



FUTURE OF EUROPE OBSERVER

European Elections 2014

Europe has voted. Between May 22nd -25th 400 million people in 28 member states have been called to vote the 751 MEPs of the 8th European Parliament. This election is important as it is the first since the Treaty of Lisbon, the Parliament now has a number of important new powers. The new political majority will shape European legislation over the next five years and the Parliament - the only directly elected EU institution - is now a linchpin of the European decision-making system. The new FEO follows up on the results of the elections and their various effects on politics in Europe and the wider world.

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The Future of Europe Observer

The Future of Europe Observer accompanies the debate in the European Union on governance and regulation.

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EU Elections 2014. Was it different?

by Lorenzo Torti

"This time is different".

This was the slogan the European Parliament came up with to promote participation in the 2014 European elections. The slogan was mainly referring to the fact that the election results would determine the choice of the next President of the European Commission, as well as to the increased powers obtained by the European Parliament with the Lisbon Treaty, which would make vote-casting more attractive to European citizens. But was this time actually different?

As in previous European elections, national campaigns largely focused on domestic issues. The difference was that, after the Lisbon Treaty and the economic governance changes that followed the financial and economic crisis, many national issues actually acquired a European dimension, as they are now shaped at EU level. A perfect example of this is budgetary policy. The austerity vs. anti-austerity debate which dominated most national campaigns, while focusing on a domestic perspective, was forced to address choices to

be made at the EU level. In this respect, it can be argued that increased EU integration is de facto pushing the EU inside national political debates. There is of course another dimension. Issues such as immigration were inevitably also on the agenda, but were largely addressed from a populist and at times xenophobic perspective. This does not represent news compared to previous elections and it is not likely to change in the future, as populist, Euro-sceptic parties are always going to ride the consensus waves coming from popular fears.

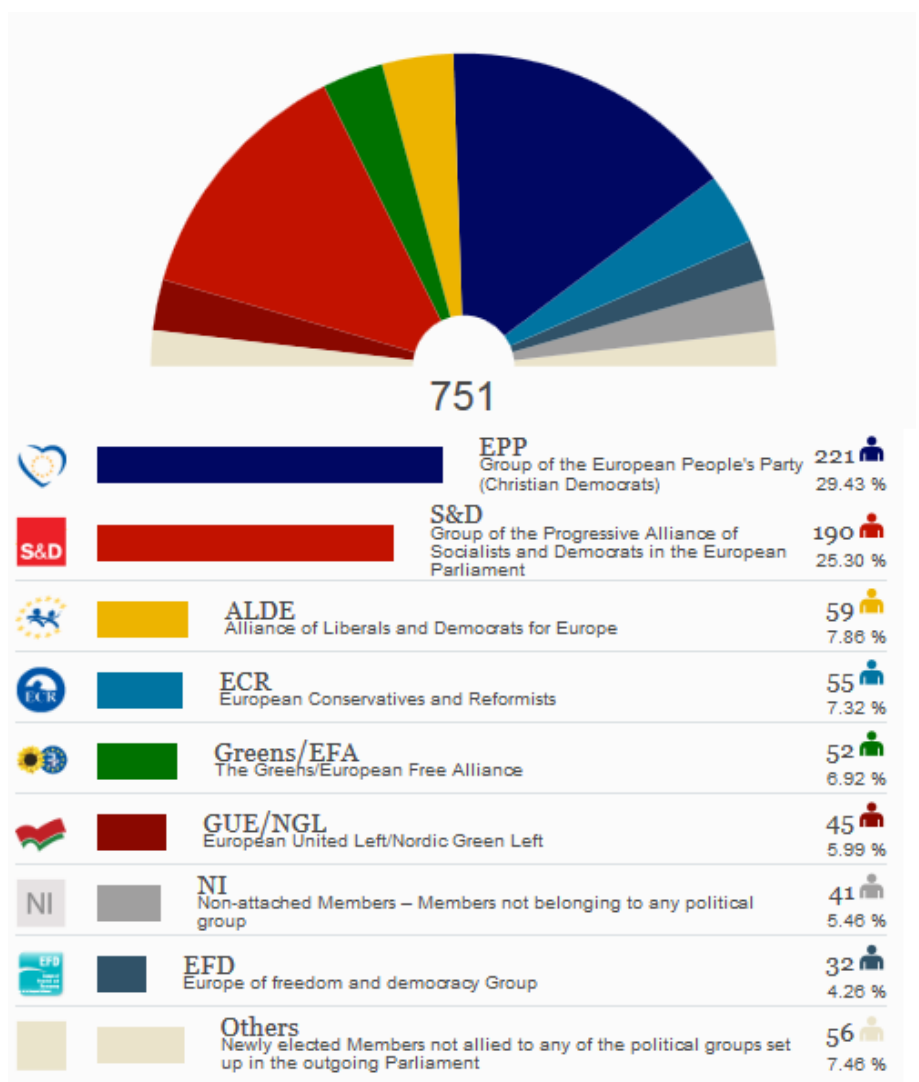
Campaign themes aside, the key feature of this campaign was surely the introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten system. Article 17(7) of the Lisbon Treaty says that "taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting 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".

