş, with a liberal and pro-European programme.² Two new parties share origins with the Social Democratic Party (PSD): It is the case of Pro-Romania Party, recently created by former Prime Minister Victor Ponta and of Pro-demo, founded by a former social-democrat MEP, Catalin Ivan. If Prodemo's programme is explicitly focused on defending national values, ProRomania's programme officially promotes a modern and pro-European version of social-democracy.

THE CAMPAIGN

As in the previous EP elections, the electoral campaign has been marked by a strong national twist. Although the institutional commitments of the EU's rotating presidency induced an increased visibility of EU themes in the national media, the campaign remained focused on domestic politics. Part of the explanation is connected to President Klaus Iohannis's decision to call a consultative referendum on the issue of justice to be held on the same day of the EP elections. The president's initiative followed a long series of tensions around controversial reforms of the Criminal Code promoted by the ruling party (PSD). Note also that presidential elections are scheduled for December 2019, with a probable run-off between the incumbent president Iohannis, endorsed by the National Liberal Party (PNL), and a possible candidate of the ruling social democrats (PSD). The organisation of the referendum has been interpreted as an anticipation of the December elections, with one of the hottest topics in Romanian politics – anti-corruption – taking centre stage. In this context, the declaration of the European Socialist Party (EPS)³ expressing deep concerns on the

1. Note that the number of signatures required for registering candidatures has been a hot topic of debate in the pre-election period, being criticised by civil society organisations and new parties on the ground that it provides a major obstacle for participation. According to the law, registration procedures require at least 200,000 signatures for a political party and at least 100,000 for independent candidates.
2. The two parties run together as Alliance 2020 USR PLUS.
3. For details: <https://www.pes.eu/en/news-events/news/detail/PES-closely-monitoring-situation-in-Romania/>

matter of the justice system reforms in Romania, promoted by the social democrats, induced increased tensions. PES President Sergei Stanishev declared the affiliation of the ruling PSD party to be frozen pending a clarified commitment to the rule of law. A formal discussion over PSD's membership is scheduled for June, after the EP elections. Similarly tense relations can be found in the case of the PSD government partner, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE). The liberal Alliance has been explicitly threatened with exclusion from the group of European liberals on the ground of their support for the contested reform of the justice system.⁴ Significantly, the leader of the European liberals, Guy Verhofstadt, participated in the closing meeting of the campaign of the 2020 USR PLUS Alliance.

During the campaign, the cracks in the pro-European consensus have become more visible. This is particularly obvious in the patriotic-centred campaign of the three main parliamentary parties: PSD, ALDE, and PNL. With the slogan "Patriot in Europe", the PSD has organised its campaign around the need to guarantee a representation in Europe that "knows how to speak, that desires to speak, has the courage to speak and to defend the country's interest".⁵ A similar view echoes from the liberals' campaign whose slogan, "Romania above all", recalls the slogan of Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Note also that the PNL opened its candidate list by recruiting a famous journalist, Rareș Bogdan, known for his provocative style and nationalist themes.⁶ ALDE's campaign also placed a strong emphasis on the need to guarantee the respect for Romania in Europe ("In Europe with dignity"). This focus is consistent with the vehement criticisms voiced by ALDE head of list, the MEP candidate Norica Nicolai, targeting "the double standards" of the EU in comparing Romania with the old Member States in regard to the justice system reform.⁷

RESULTS

Taking into account the votes from overseas, the total turnout for the EP elections in Romania was 51.20% - a significant increase from the turnout in the previous round of elections in 2014 (32.44%). There are two main factors that account for the significantly higher turnout. Firstly, the elections came after two and a half years of pressures from PSD to modify the Criminal Code, on the one hand, and by significant street protests organized by civic movements, directed at preventing PSD from implementing these changes, on the other. This prolonged confrontation polarised the population to a higher extent than before and acted as a mobilizing factor for seg-

4. For details: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/tariceanu-dupa-ce-guy-verhofstadt-a-amenintat-cu-excluderea-alde-din-familia-alde-europa-1108669>.

5. For details: https://m.adevarul.ro/news/politica/surse-primele-nume-psd-pentru-europarlamentare-1_5c852ab8445219c57e17767e?fbclid=IwARo3JzLzLuEVcGSKPY-cyjwMRdqTrBP7Z3QloQht3p8YYKRROViX1rQp68pw.

6. For details: <https://revista22.ro/opinii/rodica-culcer/unde-ne-sunt-liberalii>.

7. For details: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/norica-nicolai-ie%C8%99ire-violent%C4%83-%C3%AEmpotriva-liderilor-alde-%C8%99i-ppe-destul-m-am-s%C4%83turat-de-dublul-vostru-standard-/29857345.html>.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Romania

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| National Liberal Party (PNL) | EPP | 2,449,068 | 27.0 |
| Social Democratic Party (PSD) | S&D | 2,040,765 | 22.5 |
| 2020 USR-PLUS Alliance (USR-PLUS) | | 2,028,236 | 22.4 |
| PRO Romania | | 583,916 | 6.4 |
| People's Movement Party (PMP) | EPP | 522,104 | 5.8 |
| Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) | EPP | 476,777 | 5.3 |
| European Liberal and Democrats Alliance (ALDE) | ALDE | 372,760 | 4.1 |
| Gregoriana Carmen Tudoran (Independent) | | 100,669 | 1.1 |
| George Nicolaie Simion (Independent) | | 117,141 | 1.3 |
| Peter Costea (Independent) | | 131,021 | 1.4 |
| Other parties | | 247,365 | 2.7 |
| Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) | EPP | | |
| Mircea Diaconu (Independent) | ALDE | | |
| Total | | 9,069,822 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 51.2 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5 |

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 10 | 10 | +12.0 | +4 | +4 |
| | 8 | 9 | -15.1 | -8 | -7 |
| | 8 | 8 | +22.4 | +8 | +8 |
| | 2 | 2 | +6.4 | +2 | +2 |
| | 2 | 2 | -0.5 | | |
| | 2 | 2 | -1.0 | | |
| | | | +4.1 | | |
| | | | +1.1 | | |
| | | | +1.3 | | |
| | | | +1.4 | | |
| | | | -13.1 | | |
| | | | -12.2 | -5 | -5 |
| | | | -6.8 | -1 | -1 |
| | 32 | 33 | | | +1 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

ments of the electorate that were previously less inclined to vote. Secondly, the referendum initiated by the president and held on the same the day as the EP elections also increased the turnout for this round of elections. It should be noted that these two factors combined to increase turnout particularly in urban areas, which accounted for 57.40% of the total votes.

PSD and ALDE, current governing partners in Romania, recorded significant losses. Despite opinion polls consistently crediting ALDE with about 10% of vote intentions, the party failed to reach the threshold and will not have any European MPs (MEPs). At the 2014 elections, PSD received 37.6% of the votes and had 16 MEPs. In 2019, although it received a similar number of votes as in 2014, about two million, the increased turnout decreased the relative share of PSD to only 22.6%, relegating the party to second position and awarding it only eight MEPs.

The National Liberal Party was the winner in this round, increasing its share of the vote from 15% in 2014 to about 27% in 2019, and increasing the number of European MPs from six to ten. The second undisputed winner is the alliance between the Union Save Romania (USR) and the Party for Freedom Unity and Solidarity (PLUS). The former became a parliamentary party only in 2016 while the latter was officially registered as a party only recently (October 2018), but both have roots in the civic movements that fought against the judicial reforms planned by PSD. The newly-formed alliance managed to obtain over 21% of the votes, winning eight EP seats.

Despite PNL's recent history of governing in coalition with PSD, over the last four years the liberals and USR-PLUS have been the main opposition forces in the Romanian Parliament, arrayed against PSD, although it remains to be seen how the relationship between them will evolve. The first test will come by the end of this year during the presidential election campaign, when both parties will have to decide whether to have a common candidate or whether they will each propose their own candidate. For now, it is important to note that PSD lost its first place in all but one of the largest 20 cities in Romania, while USR-PLUS reached first place in 15 cities and PNL in the remaining four.

