

European Elections: The results are in!

26/05/2014

The 2014 European Elections are over. Italy was the last EU Member State to close the polls, yesterday at 23h00 (Sunday 25 May). After months of speculation, we finally have an indication of popular support for the European Union (EU) after years of crisis. In this blog Acumen gives an overview of the results and looks at how they could influence policy-making in the EU over the next five years.

European centre-right can claim victory

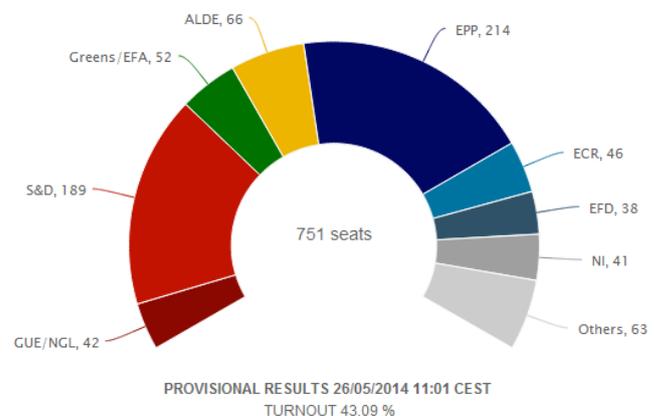
The definitive results will only be available later this weekⁱ. But, with the majority of the official results in, the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) looks certain of victory. The current results give the group a total of 214 seats (out of a total of 751). However, the EPP's victory must be viewed in relative terms. The fact that the Group lost 60 seats compared to the current Parliament is hardly cause for celebration. The second placed Socialists and Democrats (S&D) Group also lost seats, and now numbers 189 MEPs (down from 196). The liberal ALDE group lost substantially, currently holding 66 seats (down from 83). Within the ALDE, in particular, the British Liberal Democrats were hit hard, losing all but one of the 11 seats they won in 2009.ⁱⁱ Surprisingly, the Greens did not lose many seats, with 52 seats in the new Parliament (down from 57). The mildly Eurosceptic European Conservatives & Reformists (ECR) group lost 11 seats (now on 46), primarily due to losses from the British conservatives, its biggest member party.

Eurosceptics the real winners?

The widely predicted Eurosceptic breakthrough has indeed come to pass, fulfilling expectations. Altogether, about a quarter of the next European Parliament's MEPs will be Eurosceptic (excluding the ECR), with mostly Eurosceptic 'Non-Attached' (NI) and 'Other' MEPs securing 104 seats. The current members of the far-right Eurosceptic Freedom & Democracy (EFD) group had good election, and are 38 seats (up from 31). On the other end of the spectrum, the far-left European United Left (GUE/NGL) made substantial gains as

well, and now has 42 seats (up from 35). The GUE/NGL's success can be largely explained by the gains of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), now the leading party in Greece.ⁱⁱⁱ

This rise of Eurosceptic MEPs is notably visible in some bigger EU Member States. In France, Marine Le Pen's far-right Front National obtained 26% of the vote, ahead of the centre-right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP).^{iv} In the UK, the Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), led by MEP Nigel Farage, secured 27.5% of the vote. This secures UKIP as the biggest British party in the European Parliament, ahead of Labour.^v In Italy, the Eurosceptic Five Star Movement (M5S) obtained 21% of the vote, becoming the second party after the social democrats (PD). In Germany, the Eurosceptic AfD made a smaller breakthrough, with 7% of the vote.



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However, not all went to plan for Eurosceptics across the EU: in the Netherlands, the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders did not gain as many seats as had been expected, and remains on 4 MEPs.^{vi}

For pro-Europeans, perhaps the only other crumb of comfort is that, for the first time ever, voter turnout did not decline. That said, an increase in turnout from 43% in 2009 to 43.1% coupled with the rise in support for Eurosceptic parties is hardly an indication of popular support for the EU.^{vii}

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A Eurosceptic bloc?

The key question now is whether the disparate Eurosceptic groups will be able to organise themselves in a coherent manner. This should become apparent in the coming weeks and will have a major impact on their ability to influence the policy-making process. Until now, these MEPs have lacked the required voting discipline to form a coherent bloc, and have had difficulties forming political groups, which are crucial to asserting influence within the Parliament.

A united Eurosceptic bloc in the European Parliament is still unlikely. UKIP has repeatedly ruled out cooperating with the Front National.^{viii} However, a new right-wing Eurosceptic group next to the EFD seems likely, with the Front National in France, PVV in the Netherlands, LN in Italy, FPÖ in Austria, VB in Belgium, SD in Sweden, and SNS in Slovakia expected to work as allies.^{ix} This means that the next European Parliament could count three hard-Eurosceptic groups: EFD, GUE/NGL, and a new group rallied around the Front National.