Following an extensive interpretation of this provision, the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Green Party and the European Left all nominated lead candidates for the Commission presidency. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD), both Eurosceptic groups, did not put forward any lead candidate, as they thought it would legitimize a "Europeanization" of the elections and a federalist vision of Europe.

The Spitzenkandidaten campaigned all over Europe and some national lists put a foreign name on their campaign symbols, something unthinkable only a few years ago. In addition, several pan-European televised debates took place, where candidates confronted each other on European issues. In this regard, the Spitzenkandidaten approach surely helped to give a more European dimension to the campaign. That said, it is debatable whether it has brought about a real change from a substantial perspective. The parties' manifestos, as in the previous elections, seemed quite vague and generally fell short of specific proposals, due to the fact that they were still the result of compromises between national parties. In addition, the televised debates can hardly be defined as a success, as national broadcasters in key Member States relegated them to secondary channels. In fact, public opinion and the national media did not seem to give particular importance to the Spitzenkandidaten and the potential implications of the new system.

The Spitzenkandidaten approach undoubtedly represents a step forward towards a "Europeanization" of the European elections. However, whether it will cause a major institutional

change, de facto politicizing the process behind the choice of the EU executive, remains to be seen. A major precedent will be set in the coming weeks. The EPP came out as the winner of the elections, maybe not from a political perspective but certainly from a numerical one. On 27 May, the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament gave the green light to Jean-Claude Juncker, the EPP lead candidate, to attempt to form the required majority in the hemicycle. However, on the same day national leaders clarified that they were keeping their options open and gave the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, a mandate to start consultations on the choice of the next Commission President. Juncker has the backing of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and of a number of other leaders, but faces strong opposition from others, namely British Prime Minister David Cameron. Negotiations within the European



Turnout 43,09 %

Results of the 2014 European elections

Council are therefore going to be difficult and may very well result in the nomination of a figure from outside the Spitzenkandidaten, as the names of Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt, the respective lead candidates of PES and ALDE, are also controversial within the European Council as seen by many as federalists.

Should national leaders decide to nominate an alternative candidate, conflict between the European Parliament and the European Council will be inevitable. The European Parliament would most likely reject the European Council's choice, causing an institutional impasse. In this situation, it will be interesting to see which institution "blinks first", the key outcome being which precedent is set with regard to the interpretation of Article 17(7) of the Lisbon Treaty: A

precedent which will be valid for years (or decades) to come.

Coming back to the original question, was it different? Yes, it was different. The EU in general, and the European Parliament in particular, have increased their competences over the last years and are therefore more present in national political debates. However, whether the 2014 European elections will be remembered as a milestone of European integration will depend on the way the next Commission President is chosen. Should the Spitzenkandidaten system be endorsed, the European elections would be transformed into the indirect election of the Commission President, de facto politicizing the Commission and opening up a whole new set of scenarios for the EU.