Among the diaspora votes, the USR-PLUS alliance won close to 44% of the votes, PNL almost 32%, and PMP won 8% of the votes. PSD, usually not a favourite of Romanians living abroad, paid a particularly hard price this time, when it won less than 2.5% of the diaspora votes. It should be mentioned that the abysmal performance of PSD comes after multiple rounds of elections, which made it very difficult for the diaspora to vote, and after the August 10, 2018 protest organised by the diaspora in Bucharest, which ended with gendarmes using unnecessary violence against peaceful protesters.

At the moment it is unclear which European groups some parties will join in the EP. For PNL, PMP, and UDMR things are clear, they will stay with the group to which they previously belonged, the EPP. The USR-PLUS alliance has purposely avoided discussing this issue during the campaign, in an attempt to attract as many voters as possible. As already indicated, they are in negotiations with ALDE and it is very likely that they will join this group, especially now that the Romanian ALDE has not passed the threshold.

The PSD membership in the S&D was frozen prior to the elections. Considering that the leader of PSD, Liviu Dragnea, was jailed and removed from leadership of the party, it is reasonable to believe that PSD will stop trying to modify the Criminal Code and that it will re-enter the good graces of the S&D group. It helps that PSD, even after a weak performance in this round of elections, is still able to bring eight MEPs to the S&D group. The last unknown is the Pro Romania Party, which separated from PSD under the leadership of Victor Ponta, a former PSD prime minister. As of this moment, it is not clear which EP group the party will join.

Summing up, the local Romanian context managed to increase turnout to the highest level recorded for an EP election in Romania since joining the EU. Moreover, the local conflicts have somehow prevented clear anti-EU parties from becoming relevant actors in this round of elections, although PSD has adopted significant parts of the anti-EU discourse. It remains to be seen whether the party will continue to go in that direction (a distinct possibility if S&D refuses them, which is not very likely) or if, being forgiven, the S&D will act as a “civilising” factor that will bring the PSD back to a more pro-European stance.

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Slovakia: Continuation of electoral earthquakes

PETER SPÁČ

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) election was held in Slovakia on May 25th, the fourth time since the country's accession to the EU. Two points are worth mentioning at the outset. Firstly, turnout increased considerably since the previous election in 2014. However, with roughly one in four voters participating in the election, it was still the lowest turnout in the whole EU. Secondly, the results confirmed the substantial recent changes in Slovakia's political life, with critical implications for the coming years.

In line with other EU countries, the elections are held under proportional representation rules. Similar to national elections, there is only one constituency that comprises the whole country. The threshold is set at 5%, which effectively bans smaller parties from obtaining EP seats. Similar to several other member states, Slovakia does not allow its citizens to vote from abroad in EP elections. The country elects fourteen members of the EP (MEPs), although it will only have thirteen until Brexit is finalised.

BACKGROUND AND CAMPAIGN

In the 2016 general election Slovakia experienced a huge shift of its party system. Although SMER-SD lost a considerable part of its support, it maintained its position as first party. As for past elections, populist and antisystem parties gained parliamentary representation, including the extreme right People's Party-Our Slovakia (LSNS). This electoral success led the new coalition government formed by SMER-SD and its junior partners to state that they serve as a 'barrier against extremism' (Rybář and Spáč, 2017).

Following the murder of investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée in February 2018, massive demonstrations were held across the whole country (cf. Mezešnikov and Gyarfašová, 2018). The protestors demanded an early election and an independent investigation of the crime. After a series of these public protests, several members of the government, including the long-term Prime Minister Fico, stepped down. However, the parties in government refused to call an early election, thus not fulfilling the protestors' principal aim. As a result, support for governing parties, and primarily for SMER-SD declined. This trend was observed both in the 2018 local and in the 2019 presidential elections. Thus, the 2019 EP election found the country in a rather agitated state of mind.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Slovakia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Progressive Slovakia/Together (PS/S) | ALDE/EPP | 198,255 | 20.1 |
| SMER - Social Democracy (SMER-SD) | S&D | 154,996 | 15.7 |
| People's Party - Our Slovakia (LSNS) | NI | 118,995 | 12.1 |
| Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) | EPP | 95,588 | 9.7 |
| Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) | ECR | 94,839 | 9.6 |
| Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) | ECR | 51,834 | 5.3 |
| Party of Hungarian Community (SMK) | EPP | 48,929 | 5.0 |
| Slovak National Party (SNS) | NI | 40,330 | 4.1 |
| Christian Union (KU) | NI | 37,974 | 3.9 |
| We Are Family - Boris Kollar (WF-BK) | EAPN | 31,840 | 3.2 |
| Bridge (Most) | EPP | 25,562 | 2.6 |
| Christian Democracy - Life and Prosperity (KDZP) | NI | 20,374 | 2.1 |
| Others | | 66,164 | 6.7 |
| Total | | 985,680 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 22.7 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 5 |

For the Brexit scenario, Slovakia included a mechanism in its electoral law. Based on it the party with the lowest remainder obtains its last seat only after Brexit takes place. In fact this mechanism was set in such a way that it allowed a non-logical solution, i.e. the party with less votes could get more seats in case a no-Brexit scenario occurs. This possibility truly occurred as KDH obtains its second seat only after scenario while SaS with a lower results obtains its two seats right from the beginning.

Source: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic.

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 4 (2 for ALDE and 2 for EPP) | 4 | +20.1 | +4 | +4 |
| | 3 | 3 | -8.4 | -1 | -1 |
| | 2 | 2 | +10.3 | +2 | +2 |
| | 1 | 2 | -3.5 | -1 | |
| | 2 | 2 | +3.0 | +1 | +1 |
| | 1 | 1 | -2.4 | | |
| | | | -1.6 | -1 | -1 |
| | | | +0.5 | | |
| | | | +3.9 | | |
| | | | +3.2 | | |
| | | | -3.2 | -1 | -1 |
| | | | +2.1 | | |
| | | 14 | | | |

In Slovakia, the timing of the European election is critical. A direct presidential election takes place every five years in spring. The presidential election is the most critical competition in the country, and it receives substantial attention from political parties, society and media. In 2019, the second round of this election took place on March 30th. Until this date the issue of an EP election was marginal. While the campaign before the presidential election lasted for about one year, the campaign for the EP election took roughly one and a half months.

Despite its short duration, the campaign was reasonably visible. In comparison to the 2014 EP election, which had a non-existing campaign (Spáč 2014), the political parties were overall more active in mobilising their supporters. This was mainly true for two new parties Progressive Slovakia and Together - Civic Democracy, which emerged at the end of 2017 and later formed an electoral coalition (PS/S) with a strong pro-EU stance. It was also true for the liberal Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS), the main opposition force in the parliament. Similarly, the extreme right party LSNS was very active, even though in 2016 it initiated a petition to hold a referendum about Slovakia's withdrawal from the EU and NATO. On the other hand, the governing parties (and especially SMER-SD) held only a feeble campaign similar to that seen at the previous EP election in 2014.

The campaign in Slovakia did not focus on a dominant issue. Most parties debated about problems such as security, immigration, double standards for food quality, environmental protection and further development of EU integration. The stances of parties ranged from openly pro-EU to Eurosceptic. Along with LSNS, the latter category included the governing Slovak National Party (SNS) and a new entrepreneurial party We are Family (WF-BK), led by Boris Kollar, which entered parliament in 2016. Shortly before the 2019 EP election, the WF-BK joined ranks with the parties of Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini, and it was reluctant to condemn the scandal of Austrian Vice-Chancellor Strache. Together LSNS, SNS and WF-BK blamed the EU for discriminatory practices (double standards regarding food quality), negatively evaluated its immigration policy, labelled its activities a liberal threat to a more conservative Slovakia and as a 'dictate of Brussels', and called for weakening or even abandonment of sanctions against Russia (cf. Gabrižová, Geist and Koreň, 2019). The intensive campaigning of the extreme right party, LSNS, led more pro-EU parties to stress the risk of spreading extremism not only in Slovakia but in the whole EU as well. Hence, they used the LSNS as a mobilising topic to encourage their supporters to cast a ballot at the EP election so as to avert the risk of a rise of extremist politics.

