

In the Aftermath of the European Elections: The European Left Facing New Challenges

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Documentation of a European Seminar organised by transform! europe and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in June 2019



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VIENNA SEMINAR, 12 JUNE 2019

Introduction

By **Angelina Giannopoulou** (editor), is an Athens-based political scientist and facilitator of transform! europe in the programmes "European Integration and the strategic perspectives of the radical Left" and "The UK and Europe".

This seminar, as a cornerstone of the strategic cooperation between transform! and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, takes place every year and has two fundamental goals. The one is to debate strategic questions that concern the Left in Europe and the new born challenges we face, while the second is to create the space where different voices of the left could be heard and a dialogue -needed more than ever- could be born.

This is not an easy task. Firstly, because identifying the strategic questions of each particular period is even itself a matter of debate and results from a process of reflection of the political left. Not the whole spectrum of the left agrees upon the critical questions of our times or the challenges we face, or at least on the prioritization. Secondly, it's not an easy task as long as – to be honest – not everyone is "interested" to engage himself/herself on a dialogue with people who disagrees with. The unity of the left is always a matter of dispute and who belongs or not to the left (or what is the left today) is a polemic subject as well...

Therefore, though transform -as a network of political foundations and intellectual organisations has much more leverage (in comparison to a political party or a coalition of parties) to initiate processes of political and theoretical debate of the left and networking of the various left actors, it likewise faces difficulties in doing so when the political climate has left us numb and hunted. And I think that it is such a political climate that has been shaped after the results of the European Elections. It was self-explanatory that this years' seminar would focus on the European Elections, the evaluation of the results, what do they mean for the Left, the reasons behind the electoral performance of the Left, the new political landscape that is being shaped, what coalitions can emerge within the new European Parliament etc.

Consequently, organising a seminar of evaluation and critical reflection right after the elections, while all political parties of the left are still digesting the results and interpreting the reasons of the disappointing performance of the Left,

was quite an important step for a process of honest self-critique and the re-booting of the radical left in Europe.

We tried this seminar to be based in 5 pillars:

1. An overview of the electoral results, the numbers and what do these numbers mean, in comparison with the EP 2014, and within the context of a Europe that has been changed a lot for the last 5 years.
2. Selected country cases, the interpretation of the electoral results in a series of countries. Most certainly, it would have been impossible to include all the 28 EU countries in a three-days seminar, however presenting 12 different countries was quite an achievement. We chose countries that their results we consider as critical in shaping the political barometer within the EU in various aspects, but also countries where our member & observer organisations could provide us with thorough analyses. This publication includes selected contributions, some of them with a broader perspective and content and others with a focus on national realities and electoral results.
3. The performance of the Far Right from a European perspective, analysing its increase in numbers, but also in influence by shaping the public agenda. Analysing the power the far right has gained through its national representations and how all these national representations (institutional dimension) have build a whole public image for the Far Right as united political force.
4. The Radical Left as a whole. Interpreting the results of the Left as a European force, without distinguishing between the Europhile and the Eurosceptic wing, since it is obvious that the left in total lost. GUE/NGL is the smallest group of the European Parliament with 5.06% and 39 seats. What are the reasons behind the defeat, though the Left was presented through different political strategies (plan a, plan b, left populism, strategy of alliances, identity politics)?
5. The strategy of the Left in Europe, cornerstones of a common left strategy. Can the Left in Europe work together and present an actual strategy that could inspire the people and draw a path beyond the "business as

usual" of neoliberalism and the far right and neoconservative anger and despair? How would be the next day for the left?

6. Political conclusions of the debate and future perspectives, meaning, in which context do we put this particular seminar. How its conclusions could be communicated to the relevant actors? By what means the intellectual organisations of the Left can be useful for the political parties and the party militants? How this cooperation should look like?

Despite the defeat, we shall not believe that the war is over. The Left has been suffered severe defeats through the decades, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall. We shall not forget that the past five years have been the period of the breakdown of the system of political representation and we were part of it, even as its minor player. We don't have the privilege now to go to pieces from the left melancholy. We need desperately to reorganise ourselves, our parties and think about our European political family -if we want to have one- because the fight against the Far Right and the climate crisis is a No1 priority. We must work collectively on building the Left in countries were we are completely disappeared. I'm talking about countries from Italy to Hungary. We cannot sit and wait for the Left to be born. We should use our forces and our international solidarity to make a plan with measurable steps on creating left massive organisations in these countries. We shall start reflecting not only upon what we lost in Germany or Spain, but also on what we continuously lose in so many countries of Europe.

This publication is the material outcome of the seminar and aims to serve as the documentation of a political debate that was held right after the results of the European Elections in 2019 among people from 14 countries, 13 women and 17 men. More materials of the seminar can be found in transform's webpage, as well as in our page on facebook.

Future Perspectives of the European Family of the Political Left

By **Gabi Zimmer**, is a former member of the European Parliament for Die Linke in Germany and the former President of GUE/ NGL (the left group in the E.P.).

Find here Gabi Zimmer's talk at the European seminar organised by transform! europe and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 12-14 June 2019, reflecting the new political conditions in the aftermath of the European elections.

source: Multimedia Centre European Parliament, 16/04/2019, online: multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/press-conference-by-gabriele-zimmer-gue-ngl-press-briefing_1171500-V_rv;

Given the harsh losses of Social Democrats, Conservatives and Leftists, one may quickly be tempted to hide behind a general trend: Global warming / climatic disaster is seen by many people as such a danger that they turn to the Greens, who by nature with the climate – and environmental protection are connected. The result of the elections to the European Parliament reveals how meaningless the left has become in the European debate. It is not just an expression of a current failure, uninspired election campaigns in several EU member states, problematic messages, false targeting, internal struggles, fragmentation between leftist parties, wings, movements, actors.

The loss of hundreds of thousands of voters has deeper causes and is an expression of long-term failure.

- The causes and long-term consequences of the failure of Eastern European state socialism for the entire left in Europe have not been addressed to date. Not only the Eastern European and East German Communists and Socialists failed with their claim of a society alternative to capitalism, even the West European Old Left did not draw any profound conclusions and could not oppose their de facto demise in the largest Western European economies with convincing alternatives. As a result, the Left as a whole could hardly set any forward-looking messages – or better said – any new European visions from the left perspective. To this day they are both culturally and linguistically like a fossil of the last century.
- Only a few impulses emanated from the European Left Party and the GUE/ NGL faction in the EP for a much-needed debate on common goals, strategies and

initiatives. Only a few MEPs started an initiative to reclaim the Manifesto of Ventotene. They asked left-wing intellectuals from several EU member states to reassess the Manifesto and so initiated discussions on the question “What future for the EU?”. Yes, the initiatives to organize Forums in Marseille and last in year in Bilbao were important first steps. In my opinion it is now time to broaden the space, the issues of discussion and of course the participants. It would be useful to include other progressive forces and social movements from the very beginning. Generally speaking, the left failed to discuss their vision of another, socialist Europe, or to clarify their relationship with the EU. In your view, what role should the EU play in the face of global challenges such as the climate catastrophe, global warming, global migration flows and global sustainability development? How is the left continuing to deal with globalization? How is the relationship to develop between the EU and nation states, to the regions and municipalities, to Europe and to the one world in which we live?

- The disaster of the left of Europe, which finds its reflection in the result of the EU election, can best be described with the fact that only one representative from the Czech Republic stands for the East European Left in the EP. But the movements in Spain and Greece, which arose just a few years ago in the wake of the global financial crisis, also lost massive support in the process of their party formation and active participation in parliamentary structures or government work. The attempt to found a more left-leaning populist movement from within a left-wing party, as in France, and thus to score points, fell short of its own expectations. The non-reformed communist parties, with their messages tied to national interests, their stale appearance, and the reduction of their target group work, especially to industrial workers, have lost touch with new socially and culturally different groups. The Scandinavian green-left parties, who could face the challenges much more consistently than modern feminist and ecological parties, continue to have a reputation for rejecting the EU and the euro in principle. The left in Germany again found it difficult to reach important voter groups such as indus-

trial workers, the unemployed and the socially excluded. The party was unable to convey how it intends, on the one hand, to criticize existing conditions in the EU, while at the same time developing a vision of the future for the European Union from the left.

Only Bloco de Esquerda (Portugal), AKEL (Cyprus), Left-Wing Alliance of Denmark and PTB (Belgium) were able to defend their position, to win one new seat or to join the European Parliament. We need now a radical analysis and an open debate. What is necessary now, how can we face the challenges of global warming, the rise of right-extremists and nationalists, what can we do to mobilize for peace and for sustainable development, to fight poverty and social exclusion, for gender democracy and against any kind of discrimination? We have to start to work not only for another Europe, but for a socialist Europe.

Our Irish friends from Sinn Féin said, that they try to analyze why they failed in the election. But their problem is not to know what the problem is. They got a lot of different answers ...

As I said before: we got now the receipt for failing for a long time, underestimating the European issue, missing concrete strategies in our electoral campaigns, long lasting mistakes. Leaderships of some national left parties and the European Party as well were far away from professional organized electoral campaigns. Voters missed empathy and that left in Europe worked with heart and soul for a left vision in Europe and towards changing the balance of power in favor to left and progressive forces in EU member states. I would like to be very clear addressing the European Left Party: It was very late to nominate Spitzenkandidaten. I understand, that there are different positions to take part or not. Okay. But, when there is a decision to ask two comrades to go in the hell and to do the best in the interest of left parties, then they need better support. They need all our solidarity, a clear strategy, an excellent organized campaign. It was not because of our candidates that the European Left couldn't mobilize more voters! I was missing leaders of the EL in some of the events, backing our candidates!

We learned also that we will not win if left parties try to copy an anti-migration policy. We will not get voters back from right wing and racist parties if we stand against our

principle that human rights are universal and indivisible. Never we have the right to do so!

CONCLUSIONS

1. No one of the political tendencies among left forces in Europe can claim superiority in the battles between different left approaches to EU, Eurozone and Euro. This can be a new chance for a better cooperation between all of us.
2. Losing ten mandates GUE&NGL lost influence and attractiveness for new forces in the EP. Conservatives try to built up a "cordon sanitaire" inside the European Parliament to exclude right extremists and radical left as well. The new group should continue to work for an Alliance of left and progressive forces.
3. The next Forum of progressive forces in Brussels should provide new ideas, initiatives to change EU and to organize European and transnational activities on climate, social, gender and peace issues.
4. We need different spaces and possibilities to work on left strategies on Europe. The next elections must be prepared now.

Considerations on the European Elections

By **Walter Baier**, former National Chairman of the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) and from 2007 he has been the coordinator of *transform! europe*.

The GUE /NGL and EL suffered a defeat. Except for some notable exceptions – Portugal, Slovenia, and Belgium – and our having maintained significant electoral strength in Greece and Cyprus we lost across the board. Moreover, we must acknowledge that except for the Czech Republic we have no MEPs in the vast space of Central and Eastern Europe.

The participants of the Executive board meeting in Berlin (6 July) joined the demonstrations in solidarity with sea rescue missions.

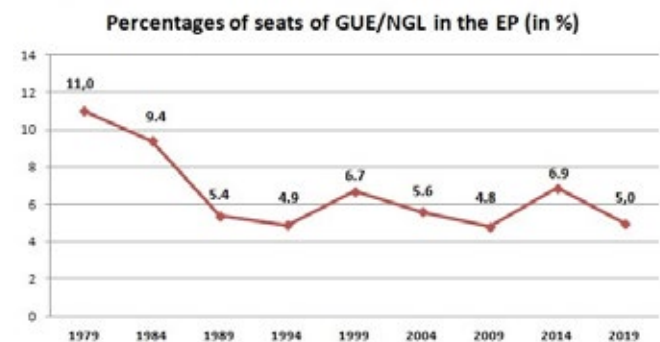
source: facebook page of the Party of the European Left; Talk by Walter Baier at the Executive Board Meeting of the Party of the European Left (EL) in Berlin, 6 July 2019.

Given this, it would be a fatal mistake if we allowed ourselves to return to business as usual.

Allow me three remarks:

- The *first* concerns the race between the nationalist right on the one side and the liberal Pro-Europeans and the Greens on the other, which obviously affected us. Certainly, the electoral performance of the nationalist right was below the level generally predicted, while the Greens exceeded expectations. Both nationalists and liberal green Pro-Europeanists have a coherent agenda concerning the future Europe. By contrast, our political proposal was vague and incoherent and so not credible. One month ago, *transform! europe* hosted a workshop in which we collected reports and the expertise of political scientists in order to draw general conclusions from the elections. Most of the accounts were similar in one respect: European politics apart from rare exceptions played a subordinate role in the electoral campaigns of our parties. Of course, there are reasons for this, for example, the coincidence of European elections with national or municipal elections. However, a general question arises: how can we expect to perform successfully in European elections without dealing seriously with European politics? It is not only a matter of electoral tactics. We all know that the EU's legislature and administration increasingly limit and constrict national political spaces. Like it or not, EU politics have become a relevant battleground for the left.

- The *second* observation refers to the historic dimension. Between 1979 and 1994, the first election of the European Parliament to fully reflect the fall of the Wall, the left in Western Europe, then almost exclusively represented by the powerful Communist parties of Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, and Greece, maintained levels between 11 and 9%. In 1994, in the first elections after the end of the Cold War, its share of votes dropped to 4.9%, around which it has fluctuated ever since.



Note: The parliamentary group of the radical left was called the Communists and Allies Group from 1979 to 1989, then Left Unity from 1989 to 1994;

Source: website of the European Parliament

This perspective suggests that we must take 5% as the structural electoral strength of the post-socialist radical left, while the 7% it achieved in 2014, represents an exception explained by the particular political conjuncture, which was the struggle against austerity in the European South, symbolised by Alexis Tsipras, then the EL's 'top candidate' for the European Commission. However, we should remember that even in 2014 our gains were concentrated in the European South, particularly in Greece and Spain while the showing in the big Western European countries remained mediocre.

- The *third* observation concerns the passionate controversies among ourselves. None of the three strategic projects (Diem25, Maintenant le Peuple, and the mainstream of the EL) has offered a winning recipe.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

It appears that the left is still wrestling with the political reality emerging from the fall of the Berlin Wall. We must once again try to understand the profound changes in Europe introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht subsequent to Germany's unification

The Treaty of Lisbon, which most of us opposed, not only enshrined neoliberalism as the EU's basic norm but also boosted also the integration process, both in terms of expansion to the East and deepening it institutionally. Thus, European integration, the crisis of 2007/2008 and the corresponding tightening of the EU's economic governance have fundamentally changed the rules of the game, revealing the want of a strategic answer on the part of the radical left. This is a serious matter because it does not only concern the EL, and this lack will be even more devastating when the plans for reforming or 're-founding' (Macron) the EU are discussed among the broader European public. Only serious theoretical work and open political debate rather than magical recipes can help.

To be sure, maintaining the GUE/NGL is an important achievement. But what about the party?

We believe that the left in Europe needs a political party on the European level. However, as with any party, the EL's future depends on its usefulness. It is not inappropriate to critically assess the extent to which the party lives up to the expectations raised by the three elements of its name: 'European,' 'Left,' and 'Party'. This carries with it a heavy responsibility since the EL, though doubtlessly weakened, remains for the time being the only party formation of the radical left on the European level.

Generally, the EL has two options:

a) It can be a loose political forum in which parties meet, exchange opinions, and occasionally agree on joint campaigns, a sort of New European Left Forum (NELF). We can allocate funds and capacities in creating a broader forum, as we are attempting with the Marseille/Bilbao/BXL Forum, a space where parties of different families meet and discuss with civil society actors, trade unions, and movements. This concept is reasonable and coherent. It requires a

lean office structure with the task of coordinating rather than 'doing politics'. The critical question, however, is whether this concept is adequate for coping with the present challenges the left faces.

b) The second option is that the EL takes steps towards becoming a real political actor with its own political profile. Consequently, it would also have to develop a political and communicative capacity and intervene in political debates on the European level. Obviously, such a party on the European level cannot be modelled on national parties since it must be based on inter-party agreements. It requires a concise political platform delineating the framework in which the party is entitled to 'do politics', that is, issue statements, take initiatives, and intervene in European public debates. The programmatic platform must be sufficiently broad to address the concerns and interests of all possible partners within and beyond today's EL.

It is obvious that 'Europe' – which is not identical with the EU – must be at the centre of the programme of a European party.

We can build on broad agreement among political actors, trade unions, and likeminded scholars around the core of a progressive socio-economic, feminist, human-rights-based, peace-orientated, and ecological agenda. True, we have to enhance our credibility in all these respects. However, credibility is not only a matter of sincerity but also of the capacity of proposing a strategy for how a transformative agenda could be implemented in view of the current institutional power relations on the different levels of state governance – the local, the national, and the European.

Brexit shows how destructive nationalism is, but at the same time it demonstrates the unsustainability of the EU in its current form. In his letter to the Guardian (4 March 2019), Emmanuel Macron correctly warns against those who would change nothing, as 'they deny the fear felt by our people, the doubts that undermine our democracies'.¹

However, the decision made by the European Council on who is to occupy the EU's top positions is the most recent and most appalling example of the undermining and betraying of democracy – not only in terms of Ms. Von der Leyen, the Commission's designated president, who is the

¹ Emmanuel Macron, Dear Europe, Brexit is a lesson for all of us: it's time for renewal, theguardian.com, 4 March 2019.

stoutest champion of Germany's Military-Industrial Complex, but also for the way in which these decisions were pushed through. Cynical horse-trading behind closed doors while ignoring the results of the election – could one imagine greater scorn for a democratically elected Parliament than the one currently evidenced by the heads of states. These are not minor questions since they touch upon the very core of the political. The current European treaties have established a system of governance meant to impose neoliberal policies on the Member States and prevent democratic change, instead of providing the political space for it. In addition to the socially devastating effects of neoliberalism, the democratic deficit in the EU's constitutional treaties is the source of the continuous decline of European integration and the rise of nationalism.

HOW TO COPE WITH IT?

First, democratic integration presupposes respect for the national self-determination of every Member State. Hence, internationalism is not the privilege of the particularly dedicated 'Pro-Europeanists'. On the contrary, it means that the ties of solidarity between left parties exist independently of whether a party prefers its country to be outside or inside the European Union.

Second, of course we are in favour of individual citizen participation, referenda, European citizen initiatives, etc. But, democracy essentially implies collective representation of the common interests of social and political groups. The ignoring of the European Parliament demonstrated by the head of states in the selection of the top executive posts once again shows the need for a fully-fledged European Parliament exercising sovereignty over all matters under the EU's jurisdiction.

CONCERNING OUR 'LEFT'

- 1) Obviously, only a part of the GUE/NGL's MEPs will commit to the EL. This means that in reality it is the party of only a part of Europe's left. Acknowledging this does not mean being satisfied with it. We need to initiate a sincere dialogue with those inside and outside of the EL. There are criticisms about the party's strategy and modus operandi that are worth taking seriously.
- 2) However, equally important would be identifying projects for concrete cooperation, for example, initiating a

discussion with left actors in CEE and in Scandinavia on common concerns regarding military and security policies as well as looking into how relevant the concepts of neutrality, non-alignment and nuclear free zones, regional or pan-European, could be for a comprehensive security strategy of the EL. We should generally encourage regional cooperation of EL parties (for example, between those of the European South, CEE, and non-aligned countries) and create networks with actors outside the EL.

- 3) It would be a good exercise in practical solidarity to propose to the EL congress the launching of a common political campaign of diverse left forces. Why not support the excellent idea proposed by *Maintenant le Peuple* of launching a campaign against tax evasion?
- 4) A party needs an efficient mechanism of internal and most importantly external communication. In this respect, one could also consider the establishment of an electronic media outlet (maybe in cooperation with *transform!*)
- 5) Definitely an issue for the discussion leading up to the congress should be whether a more participatory party structure could lend a new dynamic to the party. *Transform!* is available to collect experiences with already operating models (for example, online instruments) and submit this for discussion.

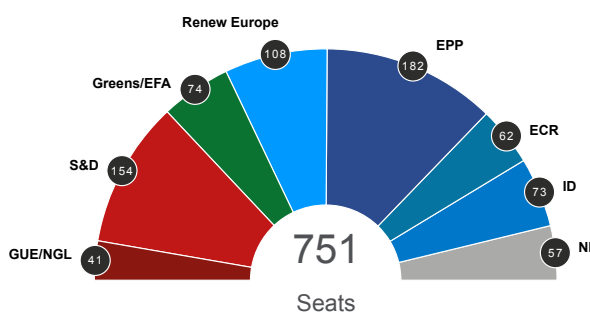
It is obvious that the problems are complex and to great extent are a reflection of the bigger picture, the crisis of European integration.

Therefore they cannot and will not be solved within the next five months prior to the congress. But the congress could be the starting point of a thoroughgoing debate. It could, for example, decide on a roadmap, tied to a next congress in which the debate could be connected to substantial decisions concerning the future of the EL.

After the Defeat. New Challenges for the Radical Left after the European Elections.

By **Cornelia Hildebrandt**, Vice Director of the Institute for Critical Social Analysis of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS) and board member of *transform! europe*

In light of the far-reaching changes of power relations within the EU, the left requires new strategies. An analysis.



European Parliament 2019 – 2024; source: www.election-results.eu;

From now on the radical left will be the smallest faction in the European Parliament. At 5.46% the left reaches a voter approval similar to the one at the end of the 1980s, with the only difference being the current conditions of a distinct swing to the right. In Spain, France, Germany, in particular, the left parties remained far behind their expectations. Compared to 2014, the radical left lost about 20% of their mandates.

Within the faction of the radical left the Spanish *Unidos Podemos* and the Greek *Syriza* are the strongest parties with six representatives each. The German *DIE LINKE* sends five mandataries to the European Parliament (EP). In addition to that, there will be one representative of the *Animal Rights Party* from Germany. With two seats each the Portuguese *Bloco* and the *Left-Green Alliance* (including Communists), *Sinn Féin* and AKEL from Cyprus are represented. One seat is held by the Swedish *Vänsterpartiet*, the Danish Unity List-RGA, the Finnish *Left Party* and the Belgian *Workers' Party* PTB-PVDA respectively. The same is true for the Czech KSČM, who, however, has also lost influence. No longer represented in the EP is the Italian left, who made it to the European Parliament with the List *Another Europe with Tsipras* in 2014. The Slovenian *Levica* did not succeed,

in spite of gaining 6.3% of voter approval. If Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* (LFI) will join the faction with their six representatives is yet uncertain.

Conservatives and Social Democrats have lost 20%¹ of their mandates each, but still remain the strongest factions with the Conservatives holding 182, the Social Democrats 153 seats.

With the Greens and the Liberals two explicitly pro-EU party families are the winners. The Greens now have 75, the Liberals – thanks to Macron's decision to join this faction – hold 108 seats. The right-wing parties of the *European Conservatives and Reformers* (ECR), the even further right-wing faction of *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* (EFDD) and the newly-founded faction of *Identity and Democracy* (ID) gain 178 seats altogether, but the final formation of the right-wing factions will only show after the Brexit is in effect. If we add more parties, such as FIDESZ, they rely on 25% of the voters.

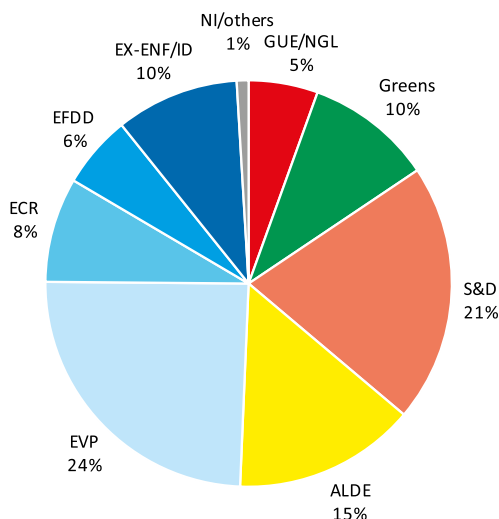
This means that, beside the Conservatives and Social Democrats / Socialists, the EP will consist of a pro-EU-bloc of Greens and Liberals, together amounting to about 25%, and a strong nationalist-oriented anti-EU right-wing bloc. Still, these election results show that the parties of the right did not become as strong as they had hoped for. Still, there is in the EP a clear right-wing slant which is more than the mere increase in votes of 22% in 2014 to 25% in 2019, especially if we take into account the impact of the right-wing parties in the national governments and via the European Council. The political right is in government or forms part of government in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Poland. In Italy and France, Salvini's *Lega* and Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* (RN) became the strongest parties in the European elections. And, by shifting the agenda they have already been influencing national and European politics for quite some time now.

¹ All subsequent figures refer to those provided on the website <https://election-results.eu/> from June 26th, retrieved on June 27th, 2019.

At the same time, the increase in votes for the Liberals and the Greens are increases of votes for clear pro-EU-positions and a consolidation of EU-politics. This is of some significance if we consider the Brexit-paradox. On the one hand, in the face of the chaos created by the Brexit, almost all parties – no matter what their political orientation – moved away from their anti-EU-position, more precisely, from their exit-positions during their election campaigns. On the other hand, the Brexit-party became the strongest party in Great Britain with more than 30% of votes.