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A Eurosceptic Earthquake? The Influence of Europe's Opposition after the European Elections 2014. New Weather Conditions?

by Malte T. Zabel

"Eurosceptic 'earthquake' rocks the EU" – this is how the BBC headed its online report on the recent European elections, thereby accepting a label French "National Front" (FN)-leader Marine LePen gave on the night of May 25. And indeed, forecasts which had predicted a Europe-wide success of populist, radical and anti-EU parties have become, in the main reality. In France, the FN posted a landslide victory with an overall result of 24.95 percent, catapulting it to the top of the array of French parties. The triumph of the "United Kingdom Independence Party" (UKIP), whose leader Nigel Farage full-throatedly calls for a British EU exit, was equally spectacular: 26.77 percent, for the first time in more than one hundred years neither Labour nor the Tories won a British election. In Italy, Beppe Grillo's "Five Star"-Movement, an anti-establishment party prominently criticizing the EU without offering any constructive agenda, became the second strongest party with a share of 21.13 percent of the Italian votes. And the

rightist and extremely EU-critical "Danish Peoples Party" (DPP) even made 26.6 percent, clearly winning the Danish elections. Indeed, these are just the most striking examples of populism and euroscepticism on the rise in the European elections and several more could be enumerated. As they caused the EP to be much more polarized than ever before it is not astonishing that many pro-European policy makers found themselves in a rather unhinged mood when the vote tally was declared. Tellingly, it was the EP's president himself, the German Martin Schulz, who called May 25 with reference to the FN-result a "sad day for Europe".

The figures indeed indicate that the EP has to face a new challenge. After the recent European elections it is confronted with a new quantity of MEPs from parties being at best eurosceptic and at worst eurohostile. However, though commentators and politicians fear a new rightist, euro-critical and populist force in the EP, this does

not necessarily signify a parliament in which Europe's opposition will permanently be able to affect political business.

Lessons from the Past

Wielding influence in the EP is first and foremost dependent on the ability to form ad hoc coalitions, which in turn requires a certain degree of coherence within the coalescing groups. Considering their poor historical record, it is at least questionable whether the new armada of far-right eurosceptics around Marine LePen and Geert Wilders will be able to meet these criteria.

So-called or self-declared eurosceptics have been in the EP from the very beginning. They have entered the EP in waves, starting with communists and nationally inclined conservatives in the 1970s, thereafter right extremists in the 1980s and some single-issue anti-EU parties since the 1994 elections. Over 30 years, from the first European elections in 1979 until the elections in 2009, they have not increased their combined share by more than 2 percent (Leconte 2010: 130). Even if one takes into account that after May 2014 it is now about one fifth to one quarter of the EP which can be attributed to the eurosceptic spectre, it remains doubtful whether extreme right-wing eurosceptic MEPs will be capable of forming cohesive and homogenous alignments. Due to numerous struggles amongst them, they so far have nearly always failed in this respect. Only one amalgamation — the “Group of the European Right,” consisting of the FN, the “Italian Social Movement” (MSI), the Greek “National Political Union” (EPEN), and the “Northern Irish Ulster Unionist Party” (UUP) — could survive a whole period as an official parliamentary group, and this is now more than 30 years ago (1989–1994). All other attempts ended in irresolvable quarrels, which were of a rather embarrassing nature for the participants involved. For instance, the “Technical Faction of the European Right,” built up after the elections in 1989, broke up because German MEPs of the “Republicans” (REP) annoyed their neo-fascist Italian colleagues by emphasizing the genuine “German character of South Tirol”. While the EP remained without any

official right-wing group in the 1994 to 1999 term, another experiment, the political group “Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty” (ITS) — set up in 2007 — also turned out to be a complete miscue and eventually dissolved only months after its inception. Actually planned as a trial of bringing together extreme right-wing movements from Eastern and Western Europe, the poor success of the undertaking instead remarkably featured the high degree of diversity of far-right European parties and shed light on irreconcilable differences amongst them. Five Romanian delegates left the group as a reaction of xenophobic accusations made by the Italian MEP Alessandra Mussolini, Benito Mussolini's granddaughter, stating Romanians in Italy were mostly characterized by their propensity for criminality. The eventual withdrawal of the Romanian PRM members finally made the alliance lose its group status, and thereby evaporating it completely (Hartleb 2012: 135f.).