RESULTS

The results of the election confirmed the dynamic evolution of Slovakian politics. The coalition PS/S secured more than 20% of votes and won with nearly a 5 percentage points margin. The coalition gained four seats in the EP. The election was also a success for the LSNS. After scoring less than 2% at the 2014 EP election, the extreme right party increased its gains considerably, ending in third position, with more than 12% of votes, and thus obtaining two seats.

By contrast, the election was catastrophic for the three governing parties. As in the 2014 EP elections, the support for the SMER-SD declined substantially. In 2009, the party dominated the EP election with more than 32% of votes and five seats out of thirteen. Ten years later its vote share had halved, and its number of seats dropped to three. For its two junior coalition partners, the nationalist SNS and the Hungarian party Bridge (Most), the results were even worse. Both these parties were unable to pass the threshold of 5% and remained without any representation in the EP. Because another Hungarian party, the Party of Hungarian Community (SMK), also ended just below the threshold, for the first time since 2004, Slovakia will have no MEP from this ethnic minority.

The parliamentary opposition experienced mixed results. While the SaS secured two seats (one more than in 2014), the anti-corruption Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) barely passed the threshold and obtained one seat. The cooperation of WF-BK with Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini did not provide the result that the party hoped for, as it scored only 3% of votes and no seat in the EP. Finally, the election was a triumphant comeback for the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) that dropped out of the national parliament in 2016. The party received nearly 10% of votes and obtained two seats (one of them after Brexit). Hence, in terms of gained seats, none of the EP groups got the upper hand in Slovakia.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 EP election provides essential insight into the politics of Slovakia. Although turnout increased to nearly 23% (it was 13% in 2014), it remained the lowest among all EU member states. In comparison to the previous EP election, the campaign in 2019 was more intense and had a stronger mobilising effect. On the other hand, Slovakia partly suffers from the timing of the election. The occurrence of the highly visible presidential election only two months before the competition for the EP had two connected consequences. Firstly, the duration of the campaign for the EP election was short, as it lasted around one and a half months. This gave only limited opportunities for parties to mobilise the electorate. Secondly, the long-lasting campaign for the presidential election made it harder for parties to persuade citizens to take part in another vote just a couple of weeks later.

With regard to the results, for the first time since 2006, the SMER-SD did not win a national election to a representative body. After a series of disappointing results in recent years, the party that once dominated the Slovak party system is following a steadily declining trend. The failure of its junior coalition partners in 2019 to acquire any seats in the EP only confirms that Slovakia is experiencing significant changes to its political scene.

On the other hand, the victory of the coalition PS/S shows that new liberal parties are increasingly popular. If this trends continues, they will have a real chance to win the upcoming general election in spring 2020 and to become the senior governing party. However, the success of the LSNS indicates that protest and extremist viewpoints also find support among a substantial portion of society. With the decline

of the SMER-SD as well as of the SNS, the extreme right LSNS might well be able to gain more supporters and become a constant player in the political map of Slovakia.

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Slovenia: Split national political identities in EU electoral democracy

SIMONA KUSTEC

INTRODUCTION

The election in Slovenia for eight European Parliament (EP) seats took place on May 26th. For the EP elections, Slovenia is considered a single electoral constituency. As for all countries, a proportional system is adopted. Voters must choose a party list and optionally also give a preference vote to any of the individual candidates on the selected party list. EP seats are distributed according to the d'Hondt method. There is no formal electoral threshold. This, together with the official introduction of a gender quota system, has proven to be a fairly effective electoral system (Fink-Hafner and Deželan, 2016).

The interest of Slovenian political lists to compete in the EP elections has traditionally been quite high. There were fourteen political lists, among which seven competing for the first time in EP elections. Out of one-hundred-three candidates, fifty-one were women and fifty-two men. All nine parliamentary and five non-parliamentary parties submitted candidacies.

Slovenia is entitled to eight seats in the EP. In 2019 these seats were equally distributed among four party lists (two left-wing and two right-wing parliamentary parties), with two seats each. Three of these four lists confirmed their previous EP status, one was newly elected, and two from the 2014-2019 mandate lost their bids. An 11% threshold of the very low 28.89% turnout rate in Slovenia was needed to enter the EP in 2019. As for previous EP elections, strong dependencies on contemporary domestic political circumstances and balances of powers have marked this year's EP campaign processes and electoral choices.

POWERS ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL PARQUET FLOOR AS A RUNWAY FOR EP ELECTIONS

Slovenians' political trust in the EU is low – similar to domestic political institutions and parties – although these are, at the same time, seen as holding solutions to the majority of the country's problems (Toš et al., 2018). Although entering into the EU has traditionally been seen as a positive political decision for Slovenia, low trust in the EU, expressed both in public opinion polls and through participation in elections, is an issue that has not been addressed since the first elections in 2004. To some extent, this can be directly linked to the role of the EU and its institutions, which in the

eyes of citizens are unsuccessful in solving many of the serious problems facing the country, such as the 2012 financial crisis and the recent migration issues that literally paralysed the state's apparatus in 2015. In this regard, and together with a weary attitude towards domestic politics, this year's 28.89% turnout, the second lowest among all EU members at 2019 elections, is no surprise.

From the national political perspective, as in 2014, EP elections have been held in the domestic political circumstances of a vague and fragmented minority government. Early national elections were held in July 2014 and again in June 2018, both of them falling within the same EP election cycle. In both cases, newly established liberal political parties took over the leading coalition positions (the Modern Centre Party (SMC) after the July 2014 elections and the List of Marjan Šarec (LMS) after the June 2018 elections). Both of these parties formed coalitions with the Social Democrats (SD) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia DeSUS (both traditional parties in the political arena with slight internal reformations from the 1990s onward). The small and young Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB) is a third example of a new liberal party, originally under the umbrella of the Positive Slovenia party, leading a coalition between 2013 and 2014 and also joining the current coalition. Despite being unusually numerous, the five current coalition partners are together still a minority due to the scattered election results, with all of the partners having similar proportions of votes. The absolute winner of the 2018 election, the right-wing Slovenian Social Democracy (SDS), was unable to form a coalition and, together with New Slovenia (NSi) – a Christian Democratic party – and the Slovenian National Party (SNS), they became part of the opposition.

In such fragmented and fragile circumstances, characterized also by positive growth cycle statistics of 4.1% GDP growth, 1.7% inflation, and 4.4% unemployment rate (SORS, 2019), but bound by poor economic growth forecasts, the lack of needed structural reforms, and active migrant issues, the Slovenian electoral campaign for the EP elections got underway.

CAMPAIGN

The 2019 EP election campaign was implemented without any serious negative attacks, the campaign in general can be labelled as 'by the book', with a mixture of pre- and post-modern campaign elements (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). The parties and their candidates were active on social media (especially Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), all of the EP parliamentary parties distributed large posters, and most circulated campaign leaflets. Parties strongly engaged in direct communication on the ground, also involving international support such as visits by European politicians. At a certain point parties' campaigns became so similar that it was almost impossible to identify anyone's campaign as unique.

This led to an extensive yet standardised media coverage of the campaign. Media debates among candidates all focused on a set of salient issues (especially migration, the future of the EU and the role of Slovenia in the EU). Social media campaigns coincided with EU-run national campaigns projects, like '#EUandME', ad-

dressing young voters, and a video project, 'Tokratgremvolit.eu', unsuccessfully calling for higher electoral participation.

Interestingly, a series of pre-election opinion polls were released to the public during the campaign period with many apparently biased results in favour of certain parties that were eventually successful.