EU-wide, the voter turnout amounted to 50.93%, which is significantly higher than in 2014 when the voter turnout was 43.09%, whereby the differences are traditionally very great between Slovakia with a voter turnout of 22.74%, Portugal with a voter turnout of 31,40% on the one hand, and Spain with 60% and those countries with compulsory voting with a voter turnout of 80% and more, on the other. There is a significant rise of voter turnout (more than 10%) in the Czech Republic (28.72%), Germany (61.41%), Hungary (43,36%), Romania (51.07%) and Spain (64.30%).

Distribution of Seats in the New European Parliament



GUE/NGL: *European United Left/ Nordic Green Left* (radical left); **S&D:** *Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats* (social democrats); **ALDE:** *Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe* (liberals); **EPP:** *European People's Party* (conservative); **ECR:** *European Conservatives and Reformists* (right wing); **EFDD:** *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* (right wing), **ID:** *Identity and Democracy* (right wing); **NI:** non-affiliated;

source: <https://election-results.eu/european-results/2019-2024>

A CHANGE IN POWER RELATIONS

Within the next weeks and months we will see an intensified struggle about the question of shaping the future EU, of its consolidation, the creation of new EU-institutions and instruments or about the dismantling of the EU-institutions, a shift of competences to the level of national governments going as far as the breach of European treaties and directives even at the expense of the threat of sanctions. The right will fight this struggle mostly in those areas that further question the democratic character of the EU, weakening human rights positions and their real enforcement. The contradictions arising between the factions and the ruling blocs must be examined in further analyses, as must be the cracks within and between the ruling blocs.

If we assess the power relations of the individual fractions with a view to possible majority ratios regarding the election of the President of the EU-Commission, among others, it becomes obvious that both large factions, the Conservatives and the Social Democrats, at 44% can no longer act as an informal 'grand coalition'. That means, the EPP and S&D will not have enough votes to elect the President of the European Commission (and, later, the President of the ECB). Under these circumstances, finding a majority without resorting to either the Euro-sceptical faction of the ECR or both right-wing factions (ID and EFDD) requires an inclusion either of the Greens or the Liberals and an opening-up of offers with regard to topics, structures or personnel. Since neither Macron nor the Greens have, so far, signalled their support for Manfred Weber, another problem becomes obvious. Within both factions the representatives of Germany, Italy and France are losing importance. However, it is not clear yet to what degree this will have political effects.

For the Conservatives and Social Democrats the changed situation means that they need to find partners. A coalition between Conservatives and the right bloc, possible in theory, also does not have a majority within the EP.

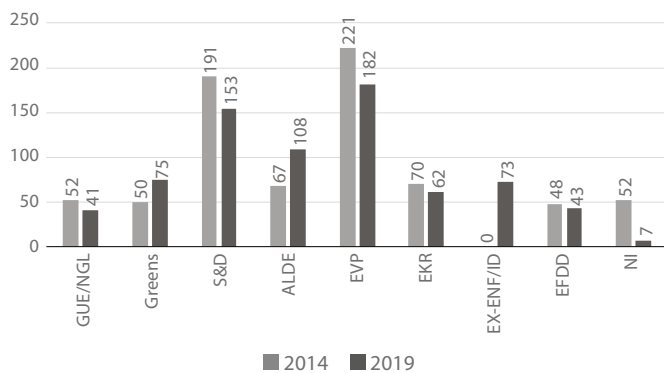
Thus, if Conservatives and Social Democrats want to find a majority without the right bloc, they have three possibilities:

- forming a 'liberal great coalition' together with the Liberals, who, on principle, stand for a continuation of the previous policies and a consolidation of the EU at

the same time – both in dispute with the parties of the right. Although refraining from a fundamental political change, this project would at least mean an intensification of the process of EU-integration and cooperation in the areas of economic and foreign policies, or

- b) forming a ‘green great coalition’ together with the strengthened Greens. In such a constellation there is the chance of developing either a social-green or a neo-liberal-green project as a European ‘driving force’ for ‘green’ capitalism. To which degree this ‘motor’ can be shaped to become one of social-ecological transformation will significantly depend on the strength and direction of social democratic/socialist parties and on the strength of a radical left with the capacity to mobilise and assert itself on a European level.
- c) Of course, there is also the chance of acting with changing majorities. Such an approach enables the Conservatives to by and large maintain the status quo with necessary green adaptations and partial consolidation of the EU with regard to foreign, climate, peace and security policies – in the end also the Greens stand for a militant defence of European values.

Results of the European elections at a glance



source: data of European Parliament, own compilation

ABOUT THE LEFT

If we look at the left side of the party spectrum, the parties of the left, the Social Democrats, the Socialists and the Greens taken together only account for just short of 35 %. The weakest element in this part of the political spectrum is the radical left.

Election Results

	GUE/NGL	Greens EFA	S&D	ALDE	EPP	ECR	EFDD	ENF/ID	INDPT
2019 in %	5.46	9.99	20.37	14.38	24.23	8.26	5.73	9.72	0.93
2019 seats	41	75	153	108	182	62	43	75	7
2014 in %	6.92	6.66	25.43	8.92	29.43	9.32	6.39	-	6.92
Diff.	-1.46	+3.33	-5.06	+5.46	-5.2	-1.06	-0.66	-	-5.99
2014 seats	52	50	191	69	221	70	48	0	52
Diff.	-11	+25	-38	+41	-39	-8*	-5	75	-45

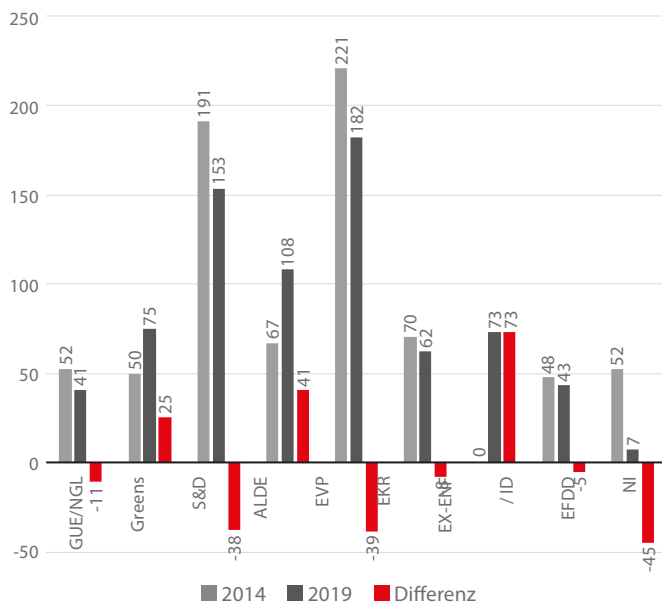
*Note: When allocating the seats of ECR, EFDD and ENF, we must take into account that some mandataries of these parties moved between these factions. For this reason it makes more sense to work with the overall number of mandates of these factions, i.e., ECR+EFDD 2014 = 118, ECR+EFDD+ENF/ID 2019 = 178; source: European Parliament

The **parties of the radical left** of the hitherto confederal faction of the *United European Left/Nordic Green Left* (GUE/NGL) could only win **5.46%** support and will have 41 representatives in the EP, if La France Insoumise joins the faction. Should the negotiations between the national delegations fail, the split of the left that was obvious in the election campaign will be continued on the EP-parliamentary level and this in the face of a weakened left, whose voter potential has, with a few exceptions, not been higher than 5% since 1989. This means that since the collapse of state socialism, left parties have not succeeded to overcome their defensive position. At the same time, the conditions for the assertion of left politics have worsened with the shift to the right within the EU and the weakness of the social democratic/ socialist parties, in spite of successes of individual parties. With the end of the post-war period also the Western European Communist parties have now lost their social significance and relevance as important forces in the struggle against National Socialism, Fascism and war.

The Greek branch (MeRA25) of the alliance of DiEM25 winning 2.99% of the votes did not succeed in getting into the EP, failing to negotiate the three-percent threshold. Yanis Varoufakis ran in Germany and could obtain 130,072 votes, i.e., 0.3%, in Greece he received 140,000 votes – not enough for getting into the EP. However, it is also possible that this case indicates a more fundamental problem regarding the implementation and legitimization of transnational lists. At least the path Varoufakis pursued by forming such a list in competition with the LINKE did not lead anywhere, in spite of the fact that the top candidate was well-known.

In addition to the weakened position of the left, it must be noted that also any new faction of GUE/NGL can be formed only under the condition of a federal structure, since positions regarding the role of the left in the EP, the understanding of politics, the strategy and organisation as well as specific topics differ widely. Another aspect is that any Europe-oriented strategy development is complicated further by the dominance of nationally oriented left political approaches and their prolongation onto the European level. Thus, working for a common agenda of the federal faction is often possible only for specific questions, in particular, the social question or the issue of international trade agreements (TTIP). The requirement of speaking with one voice contradicts the federal character of the faction.

Losses and gains in mandates 2019 as compared to 2014



source: <https://election-results.eu/european-results/2019-2024/>, own compilation

In order to understand the extent of the changes even better, we will cast a glance at the losses and gains. Compared to 2014, the losses of 11 seats for the left, 38 seats for the Social Democrats and 39 seats for the Conservatives are equivalent to a loss of 20% of their former voters respectively in the core countries of the EU. Quite different the situation for the Greens and the Liberals: For the Greens the gain of 25 seats reflects an increase of mandates by 50%, while the Liberals could more than double their number of seats.

Share of the votes at European elections of the fractions GUE/NGL, Social Democrats/Socialists, Greens, Liberals and Conservatives between 1979 and 2019

Faction in the EP	Share of the vote 1979	Share of the vote 1984	Share of the vote 1989	Share of the vote 1994	Share of the vote 1999	Share of the vote 2004	Share of the vote 2009	Share of the vote 2014	Share of the vote 2019
GUE/ NGL	10.7	9.4	5.4 GUE and 2.7 CG	4.9	6.7	5.60	4.76	6.92	5.46
S&D	27.3	30.0	34.7	34.9	28.8	27.30	25.00	25.43	20.37
Greens/ EFA	-	4.6	5.8 Gr. 2.5 ARC	4.1	7.7	5.80	7.47	6.66	9.99
ALDE	9.8	7.1	9.5	7.8	8.0	12.00	11.41	8.92	14.38
EPP	26.3	25.3	23.4	27.5	37.2	36.70	36.01	29.43	24.23

source: Wikipedia/ own calculation and own compilation

WHAT HAS CHANGED COMPARED TO 2014?

Among the continuities there is the ongoing trend of decreasing loyalties to the former major parties: both Social Democratic/ Socialist and Conservative parties are significantly and systematically losing both voter loyalty and political consent. While in the European elections of 1994 they still reached just about 35% of the voters, it is only about 20% today. In the year 2019 the Conservative parties are on the same level as in 1989.

For the first time since the beginning of European elections in 1979, both major parties together remain under 50%. That is, they must, in order to secure the required majorities, approach other party families. If they want to do so without resorting to the right-wing parties and factions in the EP, they need to win the support of the Greens or the Liberals. Thus, both pro-European party families could contribute to a modernisation of the EU-institutions and a moderate change in politics resulting in: green modernisation, liberal consolidation of the EU and strengthening the EU law as well as increasing the impact of EU-institutions on national policies and the creation of new instruments. They will have to do so in an atmosphere of permanent conflict with the political right so that we have to count with exacerbated crises, even blockades.

The results of the European elections of 2014 are an indicator of political polarisation: in the core countries and in the Northern EU-countries, the protest against the dominant policies flocked to the right, favouring right-wing populist and right-wing conservative parties. In the Southern European countries, especially in Greece, Spain and Portugal the protest strengthened the left, and even in Italy the force of the protest was strong enough for the left to re-enter the EP thanks to the List *Another Europe with Tsipras*. In 2019 this polarisation does no longer exist. Not only in the Northern, but also in the Southern and Central-Eastern European countries of the EU the protest has led to the formation of new right-wing parties, who partly had not yet existed in 2014, and to the increase in votes of the right-wing parties in the 2019 European elections. League is no longer the Northern League, it became the strongest force in all of Italy, with the European elections reversing the national power relations. At the same time and unlike the right, that is steadily gaining voter approval thus solidifying its power, the development of the left is stagnating.

The results of the 2019 European elections reveal a new polarisation between the party families not any more along the conflict lines drawn by the austerity and social policies but regarding the question of consolidation vs. dismantling of the EU even to a mere free trade zone; of an EU tackling questions of the future and taking up green and digital issues vs. an EU adhering to traditions and favouring stronger possibilities of intervention by national governments and parliaments.

The parties of the radical left clearly lagged behind expectations. A trend towards a reversal of at times high poll ratings in favour of the left in Spain and France has been confirmed. Unlike in 2014, the parties of the radical left could not agree on a top candidate but entered the election campaign divided. Three European projects competing against each other: *Maintenant le Peuple* (MLP), DiEM25 and the *European Left Party* (EL) all suffered a defeat. Since all party projects, quite diverse with regard to their origin, view of politics and organisational matters, strategy and focus of their campaigns have lost, it is difficult to give simple answers. Yet, it is sure that none of them succeeded in adapting to the newly evolved political situation and the emerging new dimensions of conflict, tackling them with a common strategy and, most of all, with a European perspective.

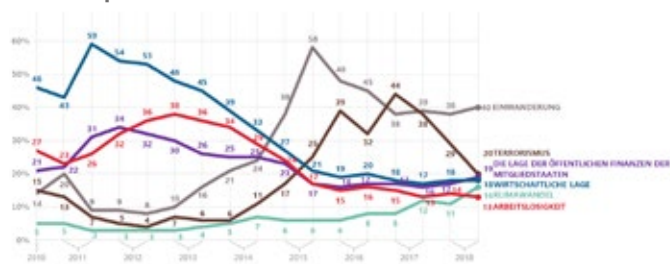
Between 2014 and 2019 the change of conflict lines in Europe took place also before the background of a global situation itself undergoing a profound change. In the face of these developments and the open view of the Brexit chaos popular consent to the EU was extraordinarily high.

The November 2018 Eurobarometer-data reveal the following developments: In the years of 2011/2012 – the time of the strongest mobilisations of social movements against EU austerity policies – up to 2014 unemployment and public finances were considered to be the most important challenges at the European level, especially in Spain, Portugal and Greece. This conflict constellation helped the success of the left in 2014. After 2015 the focus of the major tasks of the EU has shifted, first towards the question of how to deal with terrorism and immigration. Clearly less in focus than in 2014 were the problems of unemployment, the economic situation within the EU and state finances. The change in importance of climate change showed itself as a rising but not yet polarising dimension of conflict.

Answers to the question of what was important to tackle on the national level in the countries of the EU reveal a similar picture: in 2014 the problems of economic development, unemployment and public finances were dominant at the national level. At the end of 2018 people perceived a bunch of different topics that required being dealt with: unemployment, rising prices and inflation, migration, the economic situation and pensions. At the end of 2018 there were no prominent polarising topics with the exception of the question of migration. At that time Eurobarometer does not yet list the climate crisis among the tasks to be dealt with on a national level, although the issue had been present in individual countries for quite some time by then. Contrary to this, climate protection gains in weight as a task to be dealt with on a European level.

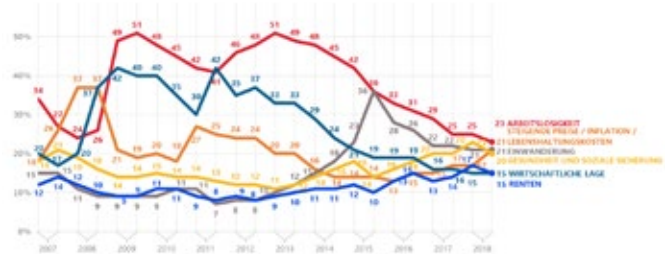
In the beginning of 2019 the economy, finances, unemployment, climate and environment were almost equally seen as the most important topics to be dealt with on the European level – the situation is still open! At the same time, there was already a trend indicating that the climate issue could become a new polarising issue. It will depend on the power of the left, if this ecological trend will also be defined as social.

Most important tasks of the EU



source: Standard-Eurobarometer 90, Autumn 2018, p. 13; 40: migration, 20: terrorism, 19: finances, 18: economy, 16: climate change, 13: unemployment

Most important tasks of own national country



source: Standard-Eurobarometer 90, Autumn 2018, p. 17; 23: unemployment, 21: rising prices, inflation, cost of living, 21: migration, 20: health and health insurance, 15: economic situation, 15: pensions

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE ELECTIONS AND WHAT IS THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE LEFT? SUMMARISING CONCLUSIONS

1. The shift to the Right described above goes on under the conditions of the previous mainstream parties becoming weaker. This shift to the right of policies already now manifests itself at the European level in questions of migration and refugee policies, in particular, when it comes to securing the borders. One example of this development is the cancellation of the European sea rescue programme *Sophia* that had been adopted primarily by Conservatives and Social Democrats. The declared aim of changing the EU and their instruments is becoming part of the fiercest conflicts. The question of which institutions will have which competences in the future will become a crucial one. That means that it will not only be about policy-making processes, i.e. concrete topics, but also about questions concerning the treaties and institutions which will become the subjects of conflict more often.
2. The Greens could win, because they seem most trustworthy and competent when it comes to dealing with questions of the future. This concerns climate issues but also issues of digitalisation – in particular, the critique of the copyright law with the possibility of installing upload filters, a topic that was discussed and negotiated on both national and European levels. It also concerns the protection of the environment such as the handling of glyphosate. Regarding all these topics the Greens were accessible and capable of dialogue at the European level, especially so in France, Germany and the Neth-

erlands. In doing so, the Greens could use their openness for new topics, their image of being an advocate for the protection of the environment and the climate. Certainly, the left also had the protection of the environment and the climate on their agenda, to be seen, among others, in the Climate Manifesto of GUE/NGL published shortly before the elections. But it was much too short-term in order for the left to be considered a credible advocate for this topic. The election platform of the EL mentioned the topic without developing it any further. The ideas of the LFI election programme did not on time become part of a European left discourse on the environment and the climate.

3. A European left must stand for a social and ecological agenda and transformation. In doing so, we must, however, not adopt concepts developed by others. We must develop independently our agenda and do so together with social movements, initiatives and other civil society actors and feed work done previously into an inner process of discussion among the left. However, this requires new and open spaces for broadest possible left discourses and alliances. The social question will be here of special significance. During the election campaign, however, one could not see the actual practical value of the left regarding this topic area.

In view of this result, the left not only has to accept our obvious defeat, but we also have to ask ourselves what the reasons were for this defeat. There are no simple answers. It is not the case that one of clearly identifiable strategies or type of party of the radical left has lost, but all. The only exceptions which deserve to be studied closer are the Portuguese *Left Bloc* and the Walloon *Workers' Party* (PTB). Notably, parties that have lost are *Podemos*, *La France Insoumise*, *DIE LINKE*, *Syriza* and *KSČM*. The background to these concrete examples of defeat are completely different political conditions, varying concrete national conflict situations and political cultures of different organisations. However, the question that needs to be answered is if there are any common structural and strategic causes, i.e., if we need new forms of strategic cooperation towards the development of a joint European strategy and agenda. The majority of the left has been conducting national campaigns for these European elections, which must be seen against the background of their relative strength

on the national vis-à-vis their weakness on the European level. But only very few have won anything that way. That is how the European Left is losing its practical value.

4. As the left we have to deal with our political methods, the forms of our politics, among others with the question why we do not succeed in tackling changed conflict situations in dynamic times of changing mobilisations. We must raise the question of the function of a 5%-party in the EP and what it would have to achieve in view of the challenges. It must ask itself these questions on both national and European levels.

Facing the Far right: what future for the left

By **Pablo Livigni** is a research assistant at *Espaces Marx* Institute in Paris.

The idea of the following presentation was to propose an analysis of the social composition of each political proposition (embodied by different parties) and its evolution from 2017 to 2019, mainly in France. It uses the term “bloc” to describe the temporal and electoral alliance that is formed by the vote for a political party. It aims to a certain extent to formulate hypothesis for creating later a strategy to form real social alliances. It gives an idea of the political movement of electorates inside of the political scene and therefore a possibility to question the different potentials for the future.

THE CASE OF POPULIST FAR RIGHT

THE LITTLE INDEPENDANTS

In the West: mainly artisans, little business owners, shopkeepers, self-employed and merchants. Those populations are independent in the sense that they do no benefit from protected forms of employment. They usually stand for less state intervention and less regulation of labour. They are partly an historical electorate of the far populist right in the west, especially since those parties were historically more neoliberal (Front National in 1981, FPÖ, AfD at its foundation, Lega,...).

In the south: numerous workers are working as employees but are attached to independent pensions system or lack of social protections relating to their labour status.

In the East: mainly little farmers and agricultural workers. An electorate that supports populist right through its traditional values. They represent a high percentage of the populations in central and eastern Europe.

THE BLUE COLLAR WORKERS

The blue collar workers were a symbolic group that conveyed the interest of all popular classes in the past through the publicization of their situation by communist and socialist parties as well as trade unions. If they represented the working class in the past, in today's Europe, the west has known a relocation of its industry toward eastern Europe, northern Africa or Asia. The number of blue collar

workers is decreasing in western Europe while most of them are concentrated in Germany and neighboring countries of the east as well as Austria and northern Italy.

In the West: the failure of collective bargaining in allowing workers to have control over their fate has transformed the political subjectivity of the group, notably towards abstention. The relocation of production in other european regions as well as outside of Europe led part of this group towards the populist right discourse that opposes globalisation and designates Europe as the trojan horse of the neoliberal globalisation in their lives. Powerless in changing their concrete conditions of work and living, betrayed by social-democrat and conservative governments, important groups of workers felt into pessimism and were seduced by the nationalist inward-looking far right populist. This group is often a supporter of the AfD, Front National, FPÖ, Lega and the PVV.

In the East: Blue collar workers in the east are actually benefiting from the relocation of production in their employment area. However, the expected benefits from the European integration are late to arrive. The working conditions are socially hard in order to maintain a high of competitiveness and the level of revenues are rising too slow to have great consequences on standard of living. To that extend Czech Republic is a good example. One of the hypotheses of the difficulty to convey a progressive discourse including social high demands is the ongoing negative affect that represents the soviet period. The blue collar workers have therefore a tendency to vote according to their traditional values as for example in Poland.

THE NEBULA OF PRECARIOUS WORKERS

In the West: The west witnessed these last thirty years the meticulous deconstruction of labour society. Since the crisis, the dismantling process of social protection of labour has drastically increase. Precariousness is not anymore only a characterisation of the different forms of new contracts and labour. It has become a socio-economical position inside the global economic infrastructure. From unemployed workers to short-term contracts, forced part-time job, more

and more people are caught in a trap of precariousness. Those precarious workers have very different profiles in terms of capital (economical, cultural, social) to mobilise and personal situation. The most pessimistic individuals of this group are likely to support populist far right that scores high in unemployed workers and working poor.

SHARED VALUES:

In these different groups, the common characteristic is pessimism in the West as well as "identity stress" for both the eastern and western part of Europe. The populist far right is achieving perfectly the strategy of populism: it succeeds in gathering different groups with heterogeneous social demands by creating an equivalence chain that connects them to form a homogeneous solid bloc. This equivalence is made through the nationalist and xenophobic discourse. The identity based proposals are covering the contradiction between the social demands while proposing a reactionary version of Polanyi's concept of "social protectionism".

This electorate is mainly a captive electorate. However we believe the main problem it encounters are socio-economic related, this electorate list as high priorities mainly problems of security, migration, terrorism and islam or national pride. This should help us see that "populist left" strategies to conquer the far right's electorate are not going to successfully steal it. It reinforces our believe that we shall never lower down our public expressions on questions relative to our values, especially on subjects such as migration.

On the bourgeois bloc :

This concept is theorized by two french researchers (B.Amable et S.Palombarini). The main idea is that the ruling class had to reorganize itself in order to continue existing in the context of the collapse of traditional ruling parties. Macron has successfully built a bloc composed by the privileged population (including the youth): high revenues, high diploma, intellectual profession, business owners, executives, pensioners and some minoritarian popular classes: employees and blue collar workers. This bloc is relying on the shared values of the ruling classes: an alliance of social-liberalism and center right neoliberalism, with agreement on the promotion of a market based economy and some liberal values. We can not underestimate its ability to attract some population however their interest are contradictory to the

agenda they proposed. This ability to integrate to your bloc some social groups that are not sharing the same interest is a characteristic of hegemony (according to Gramsci). In other countries it could be represented by transversal alliances such as the coalition between CDU and SPD (favored by the coalition culture derived from the voting system) but also by more "technocratic options" such as Renzi's government in Italy.

THE CASE OF RADICAL LEFT:

The leftist electorate is one of the most heterogeneous of all. It spreads through the whole social hierarchy.