New ZEI Discussion paper C 224/2014

Christina Wunder: Communication and Campaigning in European Citizens' Initiatives

One million signatures from at least seven European Member States: Fulfilling the conditions of the European Citizens' Initiative requires a communication campaign, which manages to reach and touch the citizens, as well as to encourage them to act. This empirical study analyses, which methods in this regard are successful or rather counterproductive. It comes to the conclusion that a variety of factors are decisive, and that these factors can differ in their manifestation – such as the availability of financial resources, the emotional potential of the issue or a sophisticated network of supporters.

Download: http://www.zei.uni-bonn.de/dateien/discussion-paper/dp_c224_wunder.pdf



ZEI Fellows invited to WDR Europaforum

As in past years, the ZEI Class of 2014 was invited to attend this one-day event at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin and listen to interesting speeches and debates on different European themes about the future of Europe. The event at the WDR Europaforum was part of the excursion to the German capital in May.



ZEI Class 2014 meets EP president Martin Schulz, May 2014

After 2009, because of experiences like those described above, the notorious extreme right-wing parties (FN, FPÖ, “Northern League” [LN], VB) did not accomplish a merge into a new official EP group (for what at least 25 MEPs from seven member states at minimum are needed). Will they be able to do so now?

In the run-up to the elections Cas Mudde, a scholar at the University of Georgia and an expert on radical right parties in Europe, deemed this very unlikely and was “pretty certain that there will be no official far right party group in the new EP” (Mudde 2014). At first glance, this judgment appeared surprising having in mind that Marine LePen and Geert Wilders had announced already in November 2013, accompanied by broad media coverage, a shimmering revival of the so far meaningless right-wing party grouping “European Alliance for Freedom” (EAF) with VVE and FN at its center, which was widely construed as a serious declaration of war to the established groups in the EP. Given that FN and VVE alone already have managed to get 28 seats in the assembly, their mere quantity suggests a high degree of influence on the EP’s daily business. Yet, it is still uncertain whether they will form an official group, as this still requires MEPs from seven different EU member states. Already before May 25, FPÖ, LN and VB had signified that they are not averse to joining this alignment and can therefore be considered as participants.

But up to now it remains unclear who else might jump on this bandwagon. Possible additional allies originally were the “Danish People’s Party” (DPP), the “Slovak National Party” (SNS) and the “Sweden Democrats” (SD), but these possibilities have evaporated in the meantime. DPP has just recently refused to join, SNS has not made it into the assembly and SD, which has always been reluctant officially abstained from the alliance. For Wilders and Le Pen this implies the need to reach out either to extremist parties, which have already left democratic conduct, or to more moderate organizations. On further reflection both ways turn out to be non-options. The first would connote concluding business with parties like the Hungarian “Jobbik” or the Greek “Golden Dawn,” which are even for Wilders and Le Pen far too radical given their openly flaunted anti-Semitism and their affinity for violence. The second necessitates getting closer to the “Finns Party” and — as there is still one nationality missing for group status — the “UK Independence Party” (UKIP). But Nigel Farage, UKIP’s powerful leader, has made no pretense of his unwavering denial to this idea considering his UKIP an organization completely different from FN and VVE. In view of these circumstances, Wilders’s and Le Pen’s chances to have their own full-fledged EP group are indeed far from optimum.