The impact of the vote on the new Parliament

What is the impact of this weekend's results on the new European Parliament? Our prognosis is that the decision-making dynamics in the Parliament will change significantly compared to the last legislature. The "big three" – the EPP, S&D and ALDE-- will have to work together more effectively than in the past, as well as look out for

Key sources of info on the next European Parliament

- [EuropeanVoice](#)
- [EurActiv](#)
- [EUAgenda](#)
- [Twitter: #EP2014](#)

other partners to form majorities on specific issues. The effective functioning of this informal "grand coalition" will have a major influence on how quickly important pieces of legislation pass through the new Parliament - particularly if the wave of new non-attached MEPs do manage to cooperate with each other. Other questions like which parties land the chairmanship of key committees, are likely to have a significant bearing

on the Parliament's role as co-legislator over the next five years.

Influence on policy dossiers

Important policy dossiers could be influenced by a polarised European Parliament. This applies for example to the EU-US trade agreement (TTIP). If and when the EU and US negotiators reach agreement, the European Parliament will need to approve the deal. With the far-left GUE/NGL and far-right parties such as the Front National opposed to the process, a highly critical Greens group, and many sceptical MEPs within the bigger parties, there is a legitimate question as to whether the deal could gain majority backing.^x In other areas such as energy policy, it remains to be seen whether the make-up of the new Parliament will prevent it from exerting as much influence as in the past.

Timeline for the coming weeks

- **Week of 26 May:** Final Results
 - Conference of presidents of the EP meets on election results
 - EU leaders meet to discuss Commission presidency candidate
- **Week of 2 June:**
 - Formation of the new European Parliament political groups
 - MEPs express committee preferences
- **2-23 June:** Nomination & election of group chairs, decision on group constitutions (NB timings differ from group to group)
- **26-27 June:** Nomination of Commission president by the Council
- **1-3 July:** 1st plenary new European Parliament
 - Plenary vote on EP (Vice-) President(s)
 - Plenary vote on EP committees' composition
- **14-17 July:** EP votes on Commission president candidate proposed by Council

The 'Spitzenkandidaten' for the Commission

A key issue on which the composition of the next European Parliament can theoretically have an impact is the selection of the next president of the European Commission.

Despite the best efforts of the Parliament to promote its new role in the process, national leaders still appear deliberately evasive when it

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comes to confirming whether one of the Parliament-nominated “Spitzenkandidaten” will eventually get the Commission’s top job. The European treaties leave room for manoeuvre for the Council, as it only has to “take into account” the Parliament’s election results when nominating its candidate. Council president, Herman Van Rompuy, has repeatedly uttered personal reservations about the ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ model^{xi}. Meanwhile, German chancellor, Angela Merkel, has recently emphasised that the next Commission president needs a clear majority in the Council.^{xii}

Candidate from the outside?

It is therefore still quite possible that none of the ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ will become Commission president. An alternative often mentioned in this respect is IMF Director Christine Lagarde.^{xiii} However, even if one of the ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ is chosen, this will be part of a bigger bargain, in which the identity of the next president of the European Council (to succeed Council president Herman Van Rompuy in November) and the make-

up of the next College of European Commissioners, come into play.

A new Parliament with no clear majority may give the Council the leeway it needs to push through an alternative candidate. Although if this is the case, we can expect the Parliament to delay its approval process, if only to save face in the short-term and bolster its negotiating position on other issues further down the line.

All will be revealed in the next few months. The European Council plans to nominate a candidate for Commission President on 26-27 June. The European Parliament is then expected to vote on this candidate from the 14-17 July. Stay tuned for more updates the coming weeks!



ⁱ Because of preferential voting and electoral thresholds, in some EU countries the definitive results will only be published later this week

ⁱⁱ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/26/lib-dems-european-elections-votes-nick-clegg>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/country-results-it-2014.html>

^{iv} Dods EP Elections 2014, 26 May 2014, 8.00h

^v <http://www.bbc.com/news/events/vote2014>

^{vi} Dods EP Elections 2014, 26 May 2014, 8.00h

^{vii} <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014-live/high-election-turnout-averted-big-disaster-302383>

^{viii} <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/national-front-not-worried-about-finding-anti-eu-allies-parliament-301702>

^{ix} <http://www.electio2014.eu/fr/pollsandsenarios/pollsblog>

^x <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/05/20/european-parliament-elections-a-final-look-at-the-polls/>

^{xi} http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/next-commission-chief-could-be-outsider-van-rompuy-says-302219?utm_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm_campaign=976ddfdb01-newsletter_daily_update&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bab5f0ea4e-976ddfdb01-245763365

^{xii} <http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/europawahl/schulz-oder-juncker-merkel-sieht-wahlsieger-noch-nicht-als-kommissionschef/9918152.html>

^{xiii} <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/diplomats-no-matter-who-wins-eu-elections-favourite-lagarde-302251>