THE YOUTH AND THE POSITIVE PRECARIOUS BLOC

The battle on neo-voters is essential as they are central in the overall renewal of the electoral body. The generation that was between 18 and 30 years old in 2008 was particularly affected by the consequences of the crisis. The youth, starting from this generation is an interesting variable to observe. Not as a generational variable but as a socio-economical one. Indeed, particularly subjected to precariousness, new forms of labour, and difficulties to socially integrate (ability to find a professional identity and project, access to housing and property, more subjected to unemployment,...). Therefore, the youth is more likely to have high social demands and support the radical left program. The powerpoint gives examples in France, Spain, Greece. By positive precariousness, we would like to designate a specific section of the precarious workers that do not recognise themselves as precarious (identify for example to the middle class without having the same access to social protection, property, etc..) or that are living precariousness as a temporal predicament that they anticipate will not last forever.

"THE LEFT HAND OF THE STATE" IN THE WEST AND THE SOUTH

The left hand of the state related to a concept of Pierre Bourdieu: "all those who are called 'social workers': family counsellors, youth leaders, rank-and-file magistrates, and also, increasingly, secondary and primary teachers. They constitute what I call the left hand of the state, the set of agents of the so-called spending ministries which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past.

They are civil servants, social workers (notably in the “care” sector), employees and workers from State-owned firms or previous public firms privatized in the recent years. They are the one conveying what is left of the social functions of the State. This group is likely to vote for the radical left for at least two reasons. First, their personal relation to labour is shaped by the adherence to high social propositions. Secondly, their personal status is usually characterized by high level of social and labour protection allowing them to be one of the most optimistic electorate. However through austerity their working conditions dramatically deteriorated. They are also usually well unionised. They are likely to support a project that aims at investing heavily in public services, social work and their optimism and status protect them partially against identity stress and nationalist inward-looking preoccupations.

In France, it is particularly true for those that are the less paid in comparison to their level of education. It would be interesting to try to identify such a tendency in other countries.

ETHNIC MINORITIES

The ethnic minorities are discriminated both socially and racially, especially the ones coming from ex-colonies background, assigned rightfully or wrongfully to islam. These minorities are massively part of the precariat. Indeed, their race and their late integration to the countries usually led them to occupy low-paid positions, short-term contracts and unemployment. They are more inclined to support the call for equality, tolerance and multinational values that the radical left supports. It is more specifically true for the minorities coming from the ex-colonies.

These three categories do not exclude the presence of other categories, notably some blue collar workers and lower employees from the private sector as well as sometime people socially more privileged.

SHARED VALUES

The electorate has usually high social expectations and wants to address the fight against social inequalities. It is strongly supporting the defense of public services, political ecology, and adopts a non discriminative stances toward race and gender.

The radical left electorate is characterized both by its heterogeneity and its optimism. Its electorate is based on a social alliance between parts of popular classes and parts of precarized “middle classes” (especially the ones with low revenues but high cultural capital). Its optimism protects it against nationalism and intolerant xenophobic discourse.

The main electorate transfer that has vivified the radical left are coming from the failure of social-democrats organisation such as in Greece, France and in another extend Spain, Portugal, Germany. The late gain in terms of electorate also comports neo-voters or non voters who started voting again.

The above presentation of the bloc’s characterisation was based on an analysis of the french presidential elections of 2017 and complementary data on other european countries.

THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS OF 2019

The electoral results of 2019 have shown to some extent some major changes. Following the powerpoint you can see the displacement of electorates.

Solidification of the far right bloc, up to an homogeneous one?

- Arrived first at the elections (23,36%-23)
- Received more votes than in 2014 (4,7 M vs 5,2 M)
- Is able to continue capturing parts of the right-wing voters
- Conserves most its voters from previous elections
- In the contexte of “referendum against Macron”, they appeared as the best opposition

COLLAPSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL BLOC

- On its “left”: 27 % of the François Fillon voters that voted in the European elections chose the République En Marche (LREM)
- “On its right”: 15 % of the François Fillon voters that voted in the European elections chose the Rassemblement National (RN) / Vox: Partido Popular’s electorate / Lega: Berlusconi’s electorate

Rightisation of the bourgeois bloc:

- The politics of the government clearly aligned with a right wing or even a far right agenda (on migration, repression of social movements and “war on terrorism” focus, neoliberal economic policies, and so on...).
- The first year began with a scission from the center right and the less conservative right, creating a group in the Parliament to support Emmanuel Macron.
- Macron’s left flank: Some of Macron’s voters that had leftist sympathies / ex Hollande voters were the first to withdraw their support.
- Total victory in capturing the right wing voters

Emergence of the greens as an intermediary option:

- Usually succeed at the European level: erg 2009: 16,28% 2,8 M but 2,31% presidential 2012
- Gained from Macron’s left flank as well as the left in general (JLM 17%, BH 26%, M 20%)
- Unstable temporality of the vote (15% on the day, 16% during the last week) but relatively high in socio-cultural professions
- Weak popular vote: future difficulty to become hegemonic

Explosion of the leftist bloc: (FI 6,31- 1,5M – 6 / PCF 2,4% / Generations 3,1% / PS 6,19%-1,4M- 6)

- Abstention (53%of JLM voters of 2017)
- For the ones who voted: Left (13% PCF, 7% PS, 2% Generation.s) Greens (17%)

Similar problems in Spain (PSOE), Germany (Greens), Syriza (Abstention of the middle class).

Results for the left: Explosion of the tacit alliance between popular classes and socio-cultural professions, absconding of the youth toward the greens (11% vs 26% for the > 35), Drop in the intermediary and high positions

CONCLUSION: THERE ARE THREE MAIN IDEAS TO REMEMBER:

- I) **The existing transfers and circulation of electorates are internal to each social political option. The repartition is there fore inside the left** (between the radical left and more social-democrat options) and on the other side inside of the right wing (between the far right

and the classical conservatives parties). Transfers from one side to another of the political spectrum is usually very rare, numerically not relevant however depending also on voting systems.

- II) In the middle, the ruling class is trying to compose with the fact it usually represents minoritarian interests. It has an ability of dragging the most privileged and moderate electorate from both sides but, as in the case of France, is more vulnerable on its left flank because the continuation of right wing and neoliberal policies can “radicalise” partly its electorate.
- III) The greens have been successful in capturing part of the leftist electorate and part of the bloc bourgeois’one. However they are receiving a weak popular vote, and they are usually more successful at the european ballot. The left can not ignore however the centrality of political ecology and it offers to it a new opportunity to advocate for an anticapitalist political rupture.

Future perspectives of the European family of the political Left

By **Heinz Bierbaum** is the head of the International Commission of the party Die LINKE as well as a member of the Political Secretariat of the Party of the European Left.

The presentations we had in this seminar spoke very clearly. The entire Left in Europe suffered a clear defeat – with, of course, some exceptions (Bloco in Portugal, PTB in Belgium, Levica in Slovenia, Akel in Cyprus). All in all, we have to acknowledge that the Left was not in the position to present itself as a strong political alternative as intended – alternative to the neoliberal policies and in particular to the far Right with their nationalism and racism. The Left was not seen as a political force having the answers for the current challenges. That's the difference to the Greens. I don't think that they have really the answers, but they are seen as a political force having the answers fulfilling the challenges like climate change and other ecological demands.

One of the main questions dividing the left forces in Europe is the position towards the European Union (EU), is the question whether the EU can be reformed or not. There are very different positions – to respect the treaties or to disobey them, Plan B, leaving the Euro-zone or not etc. There have been certainly interesting conferences in particular regarding Plan B and there are still a lot of issues to have to be discussed in order to develop an alternative economic and social policy. But very often debates about the question whether the EU can be reformed or not are rather abstract and unnecessary. In the end this question is not so important. It's obvious that the Europe we want – a democratic, social, ecological and peaceful Europe – can't be based on the Treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon which execute a neoliberal policy. But the question is not: EU yes or no, but the political processes which have to be launched in order to change the societal and political climate as a condition for changing European policy and politics in the direction we want.

The Left in Europe is divided. There are at least three different strategies:

- The Party of the European Left (EL) with their programmatic platform for the European elections and the nomination of two top candidates: Violeta Tomic and Nico Cué.
- DiEM25 with Yanis Varoufakis aiming at an extensive democratization of the European institutions and European policy. His application in Germany was not very nice for us, DIE LINKE.

- Maintenant le Peuple, initiated by France Insoumise, Bloco and Podemos and supported by Scandinavian left-wing parties with the demand to disobey the existing European Treaties.

All three strategies had in my view not a big impact on the campaign of the left forces in Europe and were not able to shape the election campaign. Our top candidates made every effort, but with little effect. The campaigns were mostly national.

What are the consequences? Which conclusions we have to draw regarding this unsatisfactory situation?

In my opinion there are two main tasks:

- We have to strengthen the cooperation and the collaboration between the left forces in Europe in order to become a strong Left being visible in Europe
- We have to give us an attractive political profile corresponding to the challenges we are facing.

The two tasks, of course, are linked to each other.

First some words concerning the political profile. Yes, it's true that there are different positions regarding the EU, the Treaties, the role of the Euro and as a consequence the differences in the strategies which the left forces are pursuing. On the other hand, however, there are also a lot of convergencies. We have many common positions and proposals. We all agree, that the austerity policy has to be ended and that we need another economic policy with an offensive program of public investments which requests also the abolition of the Fiscal Compact. We all agree that in connection with this alternative economic policy the role of the ECB has to be revised towards assuming an active role for economic development and for the creation of jobs. And we are all convinced that the financial markets have to be democratically controlled and the financial speculation has to be forbidden. We need another tax policy and the tax havens have to be closed. We all agree that the social rights have to be improved transforming for example the adopted Pillar of social Rights into a Social Protocol with binding social rights. And we are all against the militarisation of the EU. The problem, however,

consists in the fact there are many and also concrete proposals but there is no clear vision for what the Left stands. Therefore, the proposals have to be condensed to a clear profile.

The crucial point for me is the social-ecological transformation of industry. I'm convinced the Left is right in insisting on the connection between the social and the ecological dimension. But we should concretize what we intend when we demand the social-ecological transformation. We should make more efforts programmatically and politically. In my opinion we need a left-wing conception of industrial policy. Such a conception must not consist only of investment programs but has to have as an essential element the workers' participation; i.e. industrial democracy. I know that for example the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation initiated and organized interesting studies about industrial policy, but the debate within the Left and the left-wing parties is not very well developed. It has to be improved. Necessary is also an improved cooperation with social movements and with the trade unions. As Left we have to defend the interests of the workers and to work out answers to the far-reaching changes in industrial production and in the world of labour. And as Left we should also focus on "transformation" making clear that the main ecological problems like the climate change can't be resolved in an economic system dominated by profit. The ecological modernisation of capitalism as intended by the Greens seems to be a short-term answer, but it is not a solution. A real solution is only possible when we overcome the limits of capitalist development. We need a socialist perspective. That's our difference to the Greens.

Concerning the cooperation between the left forces we need a real and serious dialogue. This requests also an improvement of the political discussion within the EL. We can't always avoid the controversial positions as we often do – for example regarding the politics of the Greek government led by Syriza. The European Forum could be a platform for the necessary dialogue between the left forces. For the first time it took place in Marseille 2017, for the second time last year in Bilbao and the third one is provided for November in Brussels.

We have to work that the Forum will be successful. The first two Forums have been certainly positive steps, but they are not sufficient. In the final declaration of Bilbao four basic axes are indicated on which we should have worked

after the Forum – a new model of social and ecological development, gender equality, peace and collective security, empowering popular sovereignty. With the exception of the feminist strike there have been not so many activities in these respects. This has to be changed. The next Forum has to be larger, more open and more engaged in the construction of cooperation of the progressive forces. This is an important task for the EL and for Transform as well.

The far right in Government in EU

The strategies and the contradictions of far-right parties in Austria and Italy

By **Giuseppe Cugnata**, is a facilitator of transform! europe in the programme "Strategies against the Far and Populist Right" and research assistant at Espaces Marx Institute

PREAMBLE

This article was developed before the Italian government crisis of August 2019, thus it does not take into account the effects that the crisis has produced, because they were not known at the time of the analysis. Anyway, we suppose that it does not interfere in the understanding of the political and sociological results which have brought to the expansion of the Far-right in Europe and in particular in Italy and Austria and which we will examine in the following pages.

INTRODUCTION

The last European elections were marked by the growth (although not disruptive) of far-right parties in almost all EU member States. With the exception of the European group EFDD (composed by the former members of UKIP, now BREXIT party and from the Five Star Movement MPs) which did not form a group because of the loss of allies (the minimum threshold is 25 MPs from 7 Countries), the two parliamentary groups on the far right (European Conservatives and Reformists led by Ryszard Legutko from PiS and the new group Identity and Democracy, born as successor to the Europe of Nations and Freedom and now led by Marco Zanni, former European MP of M5S then switched to the Lega) achieved a total number of 134 MPs, 19 more than on 2014.

The far right achieved a good score in Spain, it increased its consensus in a dramatic way in Italy, Hungary and Poland, it maintained its position in France and Germany, and it lost some points in Austria. European elections 2019 thus confirmed the positive trend for the far right all over Europe. The situation become even more alarming if we take in account the number of countries in which the far right is already in Government and the possible impact on the next national elections.

At the date of the preparation of this research, we can classify six cases of far-right parties within government majorities in EU:

- The list "United Patriots" (ECR) which is composed by a coalition of three different far right parties and which is the minor partner of the government coalition led by the Prime Minister's Borisov party GERB (EPP).
- The Estonian Conservative Party EKRE (ID) which is the minor partner of the government coalition with the Centre Party and the conservative Pro Patria party.
- The Lega (ID) in Italy, minor partner of a coalition with the populist catch-all party Five Star Movement (former EFDD)
- The National Alliance (ECR) in Latvia, partner in a multipolar coalition from liberal pro-European parties to far right
- The Law and Justice party PiS (ECR) in Poland, the historical party of Jarosław Kaczyński, which gained an outright majority in 2015 legislative elections
- Viktor Orban's Fidesz party (EPP) in coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party which gained an outright majority in 2018 legislative elections.

The list could also include other parties for which the classification as far-right party is doubtful like the Croatian Democratic Union HDZ (EPP), greater partner of a coalition government with other center-right parties. Far-right parties which have supported in the past a minority government without entering the government, like Danish People's Party (ID) which has supported Lars Løkke Rasmussen II Cabinet or parties which have entered the Government in the very recent past like the Austrian Freedom Party FPÖ in Austria, which was minor partner of Kurz government until the Ibiza scandal on June 2019². In this study we want to focus this latter experience and on the Italian case, in order to understand what are the strategies leading to the reproduction of the consensus of far-right parties in Government and the contradictions they inevitably produce.

2 Philip Oltermann, Austria's 'Ibiza scandal': what happened and why does it matter? The Guardian, 20 May 2019

I – THE AUSTRIAN CASE

THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS 2017

The FPÖ is one of the oldest extreme right parties in Europe. In 2017 it achieves its better score in legislative elections in terms of number of voters (1 310 614 meaning 25.97% of votes), arriving in third position after the People’s party ÖVP and the social-democrats SPÖ (Fig.1). As a result of the election, the new government chaired by the leader of the ÖVP Sebastian Kurz is constituted as a coalition of the ÖVP and of FPÖ.

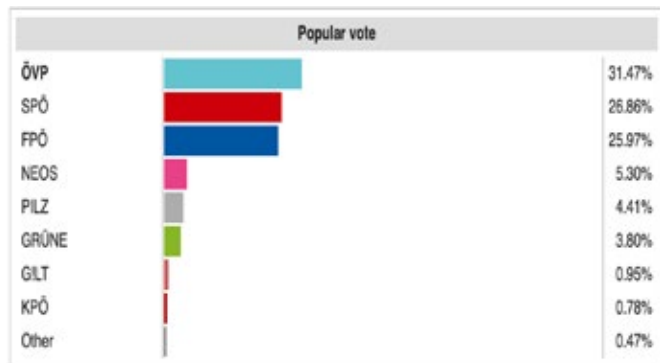


Fig.1 Austrian legislative elections 2017, source: SORA Institute

In order to understand what are the roots of this score, we have to look at the socio-economic structure of FPÖ voters. Despite the homogenization process of the social bases of FPÖ, we can distinguish between two major blocs: the working class (59% of blue collars voted for the FPÖ) and the white collars/self-employed (respectively 26% and 23% of each group voted for FPÖ) (Fig.2).

How different socio-economic groups voted

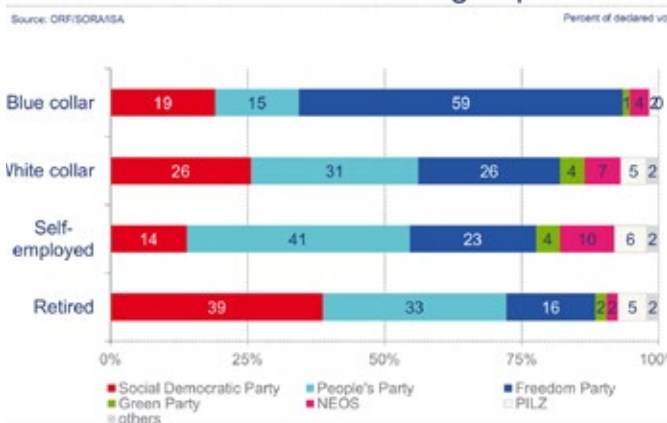


Fig. 2 The profession of voters in 2017, source: SORA Institute, 2017

The second factor that we have to consider is the educational level (Fig. 3). The majority of FPÖ voters only completed compulsory schooling (33%) or have a professional diploma (37%).

Wahlverhalten nach formaler Bildung					
	Pflichtschule	Lehre	BMS	Matura	Universität
SPÖ	33	25	21	25	31
ÖVP	25	28	41	42	32
FPÖ	33	37	21	10	7
GRÜNE	3	2	3	6	10
NEOS	2	4	7	8	9
PILZ	2	3	5	8	9

Angaben in Prozent.

Fig. 3 The educational level of voters in 2017, source: SORA Institute

FPÖ voters have the more pessimistic vision of the future (Fig.4): 42% of voters which have a pessimistic vision for the future voted for FPÖ in 2017. After this brief analysis we can affirm that the FPÖ voters can be considered for the most part as dissatisfied, lower educated and lower income voters.

Vote choice of respondents optimistic vs. pessimistic for the future

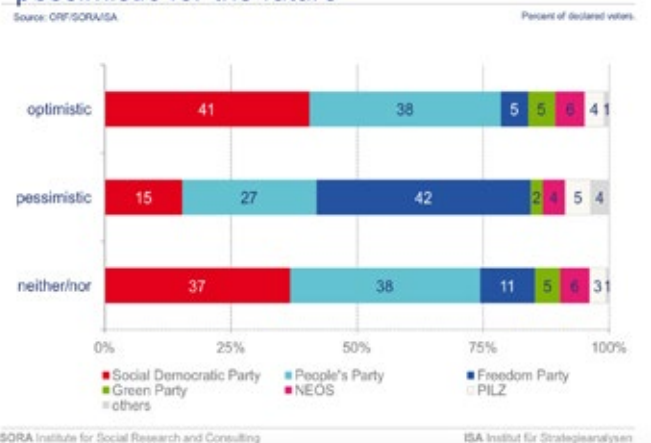


Fig. 4 Optimistic vs. pessimistic vision according to voters, source: SORA Institute

Some important information come also from the analysis of the origin of vote. As we can see in Fig. 5 the majority of FPÖ’s voters are already polarized on FPÖ and other far right parties, with the exception of a minority of votes coming from ÖVP and SPÖ. Thus, we can suppose that in

general there is not a true transfer of vote from the left to the far right.³

	SPÖ 2017	ÖVP 2017	FPÖ 2017	Grüne 2017	NEOS 2017	PILZ 2017	Sonst. 2017
SPÖ 2013	70%	3%	12%	1%	2%	15%	12%
ÖVP 2013	1%	60%	7%	2%	13%	5%	6%
FPÖ 2013	1%	11%	54%	1%	7%	6%	7%
Grüne 2013	12%	5%	2%	76%	22%	31%	11%
NEOS 2013	1%	4%	1%	1%	39%	14%	2%
FRANK 2013	2%	7%	7%	0%	3%	4%	12%
BZÖ 2013	0%	3%	7%	0%	3%	3%	1%
Sonstige 2013	1%	0%	1%	3%	2%	9%	26%
Nichtw. 2013	12%	8%	9%	15%	9%	14%	24%
Summe 2017	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Fig. 5 Vote origin from 2013 elections to 2017 elections, source: SORA Institute

THE FPÖ IN GOVERNMENT

FPÖ conquered the most strategical positions within the government, in particular the Vice Chancellor (Strache), the Ministry of Interior (Kickl) and the Ministry of Defense (Kunasek), thus the entire security apparatus which controls the police, the secret service and the army.

Starting from those positions the FPÖ promoted several security measures against migrants (cutting benefits and protection for refugees with subsidiary protection) which reproduced their consensus among electorate (80% of Austrian citizens want to better protect Europe's borders⁴).

At the same time, despite the fact that the majority of votes for FPÖ came from depressed working class and that the social benefits was the third most discussed topic by FPÖ voters,⁵ the Government launched a series of neoliberal measures, such as the reduction of the accident insurance contribution of employees, the proposal of shorter unem-

ployment benefit for sick job seekers, the pressure on wages through regionalization of the shortage occupations and the proposal of 12-hours day and the 60-hours week for workers.⁶

CONCLUSION ON THE AUSTRIAN CASE

The general turmoil after the Ibiza Gate produced the fall of credibility of FPÖ during the European elections (17% and 3 seats, one lesser than 2014). At the same time, following the process of radicalization of the electorate, the fall of FPÖ votes could be entirely absorbed by ÖVP: according to a survey conducted by ATV-Österreich-Trend only 14% of respondents consider ÖVP and FPÖ pursuing very different interests.⁷

At the same time the articulation between the two blocs (depressed working class – neoliberal self-employed) should be in theory menaced by the ideological **contradiction** between the **chauvinist welfarist issues** of the majority of the electorate and the **fully neoliberal attitude** of the FPÖ but in practice it is not true because the far-right bloc resists and increases its consensus in particular within the working class.

3 This thesis is particularly supported in France by the sociologist Perrineau (see P. PERRINEAU, *Le Gauchisme-Lepénisme. Des fractures dans la transmission des valeurs et des orientations politiques ?* in Anne Muxel, *Temps et politique*, Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.) « Académique », 2016, p. 181-202) which affirms that there is a transfer of votes between the radical left and the Front National. The analysis of the presidential elections on 2017 show that this thesis could be contradicted also in France and that the transfer of vote between Mélenchon and Le Pen is inconsistent (Y. LE LANN, A. DE CABANES, *France Insoumise versus the Front National – The Differences Between Far-Right and Left-wing Populism*, in *Integration, Disintegration, Nationalism, Transform! Europe Yearbook 2018*, pag. 174).

4 Yougov Survey for European Council on Foreign Relations, April 1, 2019

5 M. Zandonella, F. Perlot, *Election Day Survey Austrian Parliamentary Election 2017*, SORA Institute, October 15, 2017

6 Kontrast Redaction, *Regierungsbilanz: Die Gewinner und Verlierer nach einem Jahr ÖVP-FPÖ*, December 4, 2018

7 Kontrast Redaction, *ÖVP Politik erklärt: Die Hintergründe, die Gewinner, die Verlierer – Zahlen, Daten & Fakten*, May 3, 2019

II – THE ITALIAN CASE

THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS 2018

The national elections 2018 were marked by the fall of the of the center-left coalition led by the Democratic Party (S&D) and the decline of the moderate right represented by Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (EPP). The winner of the elections was the populist catch-all party Five Star Movement, leaded by Luigi Di Maio. The unexpected score was achieved by the Lega, the populist far right party led by Matteo Salvini which collected 17% of votes within the right coalition together with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and the neo-fascist party Fratelli d’Italia (ECR) (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Results of 2018 legislative elections in Italy, source: Italian Ministry of Interior

The results brought to a political crisis lasted three months which ended with a compromise between M5S and the Lega and the constitution of a coalition Government. A “contract of government” is created by mixing the programs of the two parties. Three topics are at the center: security, flat tax and citizenship income.

THE SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL VARIABLES

What is the origin of Salvini’s electorate? In order to answer to this question, we have to analyze two factors: (1) which class Salvini’s electorate belong to? (2) Is there a transfer of votes from left to far-right?



Fig. 7 Vote in Legislative elections 2018 according to professions, source: IPSOS 2018

First of all, we can analyze the voters of the Lega from a class point of view. The data on the professions of voters (Fig. 7) show that Salvini’s electorate is polarized on two classes: 23,8% of the working class and 23,6% of the self-dependent workers (artisans, small entrepreneurs especially in the Northern Italy) voted for Salvini. This structure of votes corresponds to the traditional vote of “center-right” coalition which supported in the past Berlusconi. Secondly, we can analyze those voters from an educational point of view (Fig. 8). The majority of the voters of Salvini have a low educational degree. On the one hand, thus, we can confirm the thesis of the “relative proletarianization of the far-right” which affirms that, even if in absolute values the number of proletariat in Western countries is decreasing, the number of workers voting for the far-right is increasing⁸; on the other the composition of the electorate of Salvini corresponds to the historical electorate of Berlusconi, from a socio-professional point of view.