With the exception of SDS, NSi and The Left, little can be said about the parties' ideological and policy programme statements, positions or choices, because parties used only programme-dashboards or did even less to address the voters' preferences. LMŠ, which gained two EP seats, for example, compensated for a lack of a programme statement with the president's and party list holder's speeches and press releases. It is interesting that, though parties refer to their membership in the European Parliamentary groups, they rarely directly apply any of the 'mother' group's programme statements or manifestos. The campaign's content was marked by a lot of very basic and general statements about the importance of the European Union's future, the role of Slovenia inside it, European values and principles, and only a couple of very general policy positions on security, corruption, social, economic and agricultural issues.

RESULTS

Of the eight seats available, four went to the parties in the government coalition, and four to opposition parties. The leading coalition party, The liberal LMŠ (newly established a year before the national elections), and its partner, SD, each got two mandates. The leading opposition party (SDS), together with its current EP pre-electoral coalition partner, the Slovenian People's Party (SLS), won three seats. Finally, NSi alone (without its EP 2014 pre-electoral coalition partner SLS) got one seat. Altogether, the four elected parties to the EP gained a bit more than 70% of all valid votes, with all of the eight elected candidates being elected with preference votes. Gender balance was equally distributed between four female and four male MEPs on both the coalition and opposition sides.

Besides the equally distributed domestic political powers, the EP 2019 election results draw a very interesting picture of the national elite in the EP (Scarrow, 1997). Apart from DeSUS, the other traditional parties (those established shortly after Slovenian independence in 1991), that is SD, SDS and NSi, have been re-elected from the first EP Slovenian elections in 2004 onwards. Furthermore, at the level of individual MEPs, within these parties there is a recognisable set of candidates that is now consolidated. Three MEPs from the SDS list and one MEP from SD have been re-elected twice, and a newly elected MEP from NSi was previously a sitting MEP in 2004-2009 who, in 2011-2019, held a national parliamentary mandate. With regard to the remaining three MEPs, only the one elected in the LMŠ list lacks previous political experience, as the second LMŠ MEP had gained executive political experience in the extinct liberal party For Real (2008-2011). Finally, the newly elected MEP from SD served as the Speaker of the National Assembly and vice-president of the then coalition-leading liberal party, SMC, during the 2014-2018 Parliament, and was re-elected on the SMC list for the 2018-2022 term, while transferring to the SD parliamentary group and party list a few weeks later.

Table 1: Net vote change between 2004 – 2019 EP elections for selected parties* (%)

| PARTY | EP GROUP | 2004 | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 |
|--|----------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) leading coalition 2004-2008, 2012-2013 | EPP | 17.7% of all votes (2) | +10 (2+1**) | -1.9 (3) | +1.4 (with SLS) (3) |
| New Slovenia - Christian Democrats (Nsi) | EPP | 23.6% of all votes (2) | -7.1 (1) | -0.1 (with SLS) (2) | -5.5 (1) |
| Social Democrats (SD) leading coalition 2009-2012 | S&D | 14.1 % of all votes (1) | +4.3 (2) | -10.6 (1) | +10.6 (2) |
| Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) leading coalition 1992-2004 | ALDE | 21.9% of all votes (2) (with DeSUS) | -10.4 (1) | NR | NR |
| Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS) | ALDE | NR | 7.2% of all of votes | +1.1 (1) | -2.4 |
| For real | ALDE | NE (with LDS) | 9.8 % of all votes (1) | -8.9 | NE |
| Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ) leading coalition 2018- | ALDE | NE | NE | NE | 15.4% of all votes (2) |
| Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB) (Alenka Bratušek, still as a member of party Positive Slovenia leading coalition 2013-2014) | ALDE | NE | NE | NR (6.6% of all votes for Positive Slovenia) | 4% of all votes |
| Party of Modern Center (SMC) leading coalition 2014-2018 | ALDE | NE | NE | NE | 1.6% of all votes |
| Believe, List of dr. Igor Šoltes | G-EFA | NE | NE | +10.3 (1) | NE |
| The Left | GUE-NGL | NE | NE | 5.5% of all votes | +0,9 |
| Slovenian national party (SNS) | NI | 5 % of all votes | -2.1 | +1.1 | |

Legend: Elected (number of MEP posts); * selected parties: all elected lists in the EP, all leading coalition parties at the national level, far left party in the national arena (The Left), central national party in the national arena (SNS); ** additional MEP seat due to the 2013 EU enlargement; NE: party not exist; NR: party not run for the EP elections; SLS – Slovenian People's Party.

Source: own calculations on the basis of SEC, 2019.

Table 2 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Slovenia

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and Slovenian People's Party (SLS) | EPP | 126,534 | 26.30 | 3 | +1.4 | |
| Social Democrats (SD) | S&D | 89,936 | 18.70 | 2 | +10.6 | +1 |
| Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ) | ALDE | 74,431 | 15.40 | 2 | | +2 |
| New Slovenia - Christian Democrats (Nsi) | EPP | 53,621 | 11.10 | 1 | -5.5 | -1 |
| The Left (LEVICA) | GUE-NGL | 30,983 | 6.40 | | -1.7 | |
| Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS) | ALDE | 27,329 | 5.70 | | -2.4 | -1 |
| Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB) | ALDE | 19,369 | 4.00 | | | |
| Slovenian National Party (SNS) | NI | 19,347 | 4.00 | | | |
| Greens of Slovenia (Zeleni) | NI | 10,706 | 2.20 | | +1.4 | |
| DOM -national league | NI | 8,184 | 1.70 | | | |
| Let's Unite (Povežimo se) | NI | 7,980 | 1.70 | | | |
| Party of Modern Center (SMC) | ALDE | 7,823 | 1.60 | | | |
| Movement United Slovenia (ZSI) | NI | 3,288 | 0.70 | | | |
| Good state (DD) | NI | 2,544 | 0.50 | | | |
| Total | | 482,075 | 100 | 8 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 28.89 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

Source: https://www.uradni-list.si/_pdf/2019/Ur/u2019036.pdf, pp. 4280-4283

It is difficult to identify a real winner of the 2019 Slovenian EP election. SD regained the seat lost after the 2009 elections, LMSŠ got two MEP mandates, and the NSi lost one seat. All traditional parties only experienced a slight change in vote shares between individual elections, while the emergence and disappearance of new parties point to extremely high volatility (see Table 1; Kustec Lipicer and Henjak, 2015). In the case of the 2019 elections, for example, two newly established and former leading coalition liberal parties at the national level, SAB/Positive Slovenia (2013-2014) and SMC (2014-2018), did not obtain a seat in the EP, polling much lower compared to national elections.

Regarding volatility, we should also mention that more than half of all competing lists for the 2014 EP elections (nine out of sixteen) did not stand in the 2019 elections, among them three coalition partners from that term that are today either defunct or only regionally active (e.g. Positive Slovenia). On the other hand, exactly half of the completely new political parties ran in this year's EP elections. SMC and SAB did not run in 2014 EP elections while they were preparing for the early national election that was held in July of that year, and LMSŠ was only formed as a party in 2018, before the early national elections in June that year. Party lists DOM and Let's Unite were formed specifically for the 2019 EP elections.

CONCLUSION

The debate about Slovenia's 2019 EP experience is not so much centred on its first- or second-order character (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1984; Hix and Marsh, 2011) as it is about split political and party identities in the national arena.

The following set of findings call for analytical consideration that is beyond the remit of this chapter:

- 1) low turnout and template-structured, self-seeking campaign activities that, at the same time, promote the EU as a champion for the future of the nation;
- 2) asymmetric volatility scores in a context of successful introduction and consolidation of EP elites in traditional parties on both the right and left side of the political spectrum, along with the devastating failures of newly established, mostly liberal, parties to retain voter support in successive elections;
- 3) an unstable, constantly changing first-order national political arena having a direct impact on voting behaviour in national and EP elections.