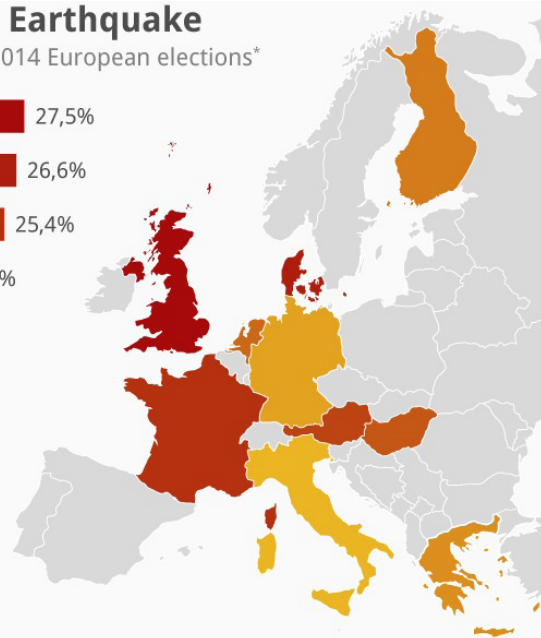
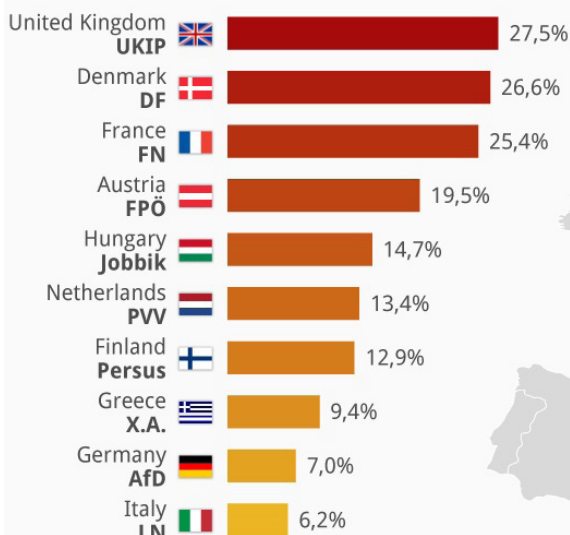
Dragging National Politics

Regardless of whether EAF will achieve group status in the end and despite the probably negligible role of many new MEPs when it comes to own parliamentary activities, far-right eurosceptics can be expected to have greater political strength and also indirect effect on European politics after the May 2014 elections. Kietz and von Ondarza are to be agreed with in their judgment that the rise of right-wing eurosceptics in the European elections will paradoxically have its greatest effects not in the parliament itself but in the Council of Ministers (Kietz/von Ondarza 2014: 3). Most of the currently aspiring parties who could send a remarkable number of new MEPs to Brussels and Strasbourg — be it FN, VVE, or even UKIP — are led by prominent and charismatic leaders who all have an oratorical profile. Their goal is not to amend directives or to act as European lawmakers. To them it is much more appealing to find a broad audience at home and to exert pressure on the domestic political arena. One can already observe that some European administrations from time to time leave their original track, because they see the need to reel in voters which would otherwise turn their hand to eurosceptic movements. For instance, David Cameron's popular announcement of holding a referendum on Britain's EU membership until 2017 is well-interpreted as an approach to hold some critical Tories on board and to give not too much space to the invigorated UKIP. Quite the same phenomenon could be noticed in the Netherlands, when the coalition government published a "subsidiarity review" in June 2013, which said that the Netherlands would be convinced that "the time of an 'ever closer union' in every pos-

sible policy area" was behind it (Government of the Netherlands 2013). Moves to reinstall border controls in Denmark and France also serve as examples for the significant influence of eurosceptics in national politics producing actual political results. Furthermore, the discussion around José Manuel Barroso's succession as President of the

Far-Right Leads Eurosceptic Earthquake

Performance of eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European elections*