8 For a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon see E. MICHEL, Welfare Politics and the Radical Right The Relevance of Welfare Politics for the Radical Right’s Success in Western Europe (2017), Ph.D Thesis, European University Institute, p. 145



Fig. 8, Vote in Legislative elections 2018 according to educational degree, source: IPSOS 2018

We can verify those results also if we analyze the last European elections where the Lega has reached its historic peak (Fig. 9). The Lega is at the same time the party of the self-employed (42% of them) and of the working-class (40% of them). The data demonstrate how the party has strengthened those two socio-economical blocs, in particular thanks to the anti-taxation policies⁹ and most of all thanks to the cultural protectionism strategy which is one of the most important determinants for voters coming from different classes to support the same candidate¹⁰.



Fig. 9 Vote in European elections 2019 according to professions, source: IPSOS 2019

THE TRANSFER OF VOTES

The same result is achieved even if we analyze the second factor, the transfer of votes. As we can see, Salvini’s voters came mainly from the former center-right coalition, while the transfer of votes from the Democratic Party is 2% and from the M5S is 6% in comparison to 2013 elections.¹¹

Even if we analyze the transfer of votes (Fig. 10), Salvini maintained its own electorate (81% of his voters in 2018 voted again for the Lega in 2019¹²) and attracted also some voters from Forza Italia, consolidating on one hand the traditional bloc of “center-right” voters. But at the same time the most evident transfer of votes comes from M5S: 14% percent of voters of M5S switched in favor of Lega in 2019, the most important loss for the Five Star Movement after the abstention (41%). Since the fact that the electoral basis of M5S is extremely heterogenous, we can suppose that this injection of votes comes from “the left-wing” of the Movement, but the data show that actually the Lega takes votes in particular from “the right” of the Five Star Movement (voters of Lega self-positioning on the “right” increased of 17% after the injection¹³) and thus that also in this complex transfer of votes there is no support for the thesis of the transfer of votes between left and far-right.

9 The “Flat tax” at 15% and 20% for all incomes and “fiscal peace” for tax arrears are the most sponsored measure of the Lega, and also the most important friction points with the European Commission.

10 See D. OESCH, Explaining workers’s support for the right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway and Switzerland, in International Political Review (2008), Vol. 29, No. 3, 349-373

11 N. PAGNONCELLI, L. COMODO, M. FORNI, Elezioni politiche 2018 – Analisi post-voto, IPSOS, pp. 21-22

12 N. PAGNONCELLI, L. COMODO, M. FORNI, Elezioni europee 2019 – Analisi post-voto, IPSOS, p. 31

13 Ibidem, p. 31

Salvini's electorate comes from citizens already oriented to the right. Thus, our results show how the electoral blocs are moving slowly, and thus it contradicts the thesis of the transfer of votes between the left and the far right.¹⁴

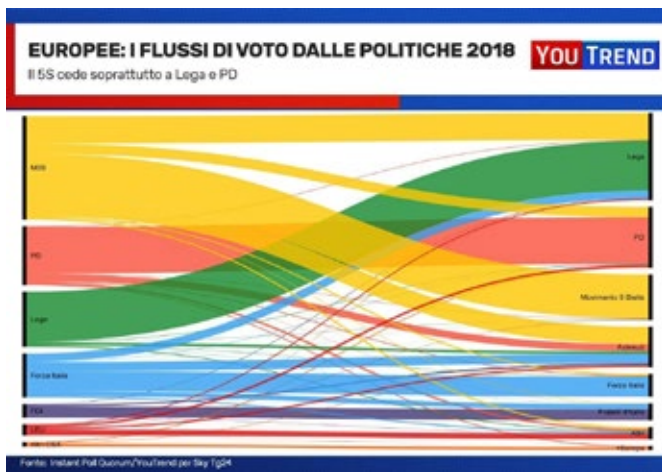


Fig. 10 The Transfer of votes between 2018 national elections and 2019 European elections, source: Youtrend 2019

SALVINI HEGEMONIZES THE GOVERNMENT

Although the League obtained the half of votes in comparison to Five Star Movement in 2018 Legislative elections, it achieved some of the most strategic position within the Government, in particular the Vice presidency and Ministry of Interior (Salvini), the Ministry of education (Bussetti), the Ministry of Regional affairs (Stefani)¹⁵.

Since the beginning of the mandate, the institutional role of the Premier Conte has been obscured by Salvini which starts a campaign to close the harbors to stop the arrivals of migrants in Italian coasts. Furthermore, Salvini launched

two "Security Laws" which were focused in particular in preventing NGOs to help migrants and in the rapid implementation of expulsion orders for migrants considered as "irregular". In addition to its personal social management team, he conquered strategic position in the public television (the presidency of RAI) which contributed to strength its notoriety and which had a massive impact in obtaining consensus among people which are politically informed only through Television (39,7% of them voted for Salvini, so there is an overrepresentation of those voters¹⁶).

Thus, we can affirm that holding the "repressive State apparatus" (the Ministry of Interior) played a fundamental role in acquiring the "ideological State apparatus" (Television, social networks, journals) and thus in reproducing the consensus in favor of Salvini and the Lega, which in a last instance can be considered as a support to the ruling class. It is worth recalling here the combination of repressive state apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses that Althusser had already well defined in the well-known 1970 writing that: "the (repressive) State apparatus functions in a massively prevalent way to repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily to ideology. (There is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus). [...] the ideological State apparatuses operate in a massively prevalent way with ideology, but while functioning secondarily with repression, even at the limit, but only at the limit, very attenuated, hidden, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.)"¹⁷

This point is very relevant also from an European point of view if we consider that in the majority of the cases in which the far-right entered the Government (Austria, Estonia, Poland, Hungary) included the so-called "illiberal de-

14 This thesis is particularly supported in France by the sociologist Perrineau (see P. PERRINEAU, *Le Gauchisme-Lepénisme. Des fractures dans la transmission des valeurs et des orientations politiques ?* in Anne Muxel, *Temps et politique*, Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.) « Académique », 2016, p. 181-202) which affirms that there is a transfer of votes between the radical left and the Front National. The analysis of the presidential elections on 2017 show that this thesis could be contradicted also in France and that the transfer of vote between Mélenchon and Le Pen is inconsistent (Y. LE LANN, A. DE CABANES, *France Insoumise versus the Front National – The Differences Between Far-Right and Left-wing Populism*, in *Integration, Disintegration, Nationalism, Transform!* Europe Yearbook 2018, pag. 174).

15 Even if it is not evident, the Ministry of Regional affairs has large powers in Italy in particular after the Constitutional reform (1999-2001) which modified the distribution of competences between the State and the regions. Furthermore, following the referendum for the differentiated autonomy in Lombardy and Veneto in 2017, the Lega has promoted a campaign for the economic autonomy of those two regions, which are the richest regions of Italy, deepening the economic cleavage between North and South. This process is led by the Ministry of Regional affairs.

16 N. PAGNONCELLI, L. COMODO, M. FORNI, *Elezioni europee 2019 – Analisi post-voto*, IPSOS, p. 13

17 L. ALTHUSSER, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État.", *La Pensée*, n° 151, juin 1970, p. 23

mocracies"; the far-right partner achieved some roles in the repressive apparatus (in particular the Ministry of Interior).

Different analyses have considered Salvini and the Lega capable of gaining consensus among the working classes also thanks to a political attitude that we could define as "welfare chauvinism", which refers to the strengthening of social measures and the welfare state aimed only at Italian citizens with the exclusion of foreigners, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. This thesis, which has found much importance over the years in the academic landscape on the radical right studies¹⁸, is, however, in contrast with a particularly important fact, which is visible both on the demand side and on the supply side. On the demand side, in fact, it can be seen that the voters of the Lega, despite putting the employment and the work as the first instance, on average with the rest of the voters, are over-represented on issues such as immigration and security and are instead under-represented compared to other more "welfarist" issues such as poverty and pensions and social assistance¹⁹. In the same way, on the political supply side, Salvini has developed the "security issue" as the first theme of the campaign both for the legislative elections and for the European elections, in first place with respect to social and economic issues.²⁰ Therefore, the thesis of "welfare chauvinism" can be considered unverified.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that we can draw after this analysis are not composed by statements but by questions for the Left. Three issues seem to be relevant in order to deconstruct the consensus for the far-right: (1) the electoral basis of extreme right parties is composed mainly by voters which are already politicized on the extreme right and by non-politicized economically depressed voters already oriented to the right (as Italian and Austrian cases show). The conclusion is thus that mainly there is not a direct transfer of votes from the left to the right. What measures could be implemented by the Left in order to strength its own bloc without foolishly run in the hunt of right-wing voters? (2) As the Italian and the Austrian cases show, the achievement of the repressive apparatus of State leads to the reproduc-

tion of the consensus for the far-right parties. This is why usually those parties negotiate those positions in order to enter the majority: what the Left can do in order to avoid it? (3) Concerning the internal electoral bases of the far right, although the electoral base is not completely homogeneous the process of homogenization around the working class is becoming more and more deep. But despite this trend, the far-right parties seem to be more interested in neoliberal policies (privatization, cutting in social benefits, anti-taxation) rather than "welfare chauvinism" ones. Why working-class right-wing voters do not reject those policies? Does it still make sense to use the "welfare chauvinism" category for analyzing the far-right or we should consider other characteristics of this electorate like "social meritocracy"?

18 H. KITSCHOLT, (1997), *The radical right in Western Europe: a comparative analysis*, University of Michigan Press

19 N. PAGNONCELLI, L. COMODO, M. FORNI, *Elezioni europee 2019 – Analisi post-voto*, IPSOS, p. 60

20 *Ibidem*, p. 39

The Spanish case

By **FEC**: The Europe of Citizens Foundation / *Fundación por la Europa de los Ciudadanos (FEC)* is an institution founded in 1998 and dependent on *Izquierda Unida*. Its purposes are related to training, policy development, and international cooperation. The centre of our work is focus on left activists' training and promoting debate among different kind of political, social and trade union activists. We also manage the *Izquierda Unida Historical Archive*.

1. MILESTONES OF THE LAST POLITICAL CYCLE²¹

In 2008, Spain suffered the first consequences of the Great Recession, which were accompanied with several political scandals played by the main political parties at the national level. The political discontent crossed all the country while the people witnessed a deep crisis in political, social, economic and cultural terms that finally shook up not only the party's system but also the public agenda.

In 2011 a new social movement raised up, the 15M Movement, as an expression of the political discontent from a new social majority searching for an alternative organization of the current state of affairs (in terms of organization of the Spanish political and economic system). In the same year, the conservative Popular Party (PP) won the general elections and its candidate, Mariano Rajoy, was the head of a Government that enjoyed a comfortable majority in Parliament. In those 2011 elections, the social democrat PSOE suffered a significant defeat after its years in office, while the radical left *Izquierda Unida* (IU), member of the Party of the European Left, had regained some of its previous support and secured 6.9% of the vote.

Figure 1. European Parliament elections 2014 (source diariodenavarra.es)



Three years later, in 2014, the European Parliament electoral results opened what some political scientist name as a new era for Spanish left wing parties. We can characterize this period as an electoral and party turmoil, featured with political uncertainty in Spain with:

- Weakening of two parties' dominance. PP and PSOE only received a little under 50% of the vote (26.1% and 23% respectively). Each of these two parties sustained losses of around 16% compared to their results in the – politically very remote – 2009 EP elections.
- Fragmentation. Two new nationwide parties obtained somewhat modest, but nonetheless remarkable results: Podemos, on the radical left, won 8% of the vote, while Ciudadanos (Cs), on the centre-right, secured 3.2%
- At the same time, this rapid rise of a new radical-left party was accompanied by a momentary resurgence of IU that saw it obtain 10% of the vote, more than doubling its meagre previous results. Together, Podemos and IU almost recouped the huge losses sustained by PSOE, and, more importantly still, these two radical left-wing parties garnered the most support ever obtained by the Spanish radical left in nationwide elections.

During 2015, Podemos constantly grew at the polls, to the point that it seemed the party may overtake PSOE. These crucial months in the configuration of the Spanish left saw three parties (PSOE, Podemos and IU) compete fiercely amongst themselves. At that time, Podemos avoided describing itself as a left-wing party. However, Podemos failed to achieve its ambitious goals of electorally overtaking PSOE and winning office in the 2015 general elections.

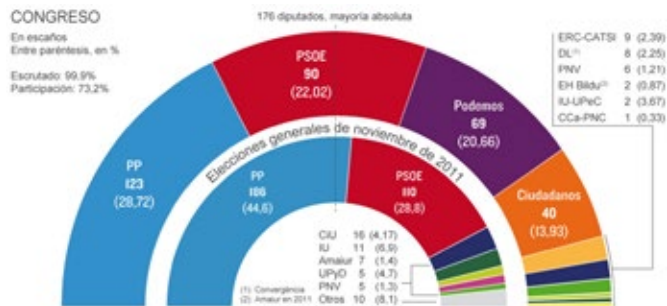
21 In the first two sections, we try to sum up the information and analysis published in several academic papers and political documents from the Spanish left wing parties, specially the works written by the political scientist Luis Ramiro for the RLS analyzing the European elections in Spain:

“Increased Polarisation and Fragmentation in the Shadow of National Electoral Politics” –

<https://www.rosalux.eu/topics/elections-and-parties/2019-european-parliament-elections-in-spain/?L=524>

“A Tale of Two Tales” – <https://www.rosalux.eu/topics/euro19/the-2019-european-parliament-elections-in-spain/?L=524>

Figure 2. General elections 2015 (source elmundo.es)



In the meantime, IU repeatedly attempted to reach an agreement with Podemos to run together the 2015 elections. All IU's efforts were unsuccessful. Despite taking on Podemos at a time when it was rising strongly in the polls, IU survived the 2015 elections, gaining parliamentary representation (3.7% of the vote and two MPs out of 350). PSOE suffered another defeat, although its electoral decline was offset by the relative achievement of maintaining its position as the largest left-of-centre party (PSOE got 22% of the vote, and Podemos 20.7%).

The inconclusive outcome of the 2015 general elections was followed by unsuccessful negotiations between PSOE and Podemos to form a government. New general elections were called for 2016. Some of the problems currently affecting Podemos and IU, as well as PSOE's optimistic prospects, have their origins in the 2016 general elections.

The 2016 general elections produced an inconclusive result again. Although PSOE was able to slightly increase its share of votes (but not of MPs), the conservative PP experienced a significant improvement in its results. With the support of a weakened Cs and the abstention of most of PSOE's MPs, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was able to form a new government and remain in office. These were crucial times for PSOE. A very serious internal crisis exploded around the results and Rajoy's investiture vote, resulting in the resignation of the party leader, Pedro Sánchez, who lost the support of the majority of the PSOE's regional leaders.

Figure 3. General elections 2016 (source abc.es)



Sánchez preferred to resign to allow the formation of the new conservative government, a move that was defended by most of the party's regional leaders. Months later, Pedro Sánchez would be elected party leader again in a process of party primaries in which he could present himself as the defender of a tough stance against PP. In just a few months, PSOE went from an electoral defeat, an internal crisis and a divisive leadership contest to a reinvigorated opposition role under the leadership of Sánchez, who had been obliged to resign only a few months earlier.

For the radical left, the 2016 elections were a kind of moment of truth. Podemos dialed back its populist overtones and, in a full reverse of strategy, formed a coalition with the 'established' radical-left IU in an attempt to overcome PSOE. However, the strategy failed. The Podemos-IU coalition lost thousands of votes. Podemos was unable to become the largest left-of-centre party, its original formally stated goal. The Spanish radical left had never before attained such a high level of support, but that was an insufficient reward compared to Podemos' own goals. If the 2016 elections provoked a deep crisis in PSOE, from which Podemos-IU could benefit, the social democrats' reinvigoration after Pedro Sánchez won a new term as PSOE's leader ended any hope. On the contrary, the usual internal crises experienced by Podemos in many of its regional organizations acquired even more severe features since 2016.

After winning office in 2016, the PP government faced an intensification of nationalist demands in Catalonia and a constant presence of political scandals affecting high-ranking PP officials. A motion of no confidence stemming from the latter of these fundamental issues ended with all the peripheral nationalists and Podemos-IU supporting the

PSOE candidate for the prime ministerial post in June 2018. Pedro Sánchez was elected President. A social democrat President took office with the external support of the radical-left Podemos-IU coalition.

Since then, PSOE has almost continuously improved its support in the polls (after the consolidation of the new leadership of Pedro Sánchez as a way back to the socialist origins of the party; and the motion of no confidence against Rajoy leading a progressive agenda at least in symbolic terms – Franco’s tomb), while Podemos-IU’s support has eroded (although the level of Podemos-IU’s support is relatively high by the standards of the West European radical left, it is very worrying considering Podemos’ previous level of support).

2. 2019: NATIONAL, LOCAL, REGIONAL AND EUROPEAN ELECTIONS.

Some of the specificities of the EP elections as second order elections were even more acutely manifested due to their contemporaneous timing to other critical national elections.

General elections. After being unable to secure a parliamentary majority in support of the annual budget, Pedro Sánchez called for general elections to be held at the end of April:

- The PSOE won the national elections obtaining 29% of the vote, with a swing of +6 points. Amidst diminishing electoral returns for their Social Democrat and centre-left colleagues across Europe, the results of PSOE represent a comparatively healthy level of support
- The Conservative PP suffered a crushing defeat of historical proportions. The PP’s 17% is the lowest level of support for the party in its entire history since 1989. Its lose 71 seats in the Congress.
- Its now new competitor party for the hegemony among the centre-right electorate, Ciudadanos (Cs), almost surpassed the PP. Cs got 16% of the vote, with a swing of +3 points
- Appearance of a significant radical right competitor too, Vox, which obtained 10% of the vote and 24 seats, from a previous level of less than 1% in the 2016 general elections.
- The radical left – the Unidas Podemos (UP) coalition between Podemos, Izquierda Unida (IU), and Catalunya en Comú – suffered dramatic losses, with its result decreasing from 21% in 2016 to 14% (losing 1 million 3 hundred

thousands votes) in April 2019. Positive readings: UP’s 14% is a comparatively high level of support in the context of the European radical left. The results were translated into a number of MPs that, given the relative majority won by the PSOE in the lower chamber, might be decisive for government formation and legislative procedures. Negative readings: But leaving aside the positive aspects, a negative swing of 7 points and a decrease of 33% of its previous vote share can hardly be considered anything short of an electoral disaster. These were the second general elections ending with a radical left decrease – after the previous 2016 general elections already resulted in a worse outcome than the one obtained in 2015 separately by the then mutually competing Podemos and IU.

Figure 4. General elections 2019 (source www.britishchamberspain.com)



Local, regional and European elections. The successive regional, local en EP elections held one month later, at the end of May, fundamentally confirmed these results with

some variations and regional peculiarities. Let's focus on the European level:

- The PSOE got again very good results, 33% of the vote, even improving its performance at the national elections of April. These results were much higher than its performance at the previous 2014 EP elections: the PSOE benefitted from a positive swing of almost 10 points and got 20 MEPs in 2019.
- The conservative PP reached a modest mark of 20% (a negative swing of 6 points from the 2014 EP elections) and 12 MEPs
- However, the liberals of Cs were only able to gain an even more modest and openly disappointing 12% of the vote (7 MEPs), a relatively poor result taking into consideration that the party informally aspired to become the largest party of the centre-right during this electoral season.
- The far right party Vox obtained a significantly lower level of support than the one received one month earlier (6% of the vote and 3 MEPs)
- The UP coalition (Podemos, IU, Catalunya en Comú) obtained 10% of the vote and 6 MEPs in the May 2019 EP elections (losing 4 points in percentage and a million and a half of votes in only one month). This result was evidently much lower than the one the coalition had obtained one month before in the national elections and even lower from the 2014 EP elections results

Figure 5. European Parliament elections 2019 (source 20minutos.es)



To sum up, we face a significant recovery of the Social Democrat PSOE; dramatic losses for the conservative PP; relevant gains for the liberal Ciudadanos party (Cs); the entry of the radical right Vox with considerable support but far from the momentous double figures of vote percentage

anticipated some months ago; and, finally, a defeat of the radical left coalition Unidas Podemos (UP, Podemos – Izquierda Unida). The Podemos-IU coalition (created in 2016) is suffering a drastic multidimensional weakening after experiencing – in the case of Podemos, at least – an impressive rise. The electoral defeat of UP during the general, regional, local and EP elections is severe and multidimensional: it comprises political or strategic, electoral, and organizational failures.

3. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to generalize before the profusion of data and realities, already mentioned above, but we can pull out some lessons:

- The dispersion and diversity of the candidacies in the different elections has penalized our space. Not even the agreement between Podemos and IU is unanimously accepted internally and in some places, it was impossible to implement for the regional and local elections. This made possible a situation similar to a 'natural experiment', one in which Podemos and IU run together or competed in several places in the regional and local elections of May 2019. Regardless of whether they ran in coalition or competed separately, Podemos and IU seemed unable to halt its electoral decline. No matter the strategy, the results were far from promising.
- The internal conflict and its excessive externalization does not seem to have favored either the political roots or the electoral results. The radical left has experienced notable internal troubles, most dramatically within Podemos. Podemos appears today extremely weakened in organizational terms, has suffered several regional splits (including in Madrid, one of its previous strongholds), and has gone through several leadership crises (including precisely the substitution of its head candidate for the EP elections). Another relevant episode is the one played by Íñigo Errejón in Madrid only a few months before the regional elections. IU is also facing organizational weakening (with some splits within the coalition, which presented their own candidacies in the European elections).
- Where Izquierda Unida (Podemos has failed in building up a territorial structure, and that is a problem for the common candidacies) has a settlement in the territory (organization and relevant political activity), it has resisted better, alone or in convergences.

- In many municipalities and autonomies where it has disappeared by going separately, the addition of Podemos and IU would have supposed a comfortable entrance. In others, even going together it would have been impossible to enter. These realities, as well as the excessive progress of the far right in Europe – and to a lesser extent also in Spain – obliges us to assume a reconfiguration of the political space of the left where there is no place for separate actors to obtain seats.
- In Spain, a new space of the alternative left has been strengthened after 15 M. The candidacies supported by the Izquierda Unida in municipal, autonomous and European states achieve a lower percentage than the United Left maximum in 1994-1995, but in the general elections we are well above the 1996 maximum (but it is a space that does not control United Left and with an organizational and social weakness more pronounced than in that decade).

The electoral performance is at historically high levels of support for the radical left in Spain, and at high levels of support considering the European radical left.

4. NEW POLITICAL CYCLE. AFTER THE DEFEAT PHASE

These results suppose the end of something in terms of the political evolution of the radical left in our country. It also supposes the beginning of something that we have to face with the current organizational and institutional frameworks.

2019 marks the beginning of a new political cycle after the general elections, regional elections, local elections and European Parliament elections: Left-wing parties are entering the political cycle in very different positions PSOE recovered, the radical left greatly weakened

- The populist experiment has failed, at least in the Spanish case.
- Increased polarization (with the ideological distance among the parties in the national party system ranging now from the radical left to the radical right) and Fragmentation (with five significant parties not of similar size but all of them with electoral strengths of 10% or higher)

Two main challenges in this political turning point:

- A) Government agreement with the socialist party. We have three possible scenarios:
- Government of the PSOE alone. In this scenario the left would prolong the “opposition of the left” maintained during the “electoral government” of Pedro Sánchez after the motion of no confidence. In short, the left would approve those measures that would be beneficial for the working class and the popular sectors with a commitment based on specific programmatic measures supported only from the Congress.
 - Government of the PSOE with liberals (Citizens). Undoubtedly the preferred option of economic elites, aware that stability is necessary and this agreement would guarantee at least in the short term.
 - Government coalition between the PSOE and United Podemos. This is the goal of Podemos and seems to be the preferred option by an important part of the leftist electorate. The risk is well known: that our project is diluted, losing its autonomy in a process of definitive “subordination” that also ends up cloistering us in the institutional sphere.
- B) Facing the reorganization of the radical left in Spain
Make progress in the creation of spaces of cooperation between the political and social forces of the left. One of the main lessons that this electoral cycle leaves us is the need to create common spaces of work to coordinate politics and optimize resources. We need coordination spaces to strengthen our social base and our organizational and territorial roots. The absence of such spaces is especially expensive in electoral processes, since they require a unique, common and coherent strategy.

Italy: triumph of the radical right, defeat of the radical left

By **Paolo Chiochetti** is a political scientist specialized in radical left politics, party politics in Western Europe, economic policy, and European integration.

The results of the 2019 European Parliament election in Italy marked a triumph for Matteo Salvini's radical right party Ligue (Lega), which won 34.3 per cent of valid votes, established its unchallenged dominance among the parties of the centre-right pole, and positioned itself as the likely future winner of the next general election. The other major parties, the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), the centre-left Democratic Party (PD), and the centre-right Forward Italy (FI), all suffered a crushing defeat. The Italian radical left, which never managed to recover from the defeat and splits of the years 2007–2009, experienced a further loss of support and won just 2.6 per cent of valid votes, divided between a left-wing and a communist list.