Considering the 2019 Slovenian EP electoral experience, a call for the stabilisation of the national political and party arena and the building of a stronger domestic attitude towards EU electoral democracy and political culture is clearly needed, especially given the forthcoming, traditionally combative, domestic political disputes in the process of nominating a national member for the European Commission. This has already been triggered by the announcement of the election results (Rtvslo, 2019).

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Spain: The endless election sequence

MARTA FRAILE AND ENRIQUE HERNÁNDEZ

INTRODUCTION

The eighth Spanish European Parliament Election (EPE) marked the end of an electoral sequence that began one month before (on 26 April 2019), with the General Election in which the incumbent Socialist Party (PSOE) won a plurality of seats. However, at the time of the EPE, a parliamentary agreement to form a new national government had not yet been reached, since most parties were eager to postpone this decision until after the election. On top of that, during the EPE campaign, Catalan politicians who had organised an independence referendum in October 2017 and ran as candidates in the General and European Parliament (EP) elections were held in prison while being prosecuted. All these issues contributed to the nationalisation of the contents of the electoral campaign leading up to the EP elections.

Perhaps the most relevant fact regarding the 2019 EPE is that, for the first time since the first Spanish EPE in 1987, they were held on the same date as regional elections (in twelve out of seventeen regions) and as local elections in all Spanish municipalities. Electoral fatigue caused by the succession of elections in a short period of time might have deterred participation. However, in comparison to the 2014 EPE, participation increased more than 20 percentage points, suggesting a “contagion effect” driven by high levels of mobilisation in local and regional elections. During the campaign, polls forecasted close races in many municipalities and regions. Uncertainty about the results of these elections probably contributed to increasing EPE participation levels even further.

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

The pre-campaign period was dominated by two topics. First of all, in the aftermath of the General Election, most parties and pundits focused on interpreting the consequences of those national election results, paying special attention to the coalition agreements that the winning party (PSOE) might reach to form a new cabinet. The media also paid significant attention to the failure of the mainstream right-wing party Partido Popular (PP), which lost half of its seats in parliament. This led to an unusual and substantial fragmentation of the right-wing vote that was divided between PP, the new extreme-right contender VOX (which obtained a total of twenty-four seats in parliament), and Ciudadanos (a centre-right party).

Secondly, four weeks before the EPE the media also drew significant attention to the fact that Catalan politicians, who were either in prison or abroad to avoid prosecution, were running as EPE candidates in the *Ahora Republicas* and *Lliures per Europa* coalitions. Initially, the National Election Board banned the candidates who were abroad, such as former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont, from running. However, after an appeal by these politicians the Courts ruled that they could run. In any case, at the time of writing it is still unclear whether these politicians can effectively become members of the European Parliament (EP), since that requires them to travel to Spain, where they might be arrested.

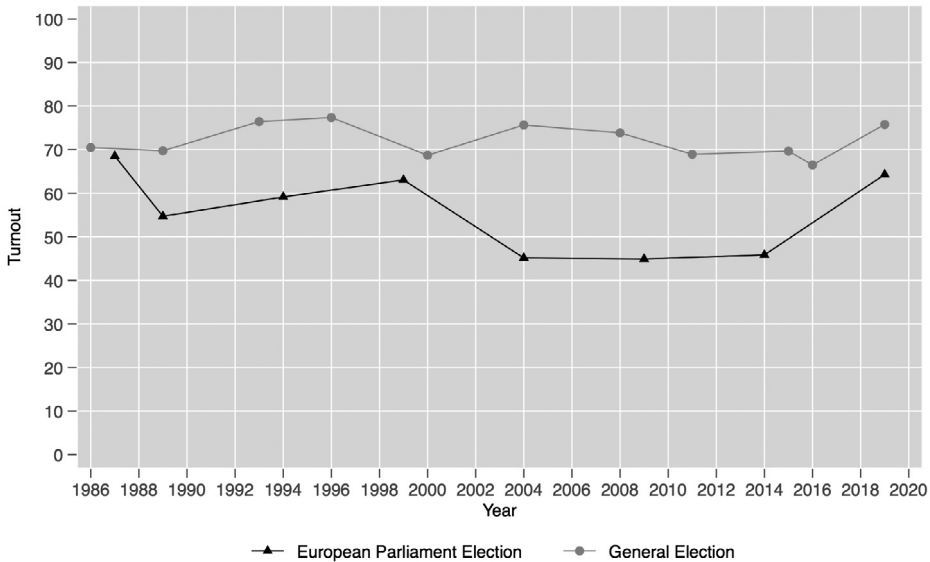
In Spain, as in many other countries, it is common for EPE campaigns to focus on national issues (Font and Torcal, 2012). The 2019 election was no exception to this trend, which was reinforced by the coincidence of these elections with regional and local elections. Uncertainty about the results in some important municipalities such as Madrid or Barcelona draw disproportionate attention to these contests, to the detriment of the EPE. For example, PP leader Pablo Casado characterised the local, regional and EP elections as a second-round of the General Election, which provided a chance for PP to improve on the bad results obtained in that election. Moreover, PP and *Ciudadanos*, which ended up in second and third place in the General Election but gained a very similar share of votes (16.7% and 15.%, respectively), saw the EP elections as an opportunity to determine which of these two parties would lead the conservative opposition against the new PSOE government.

In any event, the Spanish media also characterised the EPE as a plebiscite on the future of European integration, due to the threat posed by the potential upsurge of Eurosceptic parties. In this context, and for the first time ever, the nine EPE candidates of the main parties and coalitions (see Table 1) participated in a debate broadcasted by Spanish public television in prime time. However, while the candidates debated on topics related to the EU such as the relevance of EU immigration policies, or the challenges posed by climate change, the discussion was clearly dominated by domestic issues, most prominently the situation in Catalonia and the heightened polarisation around potential solutions to this problem.

With the exception of VOX, the election manifestos of the main parties (PSOE, PP, *Ciudadanos*, *Unidas Podemos*) share a positive outlook of the process of European integration and propose new policies that would strengthen the EU, such as greater coordination in fiscal matters and on immigration policies. In fact, while each party emphasises different issues, the policy proposals of all of them are more similar among themselves than their manifestos and agendas at the national-level would suggest (Abellán, 2019). The new extreme right-wing party VOX represents an exception to this general trend. VOX advocates the protection of national sovereignty and the return to the (pre-Maastricht) origins of the integration process. We can, therefore, characterise VOX as a soft Eurosceptic party, since it does not have a principled objection to EU membership, but clearly opposes further integration and, in some policy areas, defends the devolution of competences to national institutions (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002).

RESULTS

Figure 1 summarises the turnout rates in European and national elections in Spain for the 1986-2019 period. The 2019 EPE saw a significant spike in participation, which increased from 45.8% in 2014 to 64.3% in 2019. The coincidence of the EPE with regional and local elections undoubtedly contributed to this upward shift. However, participation was still slightly lower than that of the 1987 EPE, which was also held on the same date as local and regional elections. One must note, though, that 1987 was also the first time Spaniards voted in an EP election, which might have also contributed to high turnout rates. In any case, participation in the 2019 EPE was also lower than in the preceding national election held just one month earlier, confirming the “second order” character of these elections in Spain (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).



Source: Own elaboration on data from the Ministerio del Interior

Table 1 summarises the results of the 2019 EPE in Spain. The clear winner of this election was the socialist party (PSOE), which was able to capitalise on its recent victory in the General Election and obtained a total of twenty seats and 3.7 million more votes than in the preceding EPE. In fact, its support (32.6%) was even higher than in the last national election, where 28.7% of voters supported the socialists. Conversely, the PP lost a lot of ground in this election. In comparison to the 2014 EPE, the support of PP was 6 percentage points lower and the party lost four seats in the EP. However, the PP managed to obtain a higher share of the vote than in the preceding national election.