European Commission qualifies as an example of eurosceptics dragging national politics as well. David Cameron's threat of a British exit in case of Jean Claude Juncker's election and attempts by the French president Francois Hollande to promote his fellow party member Pierre Moscovici against all prior agreements plus the Lisbon Treaty, are to be seen as attempts to score with nationalistic inclined electorates. Against this backdrop, established European policy makers need to find a way to deal with the new strength of their opponents – and they would be well advised to seek a more profound strategy than just ignoring them, assuming alien positions or exercising awkward demonization. Euroscepticism is not a disease that can be extinguished by the right medication. Instead, it is a consequence of manifold causal factors (from utilitarian evaluations to identity-based caveats), which might all be catalyzed by the euro crisis but which at its core are also a result of an overdue politicization of European integration. Taking into consideration that the crisis and the political discussions coming

along with it are complex, it will be a deficient approach to attack the populist parties and their leaders only at the populist flank. As the debate on Europe is a serious one, those who want to be its protagonists should face their challengers with arguments and not just stigmatization.

Further Readings

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- Kietz, D./von Ondarza, N.: *Europaskeptiker im Europäischen Parlament. In Brüssel isoliert und zerstritten, treiben sie die nationale Europapolitik vor sich her*, *SWP-Aktuell* 7, Februar 2014, available at: http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2014A07_ktz_orz.pdf.



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A view from DownUnder

by Sally Watkins

The complex nature of the EU is challenging not only for Europeans. The rest of the world also struggles to comprehend European integration and the consequences for relations with the rest of the state-centric world. ‘Outsiders’ deal with two conflicting instincts – grudging respect at the way EU member states have increased their international economic weight through pooling their sovereignty and bemusement at the infighting and inability of ‘old powers’ to fail to adapt to a changing world order.

As EU Commissioners are sworn to be independent they often utter their opinion with the disclaimer ‘from the country I know best’. I provide here a view of the EU from the outside and in particular ‘from the country I know best, Australia.’ As Europe no longer seems to be teetering on the edge of ruin it is important to discuss whether the economic challenges and crises over recent years has led to the deterioration of the EU’s external image. Is Europe still credible in the eyes of the world?

The results of the European Parliament elections demonstrated that the perception of Europe has been somewhat dented internally. As in Europe, the recent election has been viewed from the outside almost purely in terms of the rise of Euroscepticism. A brief look at global reporting about the elections reveals that either the EU elections were not mentioned, or the coverage was about the elections in the Ukraine.

When mentioned the focus was upon the rise of Euroscepticism. We have watched from afar during the ‘European crisis’ and although the EU remains the most ambitious and successful attempt of voluntary cooperation between states, the recent crisis has also dented the EU’s international reputation: Reinforcing the view of Europe’s relative decline.

Global power shifts have led to increasing interdependence and interconnectedness. Australia and the EU are like-minded partners who face many similar challenges: illegal migration, climate change and dealing with the rise of new global powers to name just a few. As we have similar interests it is important for both sides that, as the center of gravity shifts to the Pacific, Europe re-examines its position in a rapidly changing world. The EU needs to present itself as a global actor capable of adapting and changing in order to cope with new global realities.

From an Australian perspective we look forward to the increasing global importance of the Asia-Pacific region. Never quite feeling at home in Asia we have always looked to Europe for partners. However recent acceptance and appreciation for the opportunities Asia offers has meant a realignment of Australian foreign policy and self-awareness. Relatively unscathed following the financial crisis we have watched with smugness the struggles and divisions of the EU, whilst ourselves riding the wave of Chinese de-

mand for raw materials.

It is necessary that the EU takes a critical view of what type of role it can play – is it a purely economic one or can it successfully export values such as freedom and tolerance? Despite the recent years of crisis the EU's image as a significant international player, especially in economic matters, is still sound. However, the image of the EU and its relative decline has been reinforced in the Asia-Pacific during the crisis and recent events in Ukraine. The EU must be seen to be credible and united on matters occurring on its own borders, let alone the rest of the world. In foreign media the EU is often depicted as paralyzed,

unable to take definitive and meaningful action. This is a direct reflection of the lack of a common definition of interests at the EU level, leading the inability to take effective external action.

The view from Down Under is that the EU elections change little for us; the EU needs to define common effectual foreign policy interests in order to remain relevant and influential in an increasingly changing multi-polar world.



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