BACKGROUND

The 2008 Great Recession and its aftermath led to a major realignment of the Italian political system, breaking the system of bipolar alternation between a centre-right pole led by Berlusconi's FI and a centre-left pole led by the PD which had been functioning since 1994 and paving the way for an unprecedented level of electoral volatility and the rise of new or renewed political forces.

From 2011 onwards the Italian voters, angered at the desolate socio-economic state of the country, repeated corruption scandals, the painful effects of austerity, and the perceived lack of difference between right and left parties, abandoned in droves their traditional allegiances and engaged in a frantic search for alternatives, which a number of political entrepreneurs managed to exploit for a short or long while: the populist comedian Beppe Grillo (M5S), the independent technocrat Mario Monti (SC), the new PD secretary Matteo Renzi, and the new Lega secretary Matteo Salvini. The fall of the Berlusconi cabinet in November 2011, caused by parliamentary defections in a context of sexual scandals, soaring government bond yields, and strong pressures from the Eurozone partners and the Italian President of the Republic, was followed by a great coalition government (Monti cabinet) which imposed savage austerity measures on the country. The subsequent 2013 general election ended in a stalemate, as none of the four main co-

alitions running (centre-left, centre-right, M5S, and SC) obtained a majority. Nevertheless, the PD managed to rule for five years at the head of shifting coalitions with groups of centrist and centre-right parliamentarians. The 2014 European Parliament election were won by the PD, now led by the dynamic new secretary Renzi, with an incredible 40.8 per cent of the valid votes, but this stabilisation was short-lived: Renzi gradually shed support, lost a constitutional referendum in December 2016, and subsequently resigned as prime minister. In the general election of March 2018, the traditional parties of government, FI and PD, lost heavily to the benefit of two challengers, Luigi Di Maio's M5S and Matteo Salvini's Lega, which after some reflection opted for an atypical "sovereigntist" coalition and supported in June the creation of the Conte I cabinet.

For almost a year, the Conte I cabinet governed with few concrete achievements but growing or stable approval ratings and voting intentions. Nevertheless, the period marked a progressive deterioration of the relationship between the two ruling parties and reversal in their relative fortunes, with a soaring Lega benefitting from the permanent campaigning of its popular leader on migration, security, Euroscepticism, and taxes and an ailing M5S failing to make an impact with its themes and personalities.

THE RESULTS

The results of the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament elections, as well as those of the 2018 general election, are provided in the table below.

	2014 EP		2018 general		2019 EP	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Valid votes / Total seats	54.2%	73	66.9%	630	52.5%	73
Ligue (Lega) <i>Radical right, ID</i>	6.2%	5	16.8%	123	34.3%	28
Democratic Party (PD) <i>Centre-left, S&D</i>	40.8%	31	18.9%	112	22.7%	19
Five Star Movement (M5S) <i>Populist, NI</i>	21.2%	17	32.2%	227	17.1%	14
Forward Italy (FI) <i>Centre-right, EPP</i>	16.8%	13	13.5%	103	8.8%	6
Brothers of Italy (Fdi) <i>Radical right, ECR</i>	3.7%	0	4.2%	32	6.4%	5
South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) <i>German minority, EPP group</i>	0.5%	1	0.4%	4	0.5%	1
More Europe (+Eu) <i>Liberal, ALDE</i>	-	-	2.7%	3	3.1%	0
Greens (Verdi) <i>Ecologist, G/EFA</i>	0.9%	0	-	-	2.3%	0
Union of the Centre & allies (UdCI) <i>Centre-right, EPP</i>	4.4%	3	1.3%	4	-	-
The other Europe with Tsipras (AET) <i>Radical left, GUE-NGL</i>	4.0%	3	-	-	-	-
Free and Equal (LeU) <i>Centre-left and radical left, S&D and GUE-NGL</i>	-	-	3.5%	14	-	-
The Left (Sinistra) <i>Radical left, GUE-NGL</i>	-	-	-	-	1.8%	0
Power to the People (PaP) <i>Radical left, GUE-NGL</i>	-	-	1.1%	0	-	-
Communist Party (PC) <i>Radical left, NI</i>	-	-	0.3%	0	0.9%	0
For a revolutionary left (SCR-PCL) <i>Radical left, NI</i>	-	-	0.1%	0	-	-
People's list for the constitution (LPC) <i>Radical left, NI</i>	-	-	0.0%	0	-	-
Italian Animalist Party (PAI) <i>Animal rights, GUE-NGL group</i>	-	-	-	-	0.6%	0
Others	1.6%	0	5.0%	8	1.5%	0

Source: Italian Ministry of the Interior

In a context marked by a falling turnout, extremely high electoral volatility, and a strong anti-immigration mood, radical right parties ended up triumphant while most other parties obtained disappointing or mixed results. The Lega, transformed by Salvini from an ailing and scandal-ridden Northern party into a successful all-Italian nationalist party, rose from 6.2 per cent in 2014, through 16.8 per cent in 2018, to an astounding 34.3 per cent in 2019. Another radical right party, the post-fascist Brothers of Italy (FdI), also increased its support from 3.7 per cent in 2014 to 6.4 per cent in 2019. Forward Italy continued its slide toward marginalisation, losing its voters to the Lega and falling from 16.8 per cent in 2014 to 8.8 per cent in 2019. The election marked a grave defeat for the main ruling party, the populist M5S, which reversed its previous upward trajectory and won only 17.1 per cent of the vote, compared to 21.2 in 2014 and 32.2 per cent in 2018. The main opposition party, the Democratic Party, experienced an even more crushing defeat, falling from 40.8 per cent in 2014 to 22.7 per cent in 2019, although the new party secretary Zingaretti could console itself with a significant recovery compared to 2018 (a rise of 3.8 percentage points, albeit largely due to a much lower turnout and to the contribution of minor allies) and finishing in second place. Altogether, the available data on electoral flows between the 2018 general and the 2019 European election seem to indicate that the Lega gained equally from former M5S voters, centre-right voters, and non-voters, that the M5S lost heavily to the non-voters and substantially to the Lega, and that the PD was good at mobilising its core electorate and won some votes on its left.

The weak and fragmented landscape of the Italian radical left also had a very bad night. The coalition The Other Europe with Tsipras (AET), including Italian Left (SI), Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), and independents, had unexpectedly managed to reach 4.0 per cent and elect 3 MEPs in 2014. This alliance had however been short-lived. In 2018, SI had joined forces with the PD splinter group Article 1 (Art.1) to build the coalition Free and Equal (LeU), winning 3.5 per cent of valid votes and 14 seats, while the PRC had supported the far-left coalition Power to the People (PaP), winning 1.1 per cent and no seats; altogether, the five radical left lists running got 5.0 per cent. In 2019, Art.1 decided to join the PD list and PaP did not run, deterred by the high number of signatures required to field candidates. The two radical left lists on the ballot stopped at a mere 2.6 per cent of the vote and no seats: 1.8 per cent to The Left

(Sinistra), a belated remake of AET including SI, PRC, and independents, and 0.9 to the Communist Party (PC), an orthodox communist follower of the Greek KKE. In addition, the new Animalist Party (PAI) – affiliated to the network Animal Politics EU, which generally seats in the GUE-NGL group in the European Parliament – got 0.6 per cent.

THE AFTERMATH

The reversal of the relative strength of the two ruling partners, M5S and Lega, heightened the tension within the seating government. Salvini's Lega, in particular, not only was now the electorally strongest of the two partners, but was also well positioned to seek an autonomous majority through an early election, either alone or in alliance with other right-wing or centre-right parties. These tensions came to a head in August, when Salvini withdrew its support to the Conte I cabinet and asked for an election granting him "full powers". However, the reaction of the other parties led to a change of alliances in parliament and the creation in September of a "pro-European" Conte II cabinet supported by M5S, PD, LeU, and other minor groups. Defeated in Europe, the radical left thus returned in government in Italy with one minister (Roberto Speranza, Art.1) and two state secretaries (Maria Cecilia Guerra, Art.1, and Peppe De Cristofaro, SI). These unexpected developments brought the PD back at the centre of Italian politics and confirmed the structural incapacity of the Italian radical left to develop an independent political course. The Conte II cabinet has temporarily pushed the Lega out of power but, in light of the historical experience and of the poor state of the country's economy and public finances, is likely to lead to an even greater victory of the radical right in the next general election (at the latest in 2023).

As far as the European Union is concerned, the Italian election results contributed to the weakening of the socialist and conservative groups and to the strengthening of the radical right. However, Salvini's dream to forge a large right-wing alliance and influence the orientation of the next European Commission failed. The new radical right parliamentary group Identity and Democracy (73 seats) failed to integrate key like-minded parties (e.g. the Hungarian Fidesz, the Polish PiS, or the British UKIP) and remained relatively isolated in the European Parliament. A new Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen was approved in June with the votes of the conservative EPP group, the liberal

ALDE group, a majority of the socialist S&D group, and the support of the Polish PiS and the Italian M5S. The Italian Partito Democratico, despite losing the election, ended up with two top offices, the President of the European Parliament (David Sassoli) and the Italian European Commissioner (Paolo Gentiloni).

CONCLUSION

The 2019 European Parliament election and its aftermath further complicate the difficult task of rebuilding a viable and autonomous Italian radical left. PRC and SI saw their electoral support halved and lost their MEPs. SI and the other the political organisations seating in the LeU group of the Italian parliament were pulled closed to the PD, ending up participating into or externally supporting the new Conte II cabinet. Finally, the anti-establishment and social aspirations of part of the M5S grassroots and electorate will be further smothered by its new embrace with the Italian and European centrist establishment, feeding the rise of abstention and of the radical right. The space for the growth of progressive forces opposed to both neoliberal Europeanism and right-wing nationalism, already small, is unlikely to open up in the near future.

THE EUROPEAN ELECTION OF 2019:

The Greek Left between (European) victory and (national) defeat

By **Danae Koltsida** studied Law and Political Sciences. She is the Director of Nicos Poulantzas Institute in Athens.

The recent European election of the 26th of May proved itself to be an important landmark for Greek politics, in an overall new – in a negative sense – landscape at the European level, not only for the Left but for the “traditionally” governing the EU political forces (EPP and S&D), as well.

However, before analyzing the results of this election – and especially those of the Left, and more particularly of SYRIZA – some preliminary remarks, concerning the character and the political surroundings of this election, are necessary in order to fully understand what happened.

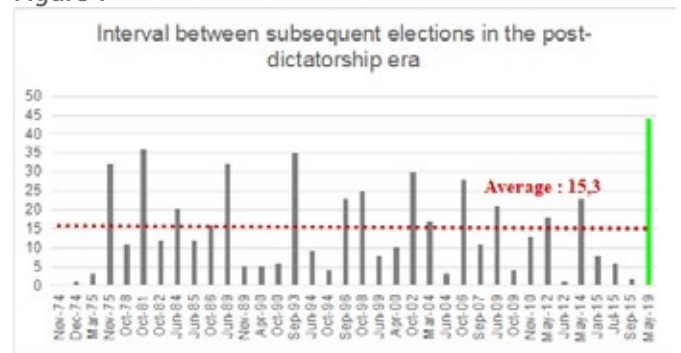
PRELIMINARY REMARKS

A “1 ½ ORDER” ELECTION

EP Elections are usually described by political scientists as “2nd order” elections, following the scheme of Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt²², since they don’t determine the respective countries’ government. However, one could argue that **the last EP Election in Greece was a “1 ½ order” election**, as it combines characteristics both of 1st and of 2nd order elections.

To begin with, this election followed **the longest period in the post-dictatorship era without any electoral procedure of any kind**. It was held 44 months after the last election, in September 2015, when the average interval between subsequent elections was until then 15 months (Figure 1). As a result, in this election the Greek voters expressed various and really condensed messages shaped throughout a long period and in different temporalities, their analysis being therefore a far more complex challenge. Besides, the fact that this election was held very close to the end of the electoral cycle made it more of **a preamble to the national election**, originally scheduled for October 2019.

Figure 1



THE PARTY CAMPAIGNS

The content of the campaigns – at least those of the main competing parties – points to the same direction.

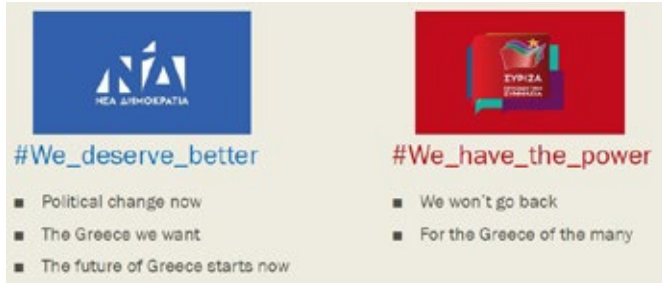
Given the broader context of that time – meaning the memoranda and the austerity to the imposition of which the European institutions played a crucial role – Europe and the question of the present and the future of the European integration were present, even implicitly, in campaigns of the Greek parties, during the previous European election in 2014.

In 2019, however, **Greek parties totally focused their campaigns on the national governance issues**. On the one hand, New Democracy leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, described the election as a referendum against the SYRIZA government. On the other hand, responding to this, Alexis Tsipras explicitly asked from the electorate a vote of confidence in favour of the positive measures adopted by SYRIZA²³. Some of the most characteristic slogans of the campaigns of the two major parties are depicted in Picture 1.

22 Reif, K. and Schmitt, H. (1980), Nine second-order national elections – A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8: 3-44.

23 For a short presentation of a large part of these measures, adopted until February 2019, see: Koltsida, D. (2019), Greece: Back on track after 10 years, *Transform! Europe*. Available online on : <https://www.transform-network.net/en/blog/article/greece-back-on-track-after-10-years/>

Picture 1



DIRECT EFFECT ON THE QUESTION OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

And of course, even indirectly, this election did finally determine the national government. Since the parties campaigned as described, it was only natural that, when SYRIZA lost by a wide margin, its leader and Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, called for an **early national election on the 7th of July**. As expected, SYRIZA – despite its impressive recovery – was not able to overthrow a so recent defeat and left government after 4,5 years.

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

As far as the **political landscape** in which the European election took place in Greece is concerned, one could point out **5 elements** that defined it:

- **First element**, the implementation of **austerity programmes** by all the parties that took office after 2009. This fact enhanced political cynicism and disappointment, especially between the voters of the Left. As a result, abstention in this election was higher amongst left-oriented voters.
- **Second element**, the signature and ratification of the **Prespes Agreement** by the government of SYRIZA²⁴. This Agreement resolved the name dispute between Greece and Northern Macedonia and, despite the fact that it was a well-balanced agreement respecting the priorities and the rights of both countries, this development triggered a revival of older nationalistic tendencies, not only on the Right side of the political spectrum, but also within parts of the Centre and the Left, causing the break of the government coalition between SYRIZA and the small populist nationalistic party of ANEL.
- **Third element**, the adoption of **positive measures by SYRIZA government** in favour of the popular social strata and petty bourgeoisie, both before and especially after the end of the last memorandum. These measures, however important, have not yet been visible in the everyday life of households, thus their effect on the electoral behaviour of the citizens was limited.
- **Fourth element**, the creation of an **explicitly anti-SYRIZA bloc**, supported not only by the main opposition party of New Democracy, but also by PASOK, which – unlike Social Democrats in other countries, such as Spain or Portugal – set as its primary goal the “strategic defeat of SYRIZA”. This, alongside the fierce opposition to the government by smaller parties of the Left, provided SYRIZA with a very limited space for political alliances.
- **Fifth element**, a **hostile media environment**, which is fully controlled by an oligarchy directly linked to the leader of New Democracy himself, but also to football clubs and even, allegedly, to the organized crime, that was fiercely against SYRIZA. There were many incidents where fake news was deliberately spread – if not constructed in the first place – by mainstream journalism²⁵.

24 See the full text of the Agreement (in English) on the website of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathemata/agreement.pdf>. For a thorough report on the political developments around the Agreement, see the reportage of *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/17/macedonia-greece-dispute-name-accord-prespa>. An analysis of the Agreement from the perspective of International Law can be found in: Tzanakopoulos, Ant., Here Comes the Name Again: Treaty Making at the Epicenter of the Greek Debate over the agreement with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Blog of the European Journal of International Law (<https://www.ejiltalk.org/here-comes-the-name-again-treaty-making-at-the-epicenter-of-the-greek-debate-over-the-agreement-with-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/>). Finally, a detailed presentation on the “Macedonian” question can be found in: Christopoulos, D., Karpozilos, K., 10 + 1 Questions & Answers on the Macedonian Question. Investigating and explaining the roots of Greek nationalism around the Macedonia question, RLS Athens, 2018, which is available online: https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/engl/MAKEDONIKO_2019_%CE%95%CE%9D.pdf

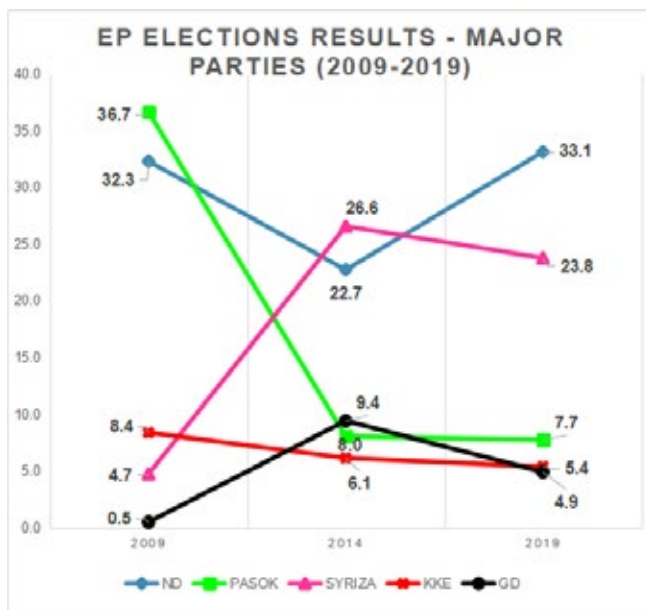
25 See an excellent analysis of the media landscape in: The Manifold (Mariniki Alevizopoulou, Yiannis Baboulias, Yannis-Orestis Pappadimitriou, Achilleas Zavallis and Augustine Zenakos), In Greece, the line between conservative journalism and political campaigns blurs, *Columbia Journalism Review*, available online: <https://www.cjr.org/watchdog/greece-media-campaign.php>

THE ELECTORAL RESULTS

TEN YEARS OF ELECTORAL TURBULENCE

The first remark one should make about the results of the European election in Greece is that they confirm **an ongoing turbulence in the Greek party system** – not so heavy, as in the previous years after the “electoral earthquake” of 2012, but persistent, nonetheless. Looking at the results of the European elections of the past decade (2009, 2014 and 2019)²⁶, one instantly notices the **significant change in the share of the vote of some major parties** (Figure 2).

Figure 2²⁷



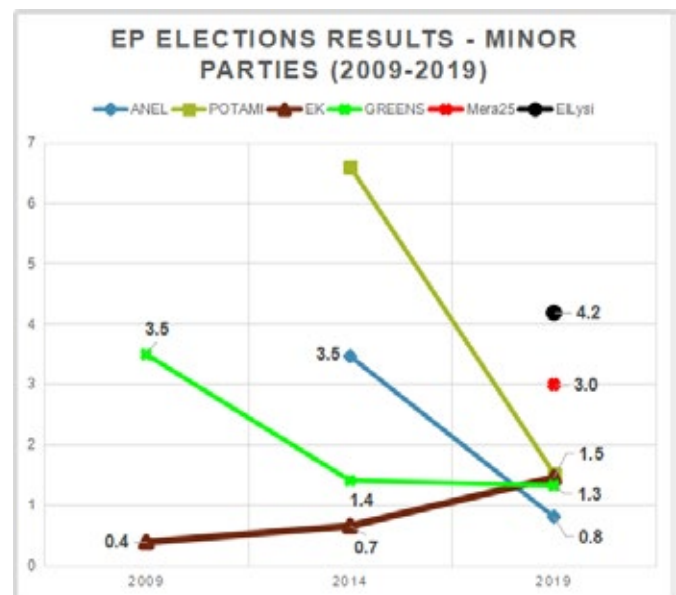
The electoral turbulence is, however, far more obvious, if someone looks more closely at the minor parties (Figure 3). Parties that were formed during the crisis and even played an important role in the National Parliament – notably **ANEL**, former government ally of SYRIZA, and the liberal centrist **Potami** – tend to disappear electorally. Foreseeing this development, both these parties decided not to participate in the national elections of the 7th of July. On the contrary, some of the new parties, founded during the SYRIZA governance period, achieved impressive results:

- **Elliniki Lysi**, a new party of the extreme Right, achieved its representation in the European Parliament, proba-

bly having absorbed the losses of the neonazi Golden Dawn.

- And of course, **Mera25** – the Greek branch of Diem25, the party of the former Minister of Finance of SYRIZA, Yanis Varoufakis – proved to be the largest party of the extra-parliamentarian Left, losing the right to elect a MEP only for a few hundreds of votes.

Figure 3²⁸



THE RESULTS OF THE LEFT

Focusing more specifically to the electoral results of the parties of the broader Left (Picture 2), one would undoubtedly argue that **Mera25 was one of the big winners of this election**, since it succeeded in expressing a critical but pro-European leftist audience, disappointed by the compromise of SYRIZA in 2015.

The **Communist party (KKE)** on the other hand remained largely stable, with marginal losses, but was unable to persuade disappointed SYRIZA voters. Quite similarly, the extra-parliamentarian Euro-sceptic Left (meaning **Laiki Enotita-LAE** of Panayiotis Lafazanis, **Plefsi Eleftherias** of Zoi Konstantopoulou and **ANTARSYA**), remained fragmented and failed to profit electorally from the disappointment

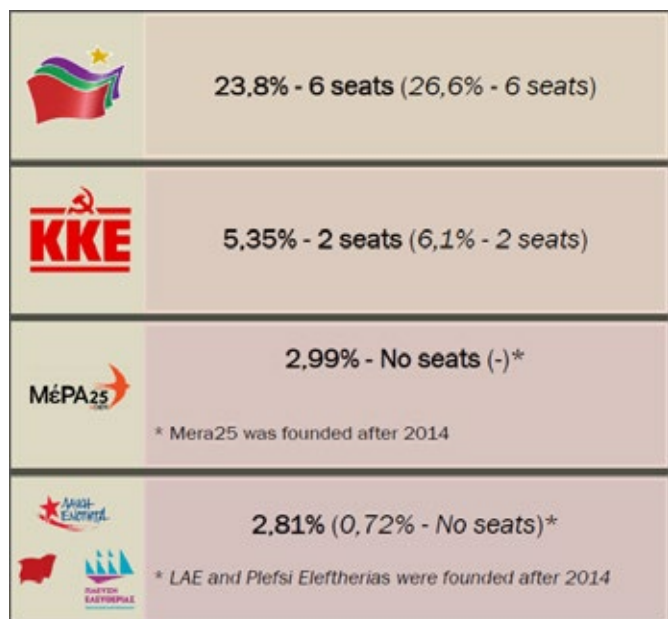
²⁶ In order for data to be comparable, we only included the results of EP elections.

²⁷ Data source: Ministry of Interior (<http://ekloges.ypes.gr>)

²⁸ Ibid

against SYRIZA. Special mention deserves the fact that Laiki Enotita of Panayiotis Lafazanis, that was on the verge of parliamentary representation in September 2015, with 2,9%, only gathered 0,6% of the vote²⁹.

Picture 2³⁰



THE RESULT OF SYRIZA

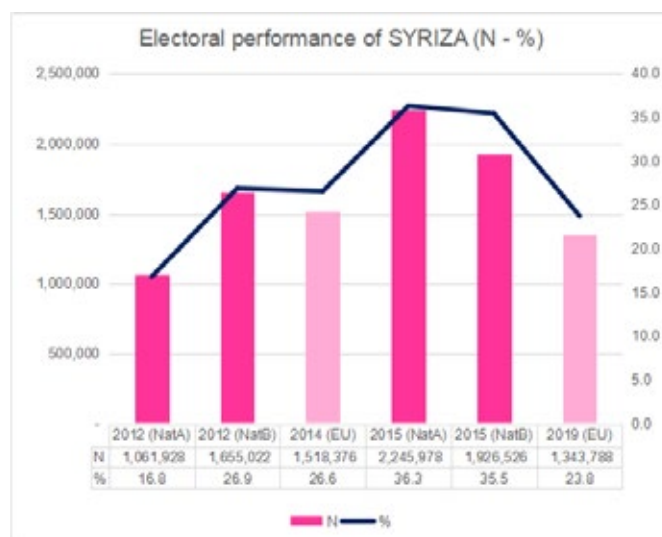
As far as SYRIZA is concerned (Figure 4), the governing party of the Left gained almost 24% of the vote and elected 6 MEPs – the same number of seats it had in 2014– thus remaining the central pole on the left side of the political spectrum. Compared to the EP election of 2014, when the party was on its pathway to power, SYRIZA suffered relatively limited electoral losses (2,8%), especially if one takes into consideration the major changes it went through in the meantime and the heated political confrontation.