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Spain

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) |
|---|-----------------|------------|-------------|
| Socialist Party (PSOE) | S&D | 7,359,617 | 32.6 |
| Popular Party (PP) | EPP | 4,510,193 | 20.0 |
| Ciudadanos | ALDE | 2,726,642 | 12.1 |
| Podemos-IU * | GUE/NGL & G-EFA | 2,252,378 | 10.0 |
| VOX | NI | 1,388,681 | 6.1 |
| Republics now** | G-EFA | 1,257,484 | 5.6 |
| Together | NI | 1,025,411 | 4.5 |
| Coalition for a solidary Europe (CEUS) | ALDE | 633,265 | 2.8 |
| Compromise for Europe (CPE)*** | | 296,091 | 1.3 |
| PACMA | | 294,657 | 1.3 |
| Coalition for Europe (CEU) | ALDE | | |
| Union for Progress and Democracy (UPyD) | ALDE | | |
| Others | | 859,479 | 3.8 |
| Total | | 22,603,898 | 100 |
| Turnout (%) | | | 64.3 |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> |

Note: * To calculate vote and seats change we consider the change with respect to the coalitions “La Izquierda Plural” and Podemos in the 2014 EPE.

** To calculate vote and seats change we consider the change with respect to the coalitions “Left for the right to decide” (EDPP) and “The People Decide” (LPD) in the 2014 EPE elections.

***To calculate vote and seats change we consider the change with respect to the coalition “Primavera Europea” in the 2014 EPE

| | SEATS | SEATS IN CASE OF BREXIT | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 IN CASE OF BREXIT |
|--|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | 20 | | +9.5 | +6 | |
| | 12 | | -6.1 | -4 | |
| | 7 | | +8.9 | +5 | |
| | 6 | | -8.0 | -5 | |
| | 3 | | +4.6 | +3 | |
| | 3 | | -0.5 | | |
| | 2 | | +4.5 | +2 | |
| | 1 | | +2.8 | +1 | |
| | | | -0.6 | -1 | |
| | | | +0.2 | | |
| | | | -5.4 | -3 | |
| | | | -6.5 | -4 | |
| | | | | | 5 |

On the other hand, while the results of *Ciudadanos* clearly improved with respect to the preceding EPE, the party performed worse than in the last national election and failed in its attempt to become the dominant right-wing party in Spain. In the case of Podemos-IU the results were also negative, since they lost eight per cent of their vote share and five seats in the EP with respect to 2014. In the case of VOX, the extreme right-wing party will be represented in the EP for the first time with three seats. However, its vote share in the EPE (6.1%) decreased four percentage points with respect to the preceding national General Election (10.3%).

Besides these state-wide parties, the Spanish party system is characterised by the presence of strong regionally based-parties. Since the single-district nature of the EPE electoral system penalises small regionally-based parties, these parties usually run in coalition with parties from other regions. This is for example the case with the Republics Now coalition which, under the leadership of imprisoned Catalan leader Oriol Junqueras and in coalition with nationalist parties from other regions, gained three seats in the EP. Similarly, the “Coalition for a solidary Europe” led by Basque centre-right nationalists won two seats. Finally, the centre right coalition Together, led by former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont, won two seats.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 EPE marked the end of an election sequence in Spain and are a clear reflection of the electoral climate at the national level. The vote was highly fragmented in both the left and right-wing camps, although the two mainstream parties PSOE and PP ended up dominating each flank. There was a slight predominance of the left, combined with substantial support for nationalist parties (these parties received approximately 13% of the votes). The extreme right-wing party VOX fell short of expectations, but still managed to enter the EP for the first time.

Spanish voters still seem to lack a genuine taste for Europe (Molina, 2019). Unlike in Italy, the UK or France, and despite the recent changes in the Spanish party system towards multipartism, political parties seem unwilling to politicise the process of European integration from the supply side. On the demand side, Spanish citizens seem to lack a connection with the European dimension: a political sphere often perceived by citizens as too remote and detached from their daily problems. Once more, the campaign and the results of the 2019 EPE in Spain suggest the lower relevance of EP elections in Spanish political life.

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Sweden: We are all the winners

MARIA OSKARSON

According to the spontaneous reactions from the parties' celebrations during the Swedish election night of May 26th, all parties were winners. The parties that lost support did not lose as much as they had feared, and among the parties that gained, celebration was loud and joyful. The only exception was the small Feminist Initiative that lost the single seat they won in 2014.

BACKGROUND

The 2019 European Parliament election took place less than a year after the national election in September 2018, which led to the most prolonged government negotiations in Swedish history. Not until January 2019 did the Social Democrats and the Green party receive support for a coalition government based on an agreement with the Centre Party and the Liberals. Even though these parties are not formally part of the government, the agreement was on a programme highly influenced by the Centre party and the Liberals. The formation of this government ended the previous two-bloc split between Social democrats, the Greens and the Left party on one side and the Centre party, the Liberals, The Moderates and the Christian Democrats on the other. The cause of this restructuring of the Swedish political landscape was the increased support for the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats, combined with a reluctance from the other parties to rely on them for government formation. Even though the Christian Democrats and Moderate Party was somewhat more open to support from the Sweden Democrats, they failed to convince the former coalition partners to form a government with the support of the Sweden Democrats. The rejection of the Sweden Democrats by the other parties continued into the campaign for the European Parliament (EP) election, where resistance against nationalism, xenophobia and anti-EU sentiments were salient issues in the campaign.

SWEDES IN THE EU

For a long time, Sweden was quite a reluctant member of the European Union. The membership referendum in 1994 was won by the “join-side” by only a slight majority, and the referendum on joining the euro in 2003 was won by the “no-side”. In recent years, the Swedish hesitancy towards the EU has changed. Today around 80% of public opinion agrees that EU membership is a good thing, and the previously pre-

vailing “Swexit” demands are no longer heard. The two most EU-critical parties, the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, have both declared that they will not campaign for a “Swexit”, albeit they both have it in their party programmes. A recent report on Swedish EU-attitudes confirms the EU-positive trend. In an analysis of perceptions of consequences of EU-membership for various policy areas, environmental policies, military security, employment and economy come out on top, whilst immigration is the policy area that has fared the worst (Berg et al., 2019). That EU issues are indeed important was demonstrated in an analysis of the 2014 EP election, where proximity on the EU-dimension was confirmed as a secondary decision rule for party choice (Oskarson et al., 2016). Increasing EU-support does not, however, mean that Swedes are un-critically positive towards further European integration, or to joining the euro. Quite on the contrary: the Swedish public support the current EU, but no more. It is the instrumental Euroscepticism that has decreased; the political Euroscepticism does in many ways still remain (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2005).

THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign for the European election was described by most commentators as vague, not addressing current issues in the EU nor visions for the EU’s future. Even though the parties in many ways tried to put forward European issues, the media was more focused on the national political game. However, themes like law enforcement, border control, the social pillar and environmental policies such as European tax on carbon dioxide were salient on the agenda. But apart from actual issue concerns, the campaign was also characterised by several “revelations” in the media regarding such things as side-payments, allowances, abortion policies, and sexual harassment accusations, linked to MEPs from different parties.

THE ELECTION

Turnout continued the positive trend in Swedish EP elections since 2004 (37.8%) and in 2019 landed on 55.3% (preliminary). The increase is a reflection of the increased support for membership, as well as the more polarised political climate.

The Left Party as well as the Social Democrats got almost the same results as in the 2014 election. This means they keep their seats (1 and 5 respectively). The Left Party had been stronger in the polls just preceding the election, and the party leader Jonas Sjöstedt blamed their non-success on a media focus on the expense allowance of the left party MEP. The Social Democrats received their lowest support ever but expressed relief that they did not lose more.