SIGNS OF NATIONAL DEFEAT...

However, the losses SYRIZA suffered in comparison to the last national election of September 2015 are severe, reaching nearly -600.000 voters and -12% of the vote. The severity of these losses augments if the result of the EP election

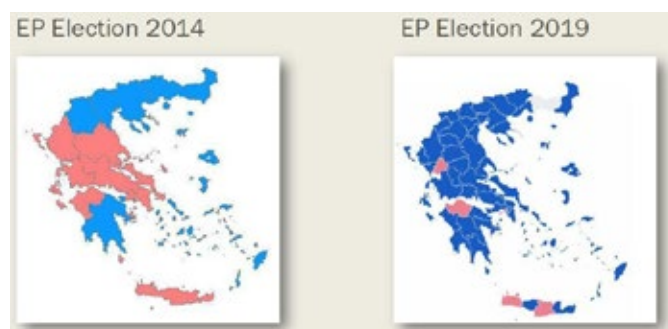
of 2019 is compared, in absolute numbers, to the electoral win of SYRIZA in January 2015, since which the party lost 900.000 voters.

Figure 4³¹



In addition, what made the result appear more negative for SYRIZA is in fact the impressive recovery since 2014 of its main adversary, New Democracy. Picture 3, showing the map of the electoral districts of Greece, according to the results of 2014 and those of 2019, gives a first impression of this recovery.

Picture 3³²



Moreover, if compared to the last national election (Sept. 2015), the results of New Democracy improved both in percentage (+5%) and in absolute number of votes (350.000

29 This situation within the Left, with the exception of SYRIZA (see footnote below), was to a large extent confirmed by the results of the national election of the 7th of July. The only significant difference is that Mera25 managed to pass the threshold of 3% and entered the Greek Parliament.

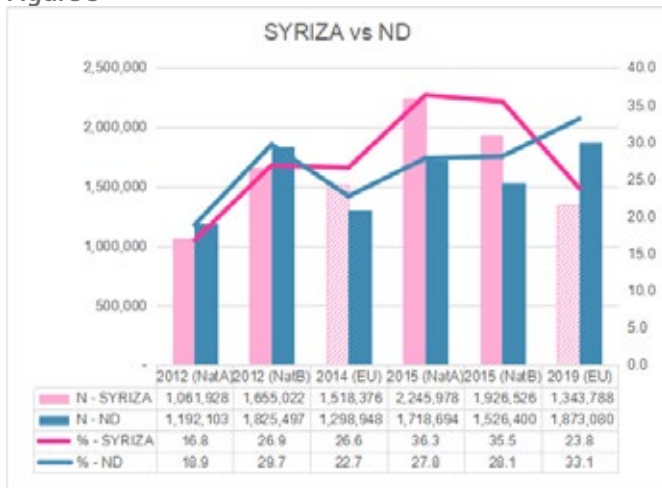
30 Data source: Ministry of Interior (<http://ekloges.ypes.gr>)

31 Ibid

32 Source: Ministry of Interior (<http://ekloges.ypes.gr>)

voters). The gains of ND are far more visible, if compared to the EU Election of 2014, since which it gained almost 600.000 voters and 10,5 percentage points of the vote (Figure 5).

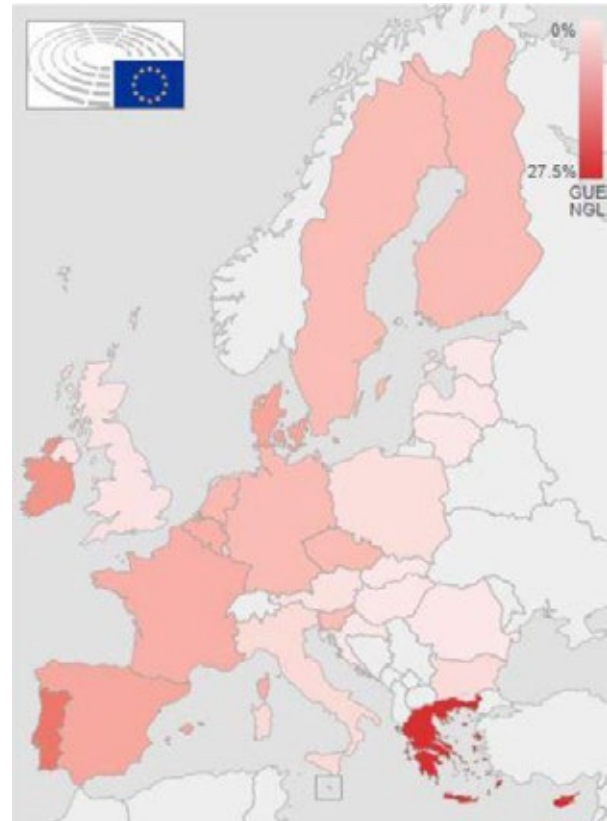
Figure 5³³



...BUT ALSO OF EUROPEAN VICTORY

The result of the EP election of 2019 – especially compared to the previous results of the party, but also to those of New Democracy – gives the impression of a **limited but still existent defeat, if looked at from a national point of view**³⁴.

Picture 4³⁵



However, **under a European perspective the result of SYRIZA remains an unquestionable victory.** During a negative electoral period for the Left throughout Europe, with a few exceptions, SYRIZA remains (alongside AKEL in Cyprus) **by far the major party of the EL** (Picture 4). Moreover, SYRIZA seems to have established a **core electoral base of around 1,5 million voters** – which is approximately between 1/5 and 1/4 of the Greek electorate. Especially, what makes the electoral durability of SYRIZA even more important Europe-wide is that it was achieved through a critical, but clearly pro-EU path – a remark that applies to Mera25 as well.

33 Data source: ibid

34 However, the impressively improved result of SYRIZA in the national election of the 7th of July (approx. + 8%, increasing its share of the vote to 32%), reverses, at least partially, the idea of a defeat of SYRIZA at the national level. For a first reaction to the result of the Greek national election, see: Castellina, L., Syriza Leaves Government as Europe’s Largest Party of the Radical Left, originally published in Il Manifesto (9/7/2019) – available online (English version): <https://www.transform-network.net/blog/article/syriza-leaves-government-as-europes-largest-party-of-the-radical-left/>

35 Source: Transform! Europe, EP 2019 monitoring project (EP 2019 – The European Left: One Mouth, Many Voices), available online: <https://www.transform-network.net/focus/overview/article/ep-2019-the-european-left-one-mouth-many-voices/interactive-map-1/>

THE ELECTORATE OF THE LEFT: THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION OF THE ELECTORATE OF SYRIZA

Examining the **socio-demographic characteristics of the electorate of SYRIZA at the EP election of 2019**, in comparison to those of previous elections, one could speak about a **“great transformation” of the SYRIZA electorate**.

Since the electoral earthquake of 2012, when SYRIZA started growing electorally, its electoral basis has **3 distinctive characteristics**:

1ST CHARACTERISTIC: A PARTY VOTED BY THE YOUTH

During all previous elections after 2012, there was a clear **generation gap within the electoral basis of SYRIZA**, since the party succeeded its best results among the younger voters. This gap, as SYRIZA was approaching and finally gaining the government, gradually not only closed, but it was reversed, resulting in an over-representation of the party among the older voters possibly as a result of the positive measures the SYRIZA government took in favour of pensioners (Table 1)³⁶.

Table 1

Age	2012a		2012b		2014		2015a		2015b		2019	
	%	Diff	%	Diff	%	Diff	%	Diff	%	Diff	%	Diff
18-24	18	1	30	3	25	-2	35	-1	42	6	24	0
25-34	17	0	31	4	26	-1	34	-2	33	-3	21	-3
35-44	18	1	29	2	26	-1	35	-1	36	0	21	-3
45-54	23	6	35	8	32	5	43	7	37	1	24	0
55-64	17	0	25	-2	31	4	41	5	38	2	27	3
65+	9	-8	13	-14	21	-6	30	-6	30	-6	26	2
National	17		27		27		36		36		24	

* In **bold**: First party/majority

2ND CHARACTERISTIC: A PARTY VOTED BY THE WORKING CLASS

The **clear class cleavage between Left-wing and Right-wing voters**, that was visible to the naked eye in previous elections, faded alarmingly in the EP election of 2019.

For example, focusing on the results of SYRIZA and of New Democracy in two electoral districts, the District of Western Suburbs of Athens (Figure 6) and the Second District of Piraeus (Figure 7), that have a vast majority of working-class and generally belonging to the lower-strata population, one can see an important differentiation. In both these areas, in 2014 SYRIZA was ahead New Democracy by 18 percentage points, whereas in 2019 the gap closed to only 2-3%³⁷.

36 This remark was however completely overthrown by the result of the national election of the 7th of July, where SYRIZA managed to gain 38% of the youth vote – far above the party’s national average (32%).

37 However, the class cleavage was – at least partially – revived in the national election of the 7th of July.

Figure 6

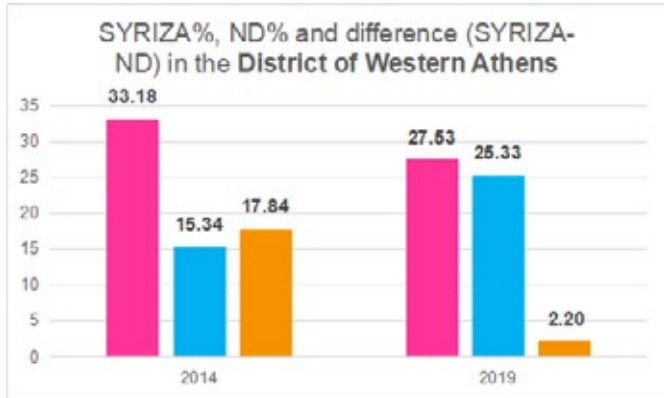


Figure 7

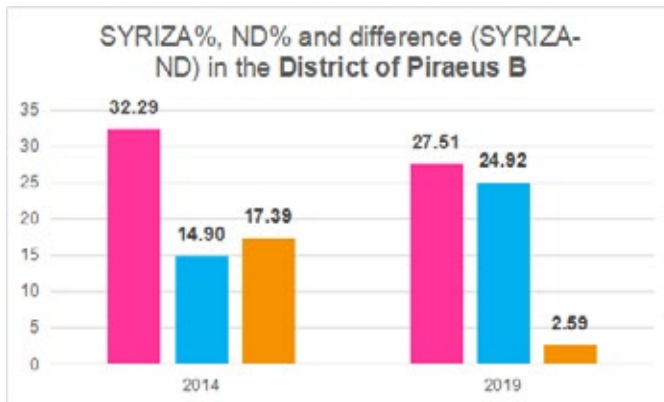
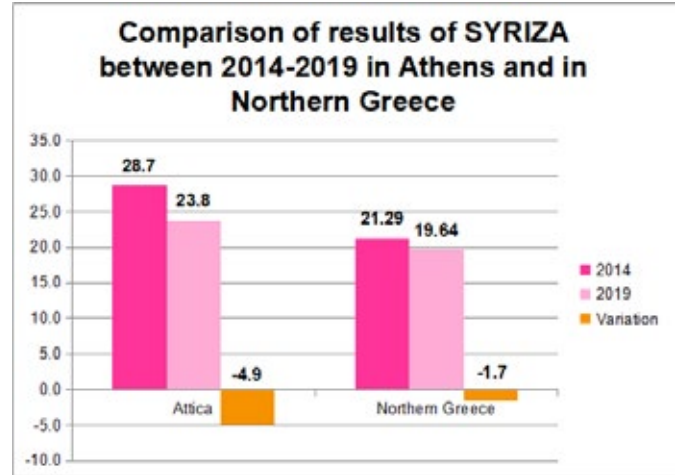


Figure 8



FINAL REMARKS

The overview of the EP election of 2019 in Greece, with a special focus on the results of the Left in general and, more particularly, of SYRIZA, permits some **provisional final remarks**.

HOW TO EXPLAIN THE RESULT OF SYRIZA?

As far as the explanation of the result of SYRIZA³⁸ is concerned, there are several remarks to discuss.

POSITIVE MEASURES: TOO LITTLE (?) AND CERTAINLY TOO LATE

Undoubtedly, SYRIZA paid the price for signing and implementing the 3rd memorandum. However, it didn't collapse, as PASOK did in 2012, most probably because the electorate acknowledged the government's efforts to take **positive measures for the lower strata**.

Nonetheless, these measures were **not enough to safeguard the electoral basis of the subsequent elections of 2015**. Some argue that these measures were "too little", but – regardless of one's position on this – they definitely were "too late". The last austerity programme came to an end only a few months (August 2018) before the EP election. As a result, the positive measures that SYRIZA government took during this short period were not yet apparent in the available income of households and, as a result, had a very limited impact on the people's electoral behaviour.

3RD CHARACTERISTIC: UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRO-SYRIZA VOTE

The epicentre of the electoral earthquake of 2012 was in the metropolitan district of Attica and it was only in latter elections that SYRIZA augmented its power in the rest of the country, following a **move from the centre to the periphery**. In the EP election of 2019, the drop of SYRIZA vote share followed a similar pattern.

Despite the Prespes Agreement, that caused nationalistic reactions mainly in Northern Greece, SYRIZA suffered far more significant losses in Attica, where its share of the vote dropped by 5%, than in Northern Greece (Thrace, Eastern, Central and Western Macedonia), where it only dropped by 1,6% (Figure 8).

38 These final remarks remain largely valid, despite the far better result that SYRIZA achieved in the national election that followed.

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS: INABILITY TO CONNECT PUBLIC POLICIES TO A NEW KIND OF POLITICAL (CLASS) CONSCIOUSNESS

SYRIZA was unable to connect the positive measures it took and the specific public policies it implemented in favour of popular classes with a new kind of political (class) consciousness.

For example, the public debate before the EP election was almost totally focused on the middle class and the need to lift the tax burden it bears. Unfortunately, instead of defending its choice to support the weaker households and to build and maintain a viable high-quality welfare state, SYRIZA fell in the trap and acceded to this debate.

SYRIZA, **just like Lula in Brazil**, proved to be the party that took a big part of the population away from poverty or danger of poverty, but failed to gain electorally out of this³⁹.

POLARISATION: THE RISK OF ISOLATION

Throughout its governance, SYRIZA chose to follow a **polarised strategy, with significant use of a populist discourse as well, at least at the communicational level**, attacking both New Democracy and PASOK as “old establishment”, corrupt etc.

While this choice is **understandable** – taking into consideration the strategic choices of these parties, especially PASOK, as well as the fact that **the accusations were not in most cases inaccurate** – the problem with this strategy was that, having to deal with a **solid and determined anti-SYRIZA bloc**, SYRIZA ended-up **isolated** and unable to form successful political and social **alliances**.

NECESSARY, BUT ONLY PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL ALLIANCES

Despite the above-mentioned, during the period of the ratification of the Prespes Agreement, there has been a

significant effort from the part of SYRIZA to form **broader progressive alliances with politicians and academics of the Centre and the Centre-Left**, who supported SYRIZA against nationalistic attacks.

Albeit necessary and symbolically important, the electoral impact of this initiative remained limited, not only because of the persons that formed this alliance, most of whom are highly respected in the Greek public sphere, but mainly because of the controversial strategy of SYRIZA already described⁴⁰.

WEAK ORGANIZATION, LACKING ROOTS IN THE SOCIETY

The electoral gains of SYRIZA after the “earthquake” of 2012 were not followed by a carefully planned strategy – at an institutional, political and organizational level – **to form social bonds and gain roots in various social organisations and institutions of social representation**, such as Local and Regional Government, Trade Unions etc.

Throughout its governance, SYRIZA remained a party of **limited organisational strength and local presence**. This fact was more than evident in the local and regional elections that were held simultaneously with the European ones, where SYRIZA performed rather poorly⁴¹.

WHAT LESSONS ARE TO BE LEARNED?

In the near future the Left in Greece will have to take important initiatives in order to:

- re-instate a **vision** and an **ideological discourse**
- opt for big **institutional initiatives** that would transform the economic, social and political life in Greece
- **reject populist dichotomies** and **revive the class cleavage** in clear political terms
- build long-term **alliances** on a programmatic base internally and with those forces that could be its “natural” partners

39 For Brazil, see the interview of Benjamin Junge in Vox (29/10/2018): “Corruption, fake news, and WhatsApp: how Bolsonaro won Brazil” – available online in: <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/10/29/18025066/bolsonaro-brazil-elections-voters-q-a>

40 The impact of the opening of SYRIZA to the Centre-Left on the result of the National Election is yet to be determined.

41 For example, SYRIZA lost all the 13 Regions to New Democracy, whereas in 2014 it had gained 3 out of 13, including the metropolitan Region of Attica, where half of the Greek population lives. After the defeat of SYRIZA in the National Election, the main topic of the internal party dialogue, on the way to the upcoming Congress, is the need to strengthen party organization, increase party membership etc.

- **strengthen and renew the party organisation**, using experiences from parties and movements abroad, in order to overcome the representation crisis.

These are only some first personal thoughts. However, **not only SYRIZA, if it is to maintain in the long term its position, as the main pillar of the Left in the Greek political system, but also the rest of the European Left would benefit from studying the experience of the Greek Left of the past decade.**

** This analysis is based on the presentation made during the Seminar of Transform! Europe and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung: "In the aftermath of the European Elections: The European Left facing new challenges" (Vienna, 12-14 June 2019). Minor revisions were made in order to include (usually as footnotes) the most recent developments after the Greek National Election.*

A thorough political evaluation of the electoral results in Cyprus and questions posed to the European left

By **Yiannos Katsourides** is a Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Nicosia and the former Director of Promitheas Institute, an observer organisation in transform! Europe.

The European elections in Cyprus were marked by four things: the very high rate of abstention (57.2%); the stabilization of the left party AKEL at around 27% following a period of electoral backlashes; the losses of the governing right-wing party DISY (-8.5%); and the sixth consecutive rise of the far right party ELAM.

Cypriot voters went to the polls to elect their European representatives for a fourth time since joining the EU. Overall, there were 641,181 registered voters, 80,862 of which Turkish Cypriots (TCs). The elections were contested on the system of proportional representation. However, the small number of seats allocated to Cyprus (six) suggests that the threshold for achieving representation amounts to 16.6%; a high barrier to entry for any small or new party. There were 13 parties/platforms contesting the elections (compared to 10 in 2014) and three independent candidates (eight in 2014). The total number of candidates increased to 72 compared to 61 in 2014. Eighteen (18) women run in the elections compared to 14 in 2014. Two TC electoral platforms took part with six and two candidates respectively, whereas another TC featured in AKEL's ballot (overall nine TC candidates).

THE PRE-ELECTORAL POLITICAL SETTING

Electoral, the polls initially predicted an easy win for the right-wing DISY. Gradually though, as the campaign progressed it became evident that the left party, AKEL, had significantly closed the gap even challenging for the primacy not least because the party appealed directly to the TCs by including –for a first time- a TC candidate in its ballot.

The most significant question (and battle at the same time) of these elections, however, was the winner of the sixth seat: a very close contest between social democratic EDEK (holder of the seat) and the extreme right party ELAM (a branch of the Greek Golden Dawn).

The campaign was entirely Cyprus-centered: only national issues featured. These included, inter alia, the status of

the economy particularly in relation to the government's decision to sell the large cooperative bank to another private bank, issues of corruption and criminality, the Cyprus problem, the participation of a TC candidate with AKEL and the introduction of the national health system. European issues were sidelined and the stakes were directly linked –by all parties- to national questions and issues. The political setting became increasingly polarized in the last couple weeks of the campaign with AKEL and its TC candidate becoming a focal point of discussions and controversies receiving a host of nationalist attacks.

Table 1: Electoral results

Parties	Electoral result (%)		Number of seats	
	2019	2014	2019	2014
DISY (right-wing)	29.02	37.5	2	2
AKEL (left)	27.49	26,98	2	2
DIKO (centre-right)	13.80	10,83	1	1
EDEK (social democrats)	10.58*	7,68*	1	1
GREENS/CITIZENS ALLIANCE	3.29*	6,78*	-	-
ELAM (extreme right)	8.25	2,69	-	-
DEPA (center)	3.80	-	-	-
JASMINE	1.7	1,05	-	-
CYPRUS SOCIALIST PARTY	0.06	0,11	-	-
OTHERS	2.01	6.38	-	-

* In 2014 the Greens contested the European elections in a joint platform with EDEK, whereas in 2019 they joined forces with the Citizens Alliance; therefore the comparison of electoral results between these parties is not easy to make.

In terms of party results the outcome of the elections revealed winners and losers which must be separated in electoral and political terms. Electoral, ELAM (+5.56%), EDEK

(+2.9%), DIKO (+3%) and DHPA (newcomer) for the most part and to a lesser extent AKEL (+0.5%) were on the winning side. DISY (-8.48%) and the Greens-Citizens Alliance were those that lost the most. The far right party ELAM (+5.56%) continued to rise for a seventh election in the row, which is arguably the most worrying trend.

Two other things singled out in terms of electoral results beyond party percentages. First, the persisting high rate of abstention which rose once again (from 56.03% in 2014 to 57.20% in 2019). Second, the increased, albeit overall small, number of TC voters: 5604 TCs voted representing 6.93% of their total eligible number compared to 1856 and 3.19% in 2014. Moreover, in terms of party-systemic variables the fragmentation of the party system was once again verified.

Politically, the results revealed three important messages: a) a disapproval of the governing DISY, the government and their policies; b) despite the increased vote share of the far right, the results showed a democratic reflexive response by the public barring their entrance in the EP. A number of citizens mobilized on a democratic agenda regardless of party affiliation in order to avert the possibility of the extreme right to enter the parliament; c) AKEL's bi-communal ballot and particularly the election of a TC candidate with AKEL was a strong message regarding the need to solve the Cyprus problem particularly because he was targeted by nationalistic circles and the governing party during the campaign.

GENERAL REMARKS FOR THE CYPRIOT PARTY SYSTEM

Given the above, there are some general observations that can be inferred from these results that are related to the qualitative dimensions of the Cypriot party system. First, it seems that a political society of 50-50% is created. This term is a loan from the respective sociological term of societies of two third and it implies those societies where abstention is not only high and systematic but it has reached such levels that half of the population does not participate in the political/electoral process. If we take into account those who chose not to enlist in the electoral lists -the majority of which is found among the youth- the problem with abstention becomes even more worrying. Almost half of the population abstains either consciously and purposefully or as a result of marginalization and exclusion from the political process. This state of affairs has two important political implications: on the one hand, those who abstain

leave the others to make decisions for them. On the other hand, the parties' actual influence in society is much weaker than their electoral percentages (see table 2). The most worrying thing though is that all parties seem to have accepted this and compromised with the withdrawal of so many citizens from politics.

Table 2: Parties' results as a percentage of the valid ballots

PARTY	%
DISY	12.72
AKEL	12.05
DIKO	6.04
EDEK	4.63
ELAM	3.61
DHPA	1.66
GREENS/CITIZENS ALLIANCE	1.44
JASMINE	0.75
OTHERS	0.91
ABSTENTION	55.01
INVALID	0.86
BLANKS	0.32

Second, the ideological balance of power has shifted and stabilized to the right in recent years. Since the early 2010s the ideological balance of power within Cypriot society has shifted to the right. This is reflected not only in party percentages but also in political opinions and political culture. In terms of party percentages the aggregated results of the center-left and the center-right show that the center-right hovers between 55-60%. If we factor in only the left (i.e., AKEL) then the picture becomes even gloomier. In the European elections the losses of right-wing DISY became the gains of the extreme right and other center-right parties. In terms of political culture more rightist opinions gain ground constantly: for example, the number of people who see a positive role for the state or who are in favour of publicly owned enterprises is shrinking. At the same time, institutions such as the army, the police and the Church are trusted a lot more than political parties and other political institutions. This highlights a right-wing ideological hegemony.

Third, there are significant gaps in political representation. Both the large size and the persistence of abstention reveal

that many citizens do not feel that any of the existing parties could politically represent them. This in turn creates a 'market' for newcomers to enter (e.g., populists).

Fourth, these elections have proven once again that many parties are short-lived. Although the four-party Cypriot system had opened-up since the mid-1990s with a number of new parties emerging since, the majority of them has proved short-lived. This was once again the case with the EP elections with some recently-founded parties (Citizens Alliance and Solidarity) aligning with other parties to avoid electoral disappearance. There are only two political parties/tendencies that have endured in these years: the Greens and the extreme right.

Fifth, the centrifugal tendencies of the party system persist. The Cypriot party system has entered a period of fragmentation. Mainstream parties still remain strong, however there is increased fluidity and electoral volatility which is reflected in the reduced accumulated electoral strength of the two big parties. This allows newcomers or parties with a small life-cycle to take advantage of circumstantial or more persistent gaps in representation and do well in particular elections each time.

Sixth, the extreme right is here to stay. The elections revealed a seventh consecutive rise of the electoral strength of ELAM which verifies the endurance of the far right in Cyprus. Their rise did not result in winning a seat in the EP; however, it proved that ELAM represents a factual sociopolitical tendency in Cyprus society, which is durable and appealing to a part of society. Moreover, the right-wing ideological shift that Cyprus society is experiencing creates a favourable structure of opportunities for the extreme right.

Seventh, we might be witnessing an opening of the party system. The reference here is linked with the participation of the Turkish Cypriots both as voters and candidates. Despite being small in numbers, their participation creates prospects for an opening of the party system, an osmosis of the political parties across the dividing line and perhaps a gradual shift in the basis of confrontation: from an ethnic to a class basis. Whether their increased participation was circumstantial or not is something to be seen since a lot will depend on the developments regarding the Cyprus problem and the political actors in both communities.

THE LEFT

Three different leftist platforms/parties contested the elections, the most significant among them AKEL, which eventually polled 27.5%. The others were two small TC political platforms, the Turkish Socialist Party and the Jasmine that scored a mere 1.76% between them.

AKEL seems to have exited a very difficult period which begun in 2011. After consecutive unpleasant electoral performances since the 2013 presidential campaign, which also included one European (2014) and one national parliamentary (2016) election, the party slightly increased its vote share compared to 2014 which indicates a stabilization. Moreover, the party maintained its two seats in the EP. However, a significant portion of the party's past voters continue to refrain from voting the party, thus leaving AKEL with the difficult task of finding ways to approach them again.

In terms of campaign, AKEL framed the elections in a purely national context asking the Cypriot people to strengthen the party in order to be able to fight on all fronts and send a message to the right-wing government that their policies and practices are no longer accepted. AKEL positioned itself as the only barrier to the government's neoliberalism, indecency and arbitrariness. Although, it did not succeed to persuade the electorate and attract new voters, this strategy allowed the party to coil its own hard core. The party's message did not travel beyond its core audience, probably because the memories of the party's tenure in government are still fresh. AKEL's experience in government still exerts a negative influence on its ability to mobilize but most importantly on its ability to convey the message to the people that it can be trusted again.

AKEL invested heavily in the last few years on its position vis a vis the Cyprus problem and particularly its genuine willingness to find a solution to the problem in the frame of a bizonal, bicomunal federation, as opposed to the government and all other parties. This enabled AKEL to attract the vast majority of the Turkish Cypriot voters who took part in these elections and also a smaller number of liberals who favour a solution. Without their electoral contribution the party would probably score lower than the 2014 European elections.

Overall, the Cypriot Left did not succeed to capitalize electorally on the failures of the rightist government and the problems caused by the ongoing economic crisis. However, it managed to reverse the trend of losing electoral ground and stabilize.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE LEFT

For the Cypriot Left there are two important conclusions from these elections: a positive one and a worrying one. The positive one is that the party managed to increase slightly and stabilize around 26-27%. This is arguably a good thing given the recent past and the fears of even further shrinkage. What is worrying is that the left has lost a significant number of actual voters, as well as 6-7% of its electoral share; people who persistently don't vote for AKEL anymore. The party seems to have a new, lower ceiling which is around 28%, whereas in the very recent past the ceiling was around 35%.

For the European left the elections presented a reversal. These elections, probably more than ever, unveiled the most important problem facing the Left all over Europe: the continuous quest for its identity. As a result, a number of questions present themselves for the European Left over and over again, which are easily asked but very difficultly answered:

Can the European Left propose an alternative, viable and trust-worthy economic plan?

Can the European Left go beyond the social democratic paradigm?

Does the European Left want to go beyond that?

Can the European Left really change the EU from within or is it just a way of covering its compromises?

Can the European Left move beyond identity politics and focus again on class issues?

For me there is only one certain answer: mimicking the European social democrats or wanting to be social democrats in their place is a strategy without a future.

European parliament elections 2019, Finland

By **Jukka Pietiläinen** is Director of Left Forum, Finland, and member of the board of transform!. He holds a PhD in social sciences.

Finland elected 13 MEPs (14 after Brexit) to European parliament. The whole country is one constituency and there is no barrier clause, except the number of MEPs. In practice, around 6% of votes is enough for one seat, 12% for two seats and 18% for three seats. A voter need to elect a candidate which belongs to party list or electoral alliance. The seats are distributed between parties on the basis of the total number of votes given for all the candidates of a party and inside the party list those are elected who get the highest number of votes. This increases intra-party competition between candidates and parties need to include nationally well-known candidates with different profiles in order to get a good result.

A party or alliance of parties can present a maximum of 20 candidates. This concerns parties which are registered as political parties. To register a new party there is need to collect 5,000 signatures of citizens who support registration of that party. At the moment 19 political parties are registered. If a party does not get in two parliamentary elections a MP in national parliament or at least 2% of votes, it need to renew the registration process. Other candidates need to collect 2,000 signatures to support their candidacy. In 2019 there was only one such candidate.

Party	Candidates	Votes	%	MEPs	change from 2014	% change	MEP change	% change from April 2019
National Coalition Party	20	380,460	20.8	3	-9,916	-1.8	0	+3.8
Green League	20	292,892	16.0	2	+131,629	+6.7	+1	+4.5
Social Democratic Party	20	267,603	14.6	2	+54,822	+2.3	0	-3.1
The Finns Party	20	253,176	13.8	2	+30,719	+1.0	0	-3.6
Centre Party	20	247,477	13.5	2	-92,418	-6.1	-1	-0.2
Left Alliance	20	126,063	6.9	1	-35,011	-2.4	0	-1.3
Swedish People's Party	20	115,962	6.3	1	-785	-0.4	0	+1.8
Christian Democrats	20	89,204	4.9	0	-1,382	-0.4	0	+1.0
Seven Star Movement	20	16,065	0.9	0	+16,065	+0.9	0	+0.5
Pirate Party	13	12,579	0.7	0	+201	-0.0	0	+0.1
Blue Reform	9	6,043	0.3	0	+6,043	+0.3	0	-0.6
Feminist Party	3	4,442	0.2	0	+4,442	+0.2	0	0.0
Communist Party	20	3,532	0.2	0	-2,400	-0.1	0	+0.1
Liberal party – Freedom of Choice	7	3,015	0.2	0	+3,015	+0.2	0	0.0
Animal Justice Party	7	2,917	0.2	0	+2,917	+0.2	0	+0.1
Finnish People First	18	2,495	0.1	0	+2,495	+0.1	0	+0.1
Citizen Party	11	2,043	0.1	0	+2,043	+0.1	0	-0.1
Junes Lokka (a single candidate)	1	4,077	0.2	0	+4,077	+0.2	0	+0.2
Total valid votes		1,830,045	100.0	13				
Non-valid votes		6,014	0.3					
Total		1,836,059	100.0					

Finland had national parliamentary elections on 14 April, which resulted in an increase of support for SDP, Greens and Left Alliance and a decrease for Centre party (Centrist, conservative, rural interests). SDP became the largest party and the party chairperson Antti Rinne started negotiations to form government with SDP, Left Alliance, Greens, Centre party and Swedish people's party. The aim was to finish negotiations before European elections but the timetable was too tight and negotiations were finished only after the European elections.

CHARACTERISATION OF MAIN PARTIES

National Coalition party is a traditional conservative party, although it has also more liberal and ecological wings. Its supporters are largely pro-EU and therefore vote more actively in European elections. It has been the largest party in all Finnish European parliamentary elections.

Green League is a centre-left green party. In many issues its supporters are closer to those of Left Alliance but in economic and labour policies it is mostly more right-wing. Greens are also pro-EU and vote actively in European elections.

Social Democratic Party is a traditional centre-left party, whose supporters are increasingly older and vote rather passively in European elections in which its support has not reached the level it usually gets in national elections.

The Finns Party is a radical nationalist-populist right-wing party which opposes EU. The party got a more radical line in 2017 when radicals won the leadership and the party was split and moderates remained in the Finnish government. The moderate split party, Blue Reform, has not got any significant support in elections. The Finns party has got smaller support in European elections than in national elections because of its anti-EU position.

Centre Party was founded as Agrarian League in 1906 and it tends to get the highest support in rural areas in the Northern and Central Finland. It has succeeded in getting significant support also in towns and cities of Northern and Central Finland. In big cities of the south it gets only a marginal share of votes (2019 in Helsinki). Decentralisation is one of the cornerstones of the political ideology and it has both conservative and liberal wings.

Swedish People's party represents the interests of Swedish-speaking minorities and collects approximately 70-75% of the votes of Swedish-speaking population. It has both urban and liberal, even left-wing fractions as well as rural, conservative ones. The support of the party is highly focused on Swedish-speaking regions in the southern and western coast.

Christian Democratic party is a small party focused on religious people. It emphasises traditional Christian values as a basis for political process, which is visible in its negative attitude towards sexual minorities and abortion. On social issues its line is closer to the centre-left with focus on families. Many of its supporters belong to independent Christian churches instead of the Lutheran church.

CAMPAIGN TOPICS

The main topics of Finnish EU-elections were similar with the national elections topics. Even campaign slogans of many parties were similar with those in national elections in April, only Europe was added, or Finland was replaced with Europe. Environment, climate change and migration were those topics in which most parties saw EU the most useful level to solve these problems. The Finns party would like to stop even migration between EU member states, to restore the possibility to start border control on internal borders and to prepare for Finnish exit from Euro. Coalition party focused on internal market, common foreign policy and co-operation in defence, while both social democrats and Left Alliance would like EU to focus more on decreasing tax competition and defending rights of the workers. Left Alliance opposed most clearly the common defence policy.

Especially Greens and Left Alliance focused on actions against climate change, while the Finns and Christian Democrats opposed new EU-level measures on climate change policy. Centre party emphasised the importance of EU subsidies for agriculture and peripheral regions. Many parties also focused on the position of Finland in the EU paying attention to how to get more resources from the EU to Finland.

The central topics, climate change and migration, favoured both the Finns and Greens which were seen as the most clear ends of the spectrum. On the other hand, in Finnish European parliament elections, the pro-European parties usually get higher support in comparison with national elections.

RESULTS

Turnout was highest in Finnish European elections (expect 1996 when MEPs were elected at the same time with local elections) 42,7% (those living in Finland) or 40,7% (including citizens living outside Finland). This is, however, lower than in national elections in which turnout is around 70%.

Turnout was highest in Helsinki (55,7%) and in Swedish-speaking municipalities in the West Coast. Lowest figures of turnout were in Eastern and Northern Finland in rural areas and small industrial towns (around 30%).

The main winners were Greens and Social Democratic party which had also won in national parliamentary elections in April and both of which had rather moderate result in 2014. Also the Finns party increased its support but not as much as could be expected on the basis of national election results. Various new small right-wing anti-EU parties, including a single candidate Junes Lokka, had also appeared and they got together around 1.6% of votes, Seven Star Movement was the most successful of them.

Left Alliance had the maximum of 20 candidates and even if all the candidates were equal and listed in candidate list in alphabetical order, the clear top candidate was Silvia Modig who had been MP in Finnish parliament from 2011 to 2019, but failed to get re-elected in April 2019 elections.

Votes for Left Alliance candidates (comparison to 2014 for those who were candidates also in 2014).

Candidate	votes in 2019	votes in 2014
Modig, Silvia	51,608	7,260
Kyllönen, Merja	23,263	58,611
Sarkkinen, Hanna	10,908	7,342
Haglund, Mia	5,303	
Halonen, Miila	3,901	
Nevanlinna, Tuomas	3,628	
Käppi, Matleena	2,817	
Lindfors, Jaakko	2,808	
Torkkola, Sinikka	2,777	1,792
Moisanen, Sari	2,612	
Ahlfors, Tiina	2,505	
Mäkipää, Anna	2,117	

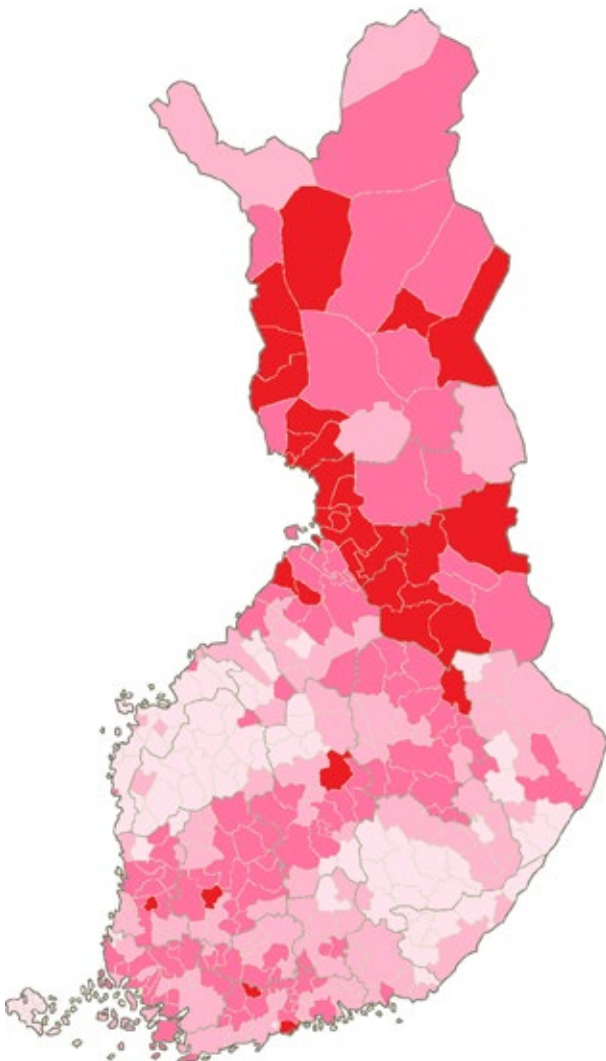
Candidate	votes in 2019	votes in 2014
Lientola, Elisa	2,051	
Majok, Ajak	2,005	
Mielonen, Joona	1,496	
Säynevirta, Sami	1,448	
Haaja, Ilpo	1,341	
Parkkila, Janne	1,155	
Linna, Jukka	1,007	
Kaakkuriniemi, Tapani	999	

Left Alliance kept its MEP although the number of votes decreased from 2014. In 2014 Left Alliance had two main candidates with different profiles, Merja Kyllönen (58,611 votes), appealing more to older generation and in Northern Finland, and Li Andersson (47,599 votes), appealing more to young, urban, red-green voters. Now, there was only one main candidate, Silvia Modig. She was a candidate also in 2014 but remained in the shadow of two main candidates. Merja Kyllönen was also a candidate, but she had announced that she will stay in Finnish parliament to which she was elected in April, because of personal reasons. Despite this she became second among Left Alliance candidates and got over 23,000 votes.

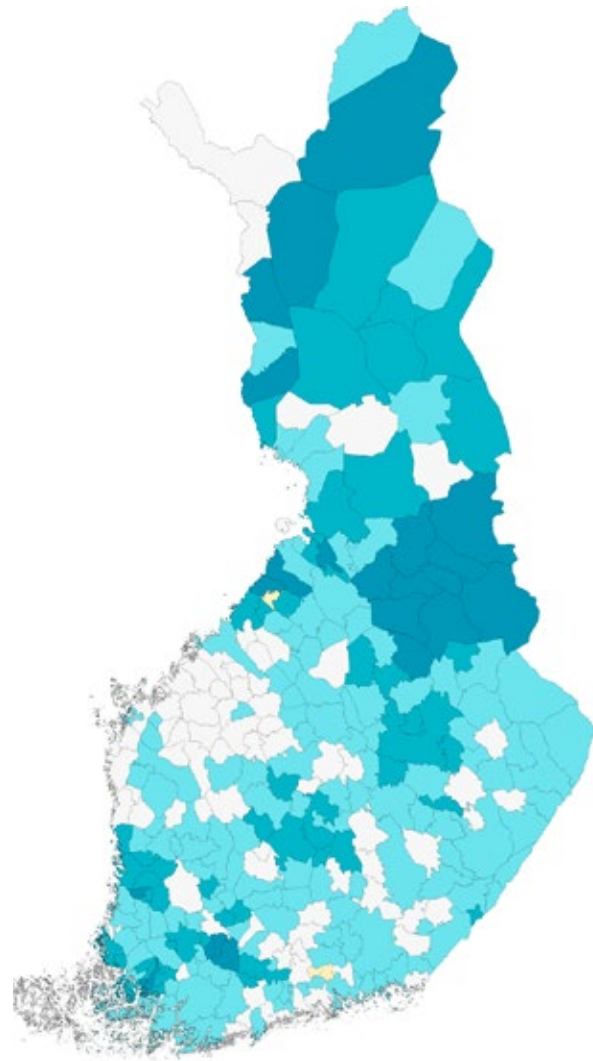
Both in 2014 and 2019 the most popular Left Alliance candidates had been women. In 2019 five most popular candidates were women and six most unpopular candidates were men. Women got a total of 89% of Left Alliance votes. Among all candidates women got 54,6% of votes. This the first time in Finnish elections than women candidates got more votes than men (presidential elections not included). Among other parties with high share of votes for women were Coalition party (68%), Christian Democrats (67%), Greens (53%) and the Finns (53%). Of SDP candidates men got clear majority of votes (58%). Seven of 13 Finnish MEPs are women (8 of 14 after Brexit).

Smaller parties of the left did not get large amount of votes: Communist Party got 0,2% (-0,1%) as well as Feminist Party (new) and Animal Justice Party (new).

In general, the election result is very close with the result of April 2019 parliamentary elections. Pro-European parties, the Greens, Coalition Party, Swedish People's party, get higher support than in parliamentary elections while,



Picture 1. The change in support of Left Alliance according to municipality. Areas in dark red are those in which support for Left Alliance is higher.



Picture 2. The change in support of Left Alliance. Areas in dark blue are those in which Left Alliance got significantly less support than in 2014. Areas in yellow are those in which Left Alliance got more support.

the Finns party and Social Democrats lost. The only change in MEPs is that Centre party lost one seat and Greens got one more. Moreover, after Brexit, when Finland will get one MEP more, that new MEP will be from Greens. Greens became the second largest party in Finnish elections for the first time (not including presidential elections of 2012 and 2018). Centre party is still suffering from its participation in centre-right coalition government (2015-2019), which policies were not liked by the rural voters.

A voter advice application by largest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat reveals that the elected candidates of the same

party may represent rather different political positions. According to left-right and conservative-liberal dimensions, seven of Finland's MEP are on the left-liberal corner (MEPs from Left Alliance, Greens, Social Democrats, Swedish People's party as well as one of the Coalition Party MEPs). Other two Coalition party MEPs are in right-liberal corner, while the Centre party MEPs are in the middle and left-conservative corner, while the Finns party MEPs are in the conservative end of the scale, one more leftist and one more rightist.

From Coalition party a re-elected MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen is more ecologist and liberal, perhaps even left-wing than her

party, also MEP from Swedish People's party Nils Torvalds (father of Linux inventor Linus Torvalds) is former hard-line communist journalist from 1970s and still pretty leftist and liberal. From the Finns party a moderate MEP Pirkko Ruohonen-Lerner could not renew her seat but the Finns are represented by a creationist teacher Laura Huhtasaari (Finnish Marine Le Pen) and Finnish MP and former saw-mill owner Teuvo Hakkarainen, who has been convicted of assault and sexual harassment of another MP and suspected from racial hatred because of his talks which he defended by claiming that he comes from a rural background. The new MEPs from the Finns party are certainly more colourful than the former ones.

RESULT OF LEFT PARTIES

There are no published information about movement of voters between parties because a possible voter study has been done only after the elections and the results will be published only in 2020. However, it is possible to analyse election data on the basis of geographical data on polling districts, 1,943 in total in the whole Finland.

On the basis of sociodemographic data of polling districts, Left Alliance got more support in areas with high population density, high unemployment and areas in which economic structure is service-dominated. Lowest support for Left Alliance was in areas with low population density, low level of unemployment and economic structure dominated by agriculture.

In comparison with European elections of 2014, Left Alliance lost votes especially in Northern Finland because Merja Kyllönen was not seen as a candidate which would take her seat in European parliament. In 2014 Left Alliance got 17,4% of votes in Oulu district and 14,2% in Lapland, and in some municipalities in the home region of Merja Kyllönen over 50% of votes. In 2019 the share of votes was 8,1% in Oulu and 11,2% in Lapland and the party lost a total of 14,700 votes in these districts, even if the support of Left Alliance remains still above national average in these districts. In South-Western Finland, around the city of Turku, the home region of Li Andersson, Left Alliance lost 5600 votes (from 11,6% to 7,4%).

Left Alliance got a better result in Helsinki and Southern Finland, in Helsinki the amount of votes even increased

from 29,908 to 30,661 in comparison with 2014 elections, although the support in general decreased from 12,0% to 11,0% because of increased turnout. Left Alliance increased its share of votes only in few rural communities, in which the support of the party was and remains very small.

The change in support for Left Alliance was negative correlated with change in support of the Finns, Centre party, Greens and SDP. However, the situation is different if Northern and Southern Finland are analysed separately. In the North the losses of Left Alliance are linked with increase of support of the Finns and Greens as well as smaller decrease of Centre party, while in the South change in support of Left Alliance is linked with increases of both Greens and SDP, but without connection to the change in support of the Finns party. The change in voter turnout had also different connection with the change in the support of Left Alliance: in the North decreased support for Left Alliance was linked with decreased turnout, while in the South increased turnout was connected with decreased support for Left Alliance. In Northern Finland of Left Alliance voters did not vote because there was not a serious candidate in the North, while in the South the supporters of other parties voted more actively which led to decrease of support of Left Alliance. The lack of high-profile male candidates may have caused flow of votes to Eero Heinälouma, the leading SDP male candidate and the more clear pro-European policy may have caused flow of votes to Greens. Also the Finns may have won votes from Left Alliance, especially in the North.

In comparison with the national parliamentary elections in April 2019 Left Alliance got the same level of support in the South around Helsinki and less in South-Western and in Northern Finland. Left Alliance may have lost votes to SDP, Centre party and Greens, but correlation with change in support of the Finns party is close to zero. Especially in South-Western Finland, Left Alliance lost votes to Greens because of the new MEP Ville Niinistö of the Greens from the city of Turku.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Finland was also part of the green tide in European elections. Greens got their best result in Finnish elections and two seats, three after Brexit. Greens were for the first time second largest party (presidential elections not included).

The success of the Finns party is most clearly linked with the decrease of support of Centre party. The Finns won especially in smaller towns and countryside, in which Centre party is traditionally strong. The Finns were largest party for example in province of Satakunta, which is the home of Laura Huhtasaari, the main candidate of the party in these elections. On the other hand, the Finns did not succeed well in places in which the Greens had much support in 2014.

To conclude, the role of popular, well-known candidates was essential in success of parties in 2019 European elections in Finland. The climate change debate had positive effects to both Greens which got votes of those interested in working against it, while the Finns collected the votes of climate-change denialists.

Left Alliance got quite expected result, although a slightly better result could have been possible too. Anyhow, Left Alliance preserved its one seat in European parliament.

A Portuguese mirage in the European political landscape

By **Tatiana Moutinho** is a Porto-based facilitator of *transform! europe* in the programme “Cooperation Strategies for Southern Europe” and the President of *Cul:tra – Cooperativa Culturas de Trabalho e Socialismo* in Portugal.

Some of the main interpretations concerning Portuguese political context should be framed within a very particular electoral calendar. It shall be reminded that European Parliamentary elections precede the National elections by less than five months. The idea that political problems, electoral agendas and even expected results for the National election can be anticipated from the European elections result turns into a strong temptation, fed by media and some political forces. Traditionally in Portugal, the campaigns for EP elections tend to be more focused on the impacts that EU policies and treaties have in Portugal, rather than on the discussion about the European Union project itself. Not surprisingly though, this year’s European Parliamentary elections campaign was heavily dominated by national politics given the proximity to the forthcoming National elections, which will take place in October.

During the campaign the main national political debate was quite present, even if issues like the ongoing debate on the Public Health Basic Law, the situation of teachers or the (quite shy) advances on labour laws are of little concern at the European level. This proximity between elections also helps to explain, for example, the quite aggressive strategy adopted by the Socialist Party towards the Left, in a desperate attempt to achieve a full majority on the national level in the near future. On the other hand, it could be noticed the political emptiness of the liberal party (PSD) agenda, lacking concrete proposals after the apparent economic achievements of the present government. Trying to gain a wider political role as opposition, one could also verify the increasing aggressiveness of the conservatives (CDS/PP), former government partners of the liberals during the troika years. With an utterly confrontational speech, conservatives tried to capitalize the shyness of their former allies, also reflecting an identity crisis of the center right, with a populist urge to fill in the political space usually occupied by alt or far right. This strategy adopted by the conservatives, in line with the reshaping of the old traditional right wing parties, was clearly defeated on the 26th of May and the “Portuguese Exception” regarding the rise of the far right still holds.

In a nutshell, one may say that the Portuguese results of the European Parliamentary elections of 2019 represent a mirage in the European political landscape:

- The social-democrats (PS, in office since 2015) ranked first, increasing by 1.5 % its turnout and electing one more MEP (9).
Bloco de Esquerda emerges as the third strongest political force (a 5.2% increase in the turnout and the election of a second MEP).
Together, the left parties (Bloco de Esquerda and the Communists’ coalition with the Greens) hold their EP representation.
- The largest right-wing parties, who ran in coalition in 2014, failed to increase both in the turnout and in the number of seats, which represents a defeat.
- The election of its first MEP by PAN (party People Animals and Nature) was the (half) surprise of the electoral evening with a score of 5% (a 3.3% increase).