The Green Party had their best ever result in European elections in 2014, with 15.2% of the votes. However, following the 2014 national election four months later they joined a coalition government with the Social Democrats, and it came with a high price. In response to the refugee crisis in 2015 the Greens, one of Sweden’s most pro-immigration parties, had to back the introduction of border controls and stricter immigration rules. In the national election in September 2018 they received

Table 1 - Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – Sweden

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Social Democrats | S&D | 974,589 | 23.5 | 5 | -0.7 | |
| Moderate Coalition Party | EPP | 698,770 | 16.8 | 4 | +3.2 | +1 |
| Sweden Democrats | ECR | 636,877 | 15.3 | 3 | +5.7 | +1 |
| Environment Party The Greens | G/EFA | 478,258 | 11.5 | 2 | -3.9 | -2 |
| Centre Party | ALDE | 447,641 | 10.8 | 2 | +4.3 | +1 |
| Christian Democrats | EPP | 357,856 | 8.6 | 2 | +2.7 | +1 |
| Left Party | GUE-NGL | 282,300 | 6.8 | 1 | +0.5 | |
| Liberals | ALDE | 171,419 | 4.1 | 1 | -5.8 | -1 |
| Feminist initiative | S&D | 332,143 | 0.8 | | -4.7 | -1 |
| Other parties | | 71,617 | 1.7 | | -0.4 | |
| Total | | 4,451,470 | 99.9 | 20 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 55.3 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | 4% | | | |

Source: Valmyndigheten <https://www.val.se/> (Official Swedish authority for elections).

only 4.4% of the votes. In view of this turbulence, the result of 11.5% in the EP election was received as something of a comeback, even though the party lost 3.9 percentage points and two seats compared to their 2014 result. However, if/when Britain leaves the EU, the Environmental will get the additional seat for Sweden. Support for the Green Party was significantly higher among young voters, probably reflecting their engagement with climate issues.

The Centre Party, formerly agrarian but today a liberal/green party, had a very good election, gaining 4.3 percentage points and two seats compared to the previous EP election. Their campaign was a continuation of their campaign for the national election and focused on climate issues, keeping a clear distance from the radical right and national conservative forces, together with a liberal stance on economic issues.

The other Swedish party in the ALDE group, the very pro-EU Liberals, did not have the same good fortune. They more than halved their support compared to the last EP election and lost one of their two seats. It was well into the election night before it was confirmed that the party would be able to keep their only remaining seat. With the most pro-EU message, asking for further integration of the EU and introduction of the euro in Sweden, they were too EU-positive for the status-quo sentiments of the Swedish electorate. Replacing their experienced and well-known MEP with a quite unknown candidate just a few months before the election was probably not profitable for the party. Finally, the party is in the middle of replacing its party leader following the turbulence related to national government formation.

The Moderate Party (EPP) has a history of weak results in European elections, was also on the losing side of national government formation, and had weakened in the polls since the 2018 election. With an intense campaign, a clear message of stricter border controls, anti-criminality measures and continued use of nuclear power, the party gained 3.2 percentage points and an extra seat. The result was however still 3 percentage points below the result from the national election.

The Christian Democrats were for long seen as quite an insignificant party in Sweden, but this is now changing both in national and European elections. With a clear and intense campaign of a “just enough” EU, the party positioned itself as safeguarding the subsidiarity principle, not least against the social pillar. With 8.6% of the vote, they gained a second seat. The polls just before the election had suggested higher numbers, but the revelation that the party's former MEP had voted “anti-abortion” in the national parliament probably meant some lost votes among late deciders.

The Sweden Democrats were in a way the central hub for the European election, as well as for the national election last September. How the other parties related, or rather did not relate, to the Sweden Democrats at times during the campaigns seemed more central than actual policy positions. No longer aiming for a “Swexit” but rather to “change the EU from the inside”, the party has toned down some of its more radical positions. But it is still mostly profiled as anti-immigration together with safeguarding Swedish national interests against supra-national policies. With support of 15.3% of voters they did indeed gain 5.7 percentage points and one seat more than in the 2014 EP election. However, compared with the national election less than a

year ago, the party lost 2 percentage points. This is actually the first back-slide since the party gained seats in the Swedish Riksdag in 2010.

Finally, the small Feminist Initiative party that gained a seat in the 2014 EP election now lost it. The party never gained representation on the national level and, with its charismatic former party leader now in the background, the party was outside the race. This means that the 2019 EP election in Sweden was the first one since 2004 where no new party won a Swedish mandate.

CONCLUSION

The Swedish party system is in a state of turbulence. The prolonged government negotiations after the national election of September 2018 finally broke up the traditional two-bloc structure that had dominated Swedish politics for decades. This turbulence in many ways spilled over to the European election, shaping it into more of a two-level election than a pure second-order election.

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United Kingdom: European Elections in the run-up to Brexit

KAAT SMETS

INTRODUCTION

The campaign for the 2019 European Parliamentary election in the United Kingdom did not kick off until the last moment as the country's government had not planned to take part in the election. The UK was originally scheduled to leave the European Union on the 29 March, but extensions of Article 50 – the legal and political process for leaving the European Union – in late March and mid-April meant that the UK had to participate in the European Parliamentary elections under EU law. Despite this, it was not until the 7 May that UK Prime Minister Theresa May conceded that the UK would indeed take part in the European election on the 23 May.

Brexit introduced a new issue-dimension in the UK after the 2016 EU referendum (Goodwin and Heath 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Cutting across the traditional lines of political conflict, both Remainers and Leavers can be found among supporters and Members of Parliament of the ruling Conservative Party and Labour, the main opposition party. Whilst the Conservative Party's official stance is pro-Leave, the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn has been less clear on its position. This difference between the two main parties was also visible during the campaign for the 2017 UK General Election (Mellon et al. 2018, Vaccari et al. forthcoming).

Because of the divisive nature of the European issue, the UK's two main parties considered holding EU elections in the run-up to Brexit problematic and both parties were eager to avoid this scenario. Against the backdrop of Brexit, the elections to the European Parliament were commonly considered a proxy for a new referendum on the question whether or not to leave the European Union, and if so how. This was also true for the local elections held on the 2 May in most of England, which saw the two main parties suffer a 'Brexit backlash' (Walker 2019). In these local elections, the Conservative Party led by Theresa May lost 1,330 out of 8,410 seats. Labour, the main opposition party led by Jeremy Corbyn, was not able to gain from the incumbent party's defeat and lost 84 councillors. The pro-Remain Liberal Democrats and Greens, on the other hand, made unexpectedly large gains of 705 and 194 seats respectively. Curiously, this result in favour of pro-Remain parties was interpreted by both the Conservative Party and Labour as a message from the electorate to 'get on and deliver Brexit'.

For the European elections on the 23 May, two new parties entered the political landscape. Nigel Farage, former leader of the right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP),

made a re-appearance with the Brexit Party. The one-issue party in favour of a no-deal Brexit, which has supporters instead of members and did not have a party manifesto, soon led the polls as many disappointed Conservative Party supporters were expected to switch allegiance to the Brexit Party. That very same Conservative Party was expected to see its worst ever performance amidst increasing turmoil within the party, talks about Theresa May's resignation as Prime Minister, changes in the party leadership, and a fourth vote in Parliament on Theresa May's Brexit deal with the EU.

The second new party, the centrist and pro-Remain Change UK – The Independent Group (CUK-TIG), was formed by MPs who resigned from the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. Unlike the Brexit Party, it never gained much momentum and was expected to receive a percentage of the popular vote in only single digits. Besides the Brexit Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens were expected to fare well in the election. Both parties were predicted to gain votes from pro-Remain Labour supporters disappointed by the fact that neither the party nor its leader Jeremy Corbyn ever unequivocally spoke out in favour of remaining in the European Union.

RESULTS

On May 23rd, voters in Great Britain and Ireland elected a total of seventy three Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The UK is divided into twelve regions, in which voters elect between three and ten MEPs depending on the population size of the region. Unlike national elections, where one candidate is elected in each of the UK's six-hundred-fifty constituencies using the first-past-the-post system, the elections for the European Parliament are held under a proportional system. The ballot in Great Britain features parties and names of candidates, and voters either select a party or an independent candidate. Seats are allocated in proportion to the share of votes cast for a party (but not for an individual running for that party) or for an independent candidate. Northern Ireland, on the other hand, uses Single Transferable Vote (STV) to elect its three MEPs and voters rank candidates according to their preference.

EU citizens living in the UK were not automatically registered to vote in the European Election and had to re-register by May 7th. The 3million, an organisation of EU citizens in the UK campaigning for them to retain their existing rights after Brexit, made a formal complaint to the Electoral Commission amid fears that many EU citizens would not be able to vote in the election. It argued that the two-step process in practice virtually deprived EU citizens of their only chance to voice an opinion on Brexit (O'Carroll, 2019).

After the polls opened on May 23rd the hashtag #DeniedMyVote soon trended on Twitter as many EU nationals were indeed not able to vote in the UK election to the European Parliament. Some EU citizens had not been aware they had to re-register, others had tried but their registration form was received too late or had gotten lost. The Electoral Commission pointed the finger at the UK Government, saying that it had already made a case for making registration easier in 2014 but that the

short notice of the UK's participation in the EP elections limited the time available to raise awareness of the rules for registration (Electoral Commission, 2019). As most European countries did not vote until Sunday May 26th, votes from the election on Thursday May 23rd were not counted until polls in other EU Member States were about to close. The days between the election and the counting of the votes saw Prime Minister Theresa May announcing her plan to resign on June 7th, triggering a leadership contest within the Conservative Party. After weeks – if not months – of turmoil, her resignation was not at all a surprise and many Conservative MPs soon announced their candidacy for the leadership of the party.

Turnout in the 2019 UK European Parliamentary election was 36.9%, up 1.5 percentage points in comparison to 2014. As expected, the new Brexit Party did well. It won 32% of the popular vote, got to send twenty-eight MEPs to Brussels, and was the largest party in nine out of twelve UK regions. The Liberal Democrats were the second largest party with 20% of the vote and fifteen MEPs (up fourteen in comparison to 2014). Not surprisingly, the LibDems topped the polls in pro-Remain London. The Green Party increased its number of MEPs by four, sending a total of seven to Brussels and garnering 12.1% of the popular vote.

Both Labour and the Conservatives were punished in the election. Labour placed third with 14.1% of the vote, down 11.3 percentage points in comparison to 2014. It now has ten MEPs, half of the number it had previously. The Conservative Party placed fifth with 9.1% of the vote – its worst performance in a national election in nearly two-hundreds years. It lost fifteen MEPs and currently has four seats in the European Parliament.

The two regional parties in Great Britain also won seats in the European Parliament. The Scottish National Party (SNP) garnered three seats (up one in comparison to 2014) and the Welsh Plaid Cymru kept its one seat. The three Northern Irish seats went to Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionist Party and the Alliance Party. It was the first time in history that the region would send three female MEPs to Brussels. Newcomer Change UK did not win any seats, and UKIP lost all of its twenty-four seats in the European Parliament after shifting to the far-right under the leadership of Gerard Batten.

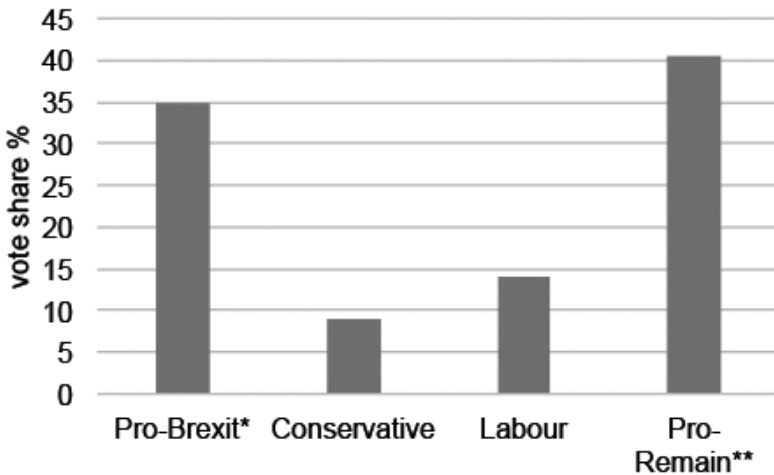
Table 1- Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections – United Kingdom

| PARTY | EP GROUP | VOTES (N) | VOTES (%) | SEATS | VOTES CHANGE FROM 2014 (%) | SEATS CHANGE FROM 2014 |
|--|----------|------------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| The Brexit Party | EFD | 5,248,533 | 31.6 | 29 | +31.6 | +29 |
| Liberal Democrat | ALDE | 3,367,284 | 20.3 | 16 | +13.4 | +15 |
| Labour | S&D | 2,347,255 | 14.1 | 10 | -11.3 | -10 |
| Green | G-EFA | 2,023,380 | 12.1 | 7 | +4.2 | +4 |
| Conservative | ECR | 1,512,147 | 9.1 | 4 | -14.8 | -15 |
| Scottish National Party | G-EFA | 594,553 | 3.6 | 3 | +1.1 | +1 |
| Plaid Cymru | G-EFA | 163,928 | 1.0 | 1 | +0.3 | |
| Sinn Féin | GUE-NGL | 126,951 | | 1 | | |
| Democratic Unionist Party | NI | 124,991 | | 1 | | |
| Alliance Party | ALDE | 105,928 | | 1 | | |
| Change UK | EPP | 571,846 | 3.4 | | +3.4 | |
| UK Independence Party | EFD/NI | 554,463 | 3.3 | | -24.2 | -24 |
| Ulster Unionist Party | ECR | 53,052 | | | | -1 |
| Total | | 16,794,311 | 100 | 73 | | |
| Turnout (%) | | | 36.9 | | | |
| Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%) | | | <i>none</i> | | | |

Vote share figures do not include Northern Ireland as it has a separate electoral system to the rest of the UK. Vote totals for Northern Ireland are first preferences only.

For parties running in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain, the vote share is just for England, Scotland and Wales, but the vote total is the sum of all GB votes plus the first preference votes in Northern Ireland.

Whilst the Brexit Party garnered the largest vote share in the election, it is clear that Brexit remains a highly divisive issue in the UK. Comparing the vote shares of the explicitly pro-Leave parties (the Brexit Party and UKIP) and the explicitly pro-Remain parties (the LibDems, Green Party, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and Change UK), the balance seems somewhat in favour of the pro-Remain parties with a total vote share of 40.4%. The pro-Leave parties together garnered 34.9% of the vote. The last word on Brexit has clearly not yet been said and the direction the UK takes in the next months will largely depend on who becomes the new Prime Minister.



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CISE – Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali

Directed by Lorenzo De Sio, the CISE – Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) is an inter-university research center established jointly by the LUISS Guido Carli University of Rome and the University of Florence. Its activity focuses on the study of elections and their institutional framework. The CISE carries out a range of research activities with different points of view on the electoral process: from the analysis of individual voting behavior (investigated through an independent, regular series of CATI/CAWI surveys) to analyses of election results based on aggregate data (also including the study of vote shifts and of electoral geography), to research on electoral systems and their related legislation. The CISE research activity is also carried out through partnerships with other Italian and international scholars, as well as with national and international research centers and research programmes. The activities of the CISE are systematically documented on the website at <https://cise.luiss.it/>.

Maastricht University /FASoS

The research institute of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) at Maastricht University studies societies and cultures as they unfolded during the modern and contemporary era in a radically interdisciplinary manner. At FASoS, we analyse the interrelationships of Europeanisation, globalisation, scientific and technological development, political change and cultural innovation. We are interested in how today's societies cope with and reflect these challenges in various ways. These could be artistic practices and practices of remembrance as well as specific forms of governance and political integration as well as strategies for managing knowledge, technologies and risks. While our research starts from today's problems, we have a strong interest in how the modern world came to be. In this sense, elections (and especially European elections) are a key component of our research, as they have the power to shape the future of our civil societies.