But, a closer look, that takes into account the political expectations of each party, the Portuguese political context and the final results, may bring some flavor to this straightforward interpretation.

THE TURNOUT:

In Portugal, the EP elections are the least participated ones: in 2014 a turnout record of only 34% of voters was attained. In the 2019 EP elections, the turnout decreased further (reaching 30%) but the number of voters remained pretty much unchanged (a marginal increase of 30 thousand). The decrease in turnout reflects the introduction of the automatic registration of Portuguese citizens living abroad, increasing the universe by approximately 1.1 million (in Portugal we have now approximately 10 million voters).

The impressive high level of abstention in Portugal indicates that the 17 political forces that ran for this election were unable to conquer the Portuguese voters for the European debate.

There are several reasons underlining this detachment of the Portuguese from the European question:

1. the lack of interest in the European Union project
2. the very poor level of debate during the campaign promoted by the Right together with the “nationalization” of the campaign by the Socialist Party
3. the perception that European Parliament decisions have low relevancy for the overall EU policies
4. the broad lack of information on Portuguese media regarding the EP activity.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY SCORE: THE ART OF MAKING A SMALL VICTORY LOOK BIG

As happens throughout Europe, also in Portugal in the European Parliamentary elections the government’s party tends to be penalized.

Nonetheless, according to polls published in the beginning of the year, the Socialist Party was expected to obtain a smashing victory, with a gap between the major right party (PSD) ranging from 10% and 20%, and a turnout that could be close to 40%.

This was an indication that the Socialists were in a position to dispute the electorate both at their left and at their right.

Indeed, the governmental experience that became known as Geringonça (a government of the Socialists with the parliamentary agreements with Bloco and the Communists) has had good economical results while partially halting and reversing some of the harsh austerity policies of the Troika years, and this could challenge Bloco’s and the Communists’ electoral basis. On the other hand, the largest right-wing party, PSD, arrived at the EP elections campaign still striving to impose a new leadership and its shift on discourse, from a previous openly neo-liberal view to a more moderate/centre right position.

However, the campaign turned out to be much more difficult than the Socialists had anticipated. This could be explained by a cumulative succession of events.

Firstly, the choice of the PS’ leading candidate for the EP elections. As minister of planning and infrastructures, Pedro Marques reached little public recognition and is a low-profile politician. Its ministerial role in the government

turned him into an easy target for opponents’ criticism, because of the execution of the 2020 Cohesion Funds and the failure on the 2021-2027 Cohesion Fund negotiation process.

Internally, the government had been subjected to strong contestation (including strikes and demonstrations) by several activity sectors, along with an awkward governmental reshuffle that was heavily criticized due to several family relationships between members of the government.

On the verge of what could be turning into a mediocre result for the Socialists, the prime-minister, who was actively and personally involved throughout the whole campaign and had called for a confidence vote in the government, took a strategic move in the beginning of May creating a “political crisis”. At the basis of this crisis was the recognition of the full length of service count for teachers’ careers, with the government attacking simultaneously the Left parties (on the grounds of radicality and irresponsibility of the proposal) and the right parties (on the grounds of forming a *contra natura* “negative coalition” with the Left). This artificial crisis ended four days after, and proved effective in conquering the centre-right electorate. It is possible that it will pay off, as well, in the October National elections.

So, on the evening of May the 26th, and although the Socialists only marginally increased its voting in comparison to the 2014 score, the election of one more MEP and the 11% gap between PS and PSD was sufficient for the Socialists to claim victory.

THE LEFT PARTIES AND THE AFTERMATH OF GERINGONÇA

One can say that the 2014 EP turnout of Bloco de Esquerda and the coalition of the Communists and the Greens (CDU) were abnormally low and high, respectively. Given the electoral basis of support of each party, it was expected that Bloco would increase its voting (being the election of, at least, one more MEP the goal) and that CDU could have some losses (and possibly the concomitant loss of one MEP). Indeed, Bloco elected a second MEP and CDU lost its third MEP, so the number of Portuguese MEP’s at the GUE/NGL remains the same (4).

Bloco is definitely one of the winners of the 2019 EP elections: Bloco more than doubled its 2014 turnout and ranked as the third political force, failing the election of the third MEP by 0.5% votes. Bloco's campaign was focused on Labour Rights, Welfare state and democracy. During the campaign Bloco stressed that, although the progressive policies that have been implemented at the national level (and thanks to the Geringonça solution) proved right and effective, the European Union refuses to draw any conclusion and to proceed with the according and necessary changes in policies.

CDU was the clear defeated of the electoral evening: the loss of one MEP came along with the loss of more than a half of its votes (about 200 000 votes). This can be particularly significant for the Communists given the profile of their electoral basis of support, the most loyal and disciplined among the Portuguese parties.

It is almost impossible not to be tempted to read the score of the two Left parties under the light of the Geringonça's experience. To which extent the agreements made with the Socialist government could turn out detrimental for the Left has always been a matter of debate inside these two parties. Although drawing a parallel between the results of the European and the forthcoming National elections is far from being an exercise of precision and accuracy, the fact is that, at least apparently, Bloco's electoral basis is possibly much more comfortable with the support given to the socialist government than the communist electorate. In fact, at the press conference that followed the central committee meeting about the European Parliament elections results, the general-secretary of the Portuguese Communist Party, Jerónimo de Sousa, strongly pointed out the importance of the agreements reached between the Party and the Socialists since 2015 for the implementation of policies that have accounted for the recovery in income and rights for the Portuguese people.

THE RIGHT WING PARTIES: THE ART OF TURNING A SMALL DEFEAT IN A SMASHING EVENT.

At the time of the previous EP elections, PSD (with an openly liberal leadership) and CDS/PP (the Conservatives) were together in government putting in place the Troika memorandum for Portugal.

These two parties ran in coalition for the 2014 EP elections and remained 4% below the Socialists. Given the political context and the popular discontent with the austerity policies at that time, this result was considered as a pretty "fair" one (or a small defeat). Indeed, the scarce victory of the Socialists back in the 2014 elections was the motto for an internal crisis that paved the way for Costa's leadership.

In this years' EP elections the right-wing parties ran separately and attained a score, if considered together, quite approximate to the 2014's: a small increase of less than 1% maintaining the same number of MEP's (6+1) that seat with EPP. Yet, both parties were the political losers of the electoral evening.

PSD, the largest right-wing party has plunged into an internal crisis since the National elections of 2015.

Dissidences have taken place, with two known members of the party resigning and launching their own parties, which ran for the 2019 EP: Aliança, an openly neo-liberal party led by the former prime-minister Santana Lopes (a kind of Portuguese-Macron wanna be) and Chega led by André Ventura, who ran in coalition with other small right wing parties as coalition Basta, with a clear populist and far-right agenda. Both parties attained residual scores, 1.8% and 1.5%, respectively.

Moreover, and as mentioned before, the new leadership has been recurrently and publicly challenged by the liberal wing of the party, with the European elections acting as a test for the centre-right leadership's political agenda.

In addition, still tied up to austerity and unable to come up with an alternative coherent proposal regarding the European project, the party's campaign was mainly focused in discrediting the Socialist candidate Pedro Marques and the Socialist Party as a whole, often based on personal attacks and fake news.

Conservatives (CDS-PP) also obtained a result very far from the Party's ambitions. Since 2015, and given the internal crisis in PSD, the Conservatives had been claiming to be "tleaders of the opposition". The expectations for these elections were very high, with the goal of electing, at least, a second MEP. Consequently, 6% of the votes and a single MEP elected was a total *debacle* for the party.

Throughout the campaign, Conservatives adopted a quite harsh and crude tone towards their opponents, often slipping into populism: for example, the leading candidate began the election campaign stating that the party would be much favorable about having Vox joining the European Popular Party or, in debates with the other candidates, rarely remained within the lines of the discussion, preferring to launch attacks on the “radical” left (Bloco and PCP) accusing the parties of supporting states that violate human rights (as would be the case of Venezuela or North Korea) or having murderers as ideological leaders (as would be the case of Che Guevara).

Regarding the right, two conclusions seem clear:

1. the Portuguese Right remains unable to capitalize from the insufficiencies of the Socialist government and, simultaneously, is unable to wipe out disastrous the consequences of their own government during the Troika years and come up with a credible political agenda.
2. for the time being, attempts to divert the politics towards right-wing populism does not seem appealing for Portuguese voters.

THE PORTUGUESE NEWCOMER MEP: SURFING THE WAVE OF A EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA

The Party People, Animals and Nature (PAN) was founded 10 years ago. Maybe, the best way to describe it could be an “out-of-the-establishment” party. Their political agenda cannot be considered either left wing or right wing, the party does not challenge the established powers, but rather focuses on the defense of animals’ rights and nature protection. With this agenda, the party managed, in 2015, to elect one MP in the National elections. At the parliament, this MP has irrelevant political weight and voted with the Left the approval of the State Budget, while repeatedly abstaining on the Right proposals.

The party ran for the 2019 EP elections with the same type depoliticized agenda, but now with a special focus on climate change, besides protection of the environment and animal rights. Several different polls had already pointed to the possibility of electing one MEP, who will join the Greens/EFA.

This party is clearly capitalizing from the raising awareness and importance, in Portugal as well as throughout Europe, of the political environmental agenda.

The outcome of the European elections in Portugal is clearly positive for the Left, and in counter cycle with most of the European countries: globally considered the Left surpasses 50% whereas the Right barely reaches a 33% turnout.

The results of the European Elections in Poland

By **Gavin Rae** is a sociologist living and working in Poland. He is a founding member of the think-tank *Naprzód (Forward)*, which is a member organisation in *transform! europe*.

The ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) won a significant victory in the European elections in Poland, strengthening its position in the run up to this Autumn's national parliamentary elections. This was despite the fact that many of the opposition parties stood in a single coalition against PiS. The remaining left and liberal parties were marginal

PiS (Law and Justice Party) has managed to maintain its dominant position in Poland because it is seen as being the party that best protects the living standards of the majority of the population. Since winning power in 2015, it has introduced a series of social welfare reforms, including the granting of a new child benefit that has helped to reduce child poverty by a half. In the run up to the European elections it widened this benefit, provided a one-off payment to pensioners and pledged to increase benefits for farmers. Although the elections took place in the wake of a teachers' strike and demonstrations by farmers, PiS were still seen as the most 'pro-social' party in these elections.

The main opposition to PiS was the European Coalition (KE), organised around the Citizens' Platform party (PO), which included the liberal Modern party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL) and the Greens. This coalition stood on a negative programme of opposing PiS, claiming that it was defending European values and democracy and that PiS wanted to take Poland out of the European Union.

These elections were dominated by issues such as LGBT+ rights and revelations of sexual abuse in the Church. PiS were able to maintain a united and consistent position on issues such as the expansion of LGBT+ rights in Poland. However, KE were divided between its conservative and liberal wings on such matters, which PiS were easily able to expose. KE also had no positive economic or social programme, and were unable to offer any credible alternative to the policies of PiS.

The overall vote for PiS rose by more than 13 percent, in comparison to the last European elections in 2014, gaining 45.38 percent of the vote. Meanwhile KE only won 38.47

percent, which was down more than 10 percent compared to 2014. This victory for PiS is even more impressive due to the fact that the turnout in these elections was two times higher than in 2014 (rising from 23.83 percent to 45.68 percent). There has therefore been a huge growth in the number of citizens participating in the democratic process, with the largest proportion of these new votes going to the ruling party.

The incoherence of KE's political campaign and message was particularly evident in the countryside. PiS essentially won these elections in the countryside and small towns where it gained 56.3 percent and 36.4 percent of the vote (in contrast it only received 27 percent in cities with a population of more than 500 thousand). Its main political rival in the rural regions, the PSL, was neutralised and its electorate demobilised partly due to its participation in KE. This left the field open to PiS, allowing it to advance its aim of becoming the recognised leading party in rural areas.

Likewise, the participation of the SLD in KE ensured that there was no strong independent left-wing alternative to PiS. This has bolstered the pro-social image of PiS and helped it to deepen its political support amongst some of the most disadvantaged sections of society. PiS therefore won over two-thirds of the votes from those with a basic or technical education, over 70 percent of the vote from farmers, 56 percent manual workers, 53 percent pensioners and 51 percent of the unemployed.

Outside of KE, two parties connected to the left stood independently. The social liberal party Spring (*Wiosna*) had been created a few months before these elections, around its leader Robert Biedroń. The party united liberals and social democrats and saw the European elections as an opportunity to launch themselves as serious contenders in this year's parliamentary elections. However, the party only managed to win 6.06 percent of the vote, winning three MEPs. Meanwhile, the Left-Together (*Left-Razem*), a coalition of small left-wing currents around the party *Razem*, stood on a left-wing social democratic programme. However, *Razem* has failed to build on the three percent it won

at the parliamentary elections four years ago, and only won 1.24 percent in these elections. Standing as part of KE, the SLD won five seats in the European parliament and alongside those MEPs from Spring will join the Socialists and Democrats group.

One piece of positive news to come out of these elections was the defeat of the far-right. The far-right were united as Confederation (Konfederacja), a coalition of the extreme nationalists from the National Movement and far-right neo-liberal party Korwin. This party only won 4.55 percent of the vote and alongside the populist Kukiz'15 failed to win any seats in the European Parliament.

The European elections have bolstered the chances of PiS winning a second term in office at the national parliamentary elections this Autumn. Meanwhile, the opposition strategy of uniting only against PiS, with no positive coherent programme of its own, has not brought any positive results. Meanwhile the left still remains weak and divided, with the major centre-left party, the SLD, incorporated into a coalition with the liberal centre-right. The left should seek to stand as one independent bloc in the parliamentary elections, which would be the best way of ensuring the left is represented independently in the Polish parliament.

The 2019 European elections analysis: a dispatch from Bulgaria

By **Jana Tsoneva** is a PhD student in Sociology at CEU, Budapest. She also co-authors *Hysterical Parrhesia* (a Lacanian-Marxist blog).

The 2019 European elections in Bulgaria yielded results similar to the 2017 national parliamentary elections. In short, they reproduced the tired status quo in the country. The ruling party of GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) emerged victorious with 31.07%, followed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) with 24.26%. The Movement for Rights and Liberties (DPS, colloquially known as the party representing the Turkish and Roma minorities of Bulgaria) was third with 16.55% and the far-right parties got between them 12% but they ran separately, unlike in 2017, since their coalition broke down in spring. Even though the BSP has been unable to topple GERB for a decade now (safe for the 2016 presidential elections when the GERB candidate was just too weak), the EP elections results this year are devastating for the BSP. This is because GERB got bogged down in a series of corruption scandals, flaking off crucial party apparatchiks and for a brief moment the main polling agencies registered a slight electoral preference for the BSP over GERB. Yet, the GERB managed to recuperate and win the elections which should have been fairly easy for the opposition to sweep clean. The other main right-wing party – a coalition between remnants of the first anti-communist opposition of the early 1990s and the Bulgarian Greens – scored 6.06% and they get one MEP who will join the European People's Party (5.88% are needed for a party or a candidate to earn a seat in the EP). This somewhat paradoxical alliance puts the Greens in the rather uncomfortable position to have helped the EPP – a traditional 'enemy' of the European Greens – get one MEP but it must be noted that the Greens in Bulgaria are mostly of liberal-right persuasion because the main current of the late 1980s opposition to the Communist Party ran along ecological lines.

The electoral turnout was only 32.64%, down 3% from 2014. Turnout in Bulgaria is not very high in general and the European elections tend to be the least exciting. The overall picture is indeed bleak and uninteresting, yet on a closer look there are some striking developments. For example, this year the preference for independent candidates grew almost 4-fold. For example, while in 2014 the cumulative result of the three independent candidates was slightly below 1% (0.93%), this year there were not only

more independent candidates, but they scored together over 3.8%. The result translates into 72500 votes which is more than what many parties and coalitions got. This indicates a clear majoritarian tendency within Bulgarian politics and an overall exhaustion with the established political parties of the Transition.

VOTER PROFILE

According to the polling agency of Gallup, mostly young and middle aged people voted GERB and DPS while voters above 60 years cast their vote for the BSP (38.5%). 40% of senior citizens voted for the BSP and 16% of the unemployed. For some reason, the unemployed percentage is over 24% for GERB which might indicate some bought vote. This might explain why the GERB pooled more votes in the countryside than from Sofia (28% and 26% respectively). The BSP got 22% in Sofia as opposed to 20% from the villages which busts a long-standing cliché that the party represents the "rural proletariat" as opposed to the educated urban middle classes. Among the holders of tertiary education degrees, 30% and 25% voted GERB and BSP respectively, rebuking another long-standing stereotype about the proverbial "uneducated" BSP voter.

IN THE RUN-UP TO THE ELECTIONS

The atmosphere before the elections was dominated by a grand corruption scandal dubbed "Apartmentgate" by the media. In spring 2019 a scheme was revealed in which high-level party members of GERB and government officials receive luxury residential properties against political favors and legislative services to big construction companies. The BSP naturally tried to exploit the scandal to its advantage by putting stronger emphasis on anti-corruption which traditionally has been the domain of the smaller liberal-right coalition mentioned above. Yet the dismal failure of the BSP to beat the already severely beaten down GERB points to the exhaustion of the politics of anti-corruption.

In addition to the corruption scandal, other topics of discussion prior to the elections were the infamous Istanbul

convention which the BSP opposed vehemently and killed, together with the far-right, as well as some failed infrastructural projects, the hallmark of GERB's decade of ruling.

As stated, the elections did not change the balance of power but reproduced the status quo. As a result, the leader of the BSP Kornelia Ninova resigned and now the party is trying to squeeze internal elections amid preparations for the local elections coming up this fall. They are most likely set to lose those as well and the general trend is towards the eternal reproduction of the current model of center-right domination, beefed up by their cozy connections with business elites and European cash injections for infrastructure.

There were two rather surprising immediate post-election developments. Firstly, the infamous oligarch Delyan Peevski (whose botch promotion as a head of National security triggered mass protests in 2013) from the DPS got a place in the EP but gave it up in order to struggle for a "just taxation" regime domestically. He basically stole the topic from a civic initiative this writer participated in from 2017 which struggles against the flat tax in the country (introduced by the BSP and DPS coalition in 2008). This prompted the PM Borissov to address the issue of taxes from a most prestigious forum – the annual ball of the Confederation of the Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria and to promise that his government will never touch the taxation regime. We can safely assume that this will be yet another artificial fault-line in the political power field because neither the DPS, as a liberal party, nor Peevski, in his capacity as a millionaire media owner, have any interest in introducing higher income tax for the rich. Meanwhile, Borissov once more pledged loyalty to his real constituency: Big Business.

The other odd and very worrying trend is the PM Borissov's pledge to reduce the state subsidies of the political parties, a development which will have extremely adverse effects on the entire democratic edifice of the state because it spells the final destruction of the modicum of independence of political parties from Big Business. As it stands, political parties that get at least 1% of votes in parliamentary elections are eligible for state subsidy amounting to 6 EUR per vote received. This subsidy is crucial for political party structure building and growth. Borissov wants to slash that amount to 0.50 EUR, in effect annulling the subsidies. This means that no new political party formation will be

possible without oligarchic financial support while it will further entrench the business grip on the established parties. The idea has been circulating for some time now, taken up regularly by different so-called "populist" voices who want to channel popular discontent with the representative system (the other change these forces push for is majoritarian system), but it has never been a "serious" issue for the so-called established and centrist parties. It seems that Borissov pushes for it right after his electoral victory in a desperate bid to entrench the increasingly unpopular political status quo. And it is unpopular because even though GERB is victorious, in reality it represents not more than 680 thousand people (this is based on the turnout of 32% or roughly 2 million people of which GERB got 31%) which is no more than 10% of the Bulgarian population. In addition to that, only 73% of those who voted GERB in the 2017 parliamentary elections repeated their vote in 2019 which is lower than BSP voters (83.6%). This means that even though GERB won, its base is smaller than that of the BSP, thereby giving the party somewhat elusive and precarious majority. My expectation is that the GERB will escalate the bid to artificially safeguard and reproduce its dominance through legalistic meddling with the franchise and with the electoral machinery.

All in all, there have not been any fundamental changes in the political landscape: it is as bleak as it gets in the eternal reproduction of the same tired forces and neoliberal consensus. There are some new actors, such as the youth formation "Give way to the Young", an offshoot of the now defunct party of the exiled ex-czar Simeon II who became prime minister in 2001 and disappeared from politics two terms later. Yet, they are new but only in the limited sense of new faces and actors. Their ideology is the same old neoliberal technocratic that voters tend to reject throughout Europe.

THE LEFT

The left parties scored a negligible 0.86%. The non-BSP left consisted of the Bulgarian Left Party (a member of the European Left) and the Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV) – a nationalist BSP-splinter group created by the ex-president Georgi Parvanov (2002-2012). It has traditionally stood to the right of the BSP. For example, in 2014, in his capacity as a social policy minister, the party member Ivaylo Kalfin introduced extremely racist restrictions to

child benefits. The coalition between the BL and the ABV (and 5 more smaller parties) adopted a moniker the BSP used and discarded last parliamentary elections, in a gamble to deflect confused BSP voters. Their result shows that the strategy of hiding ideological bankruptcy behind identity theft does not work. Their campaign pivoted on the demographic crisis, energetics, "the national interest" and closer ties with Russia.

In this drab political landscape, the sole exception was Vanya Grigorova, a trade unionist who ran as an independent candidate on 100% workers issues and rights platform. Unfortunately, Grigorova got 0.5%. Seems that worker's rights can mobilize even less efficiently than anti-corruption. Yet, given that it is her first ever try it is not that bad of a result. Also, we need to bear in mind how rigged the system is.

And it is rigged on every level. For example, the big parties buy votes and are rumored to falsify ballots. But the system is rigged also when working according to its legal parameters. For example, the conditions for media access already privilege the big parties and those who have oligarchs to bankroll them. 1.5 mins of commercial air time on National TV cost almost 1300 EUR, so naturally a poor campaign such as Grigorova's could not afford a lot of air time. The state subsidizes contestants, but it gives independent candidates only 2500 EUR for media appearance whereas parties get 10 times this amount. There is no competing with this kind of money power. So as usual, the richer you are the cheaper it is for you to compete on elections.

In short, I'd rather blame Grigorova's result on the skewed electoral rules (plus the further illicit bending thereof) which privilege the incumbent and big players and screen out alternatives. Unfortunately, the novelty of her message could not overcome the paywall and the other obstacles before the campaign. And she was a genuine novelty: she was the first candidate genuinely representing workers and the disabled. The latter makes her a pioneer in the whole of Europe inasmuch as the disabled, being one of the most invisible and marginalized demographics, have no political representation on the continent (and continue not to).

FIRST CONCLUSIONS FOR THE LEFT

It is a truism that only way one can stop the far-right is via genuine working class-centered campaign. As the story

goes, the far-right is an ersatz-left, filling the vacuum left by the social-democrats embracing neoliberal centrism and so on. Alas, it seems more complicated. (Unless the sole reason for Grigorova's low result is due to the media blackout but we will never know for sure). In no way does that mean the left must capitulate to the far-right themes and frames. As we saw, that strategy didn't help even the BSP. But maybe we should accept that a sizable segment of society is genuinely moved by identitarian issues and the latter are not just a distorted left politics looking for its "correct" form.

0.5% or 9300 votes are nothing electorally, but that figure is a huge force in grassroots terms. Politics is not exhausted by elections even though gaining control of the state apparatus should be the objective of every self-respecting leftist force. We, the people around Grigorova, are not going to leave it at that and will build on that little momentum. We rallied and counted ourselves and it is not a bad number for a country as vitriolically anti-communist as Bulgaria.

The real task at hand now is how to reach the true winner of the elections: the 5 million strong Party of the Unrepresented.

Czechia as a part of CEE region – one pebble of intricate mosaic

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As a devoted Marxist, I consider its dialectical approach to be an effective method of analysis. This method rests on considering an analyzed problem to be a dynamic summary of continuous changes resulting from the activities of people. Another pillar of this method is considering the real output to be the major criterion of thesis correctness. And the last but not the least important factor for me is a historical aspect, i.e. that the courses of actions tend to change over time. Every event may and shall be regarded as a set of internal contradictions and opposing trends in order to get them defined and analyzed.

My life-long experience of being a school teacher has taught me that using examples is one of the most effective pedagogical tools in use.

The provided timeframe does not allow me to provide an in-depth substantial analysis of EP elections outcome. Hence, I will try to let the audience to work out their own conclusions based on a set of examples that I am going to provide.

The Czech results on the EP elections are an integral part of the Central European mosaic. By examining in detail just this single piece of the CEE mosaic puzzle, we will not be able to comprehend the overall image displayed. You can find a list of Czech outcomes and the related analytical conclusions are in the addendum. In fact, they are nothing but a fragment taken from the whole picture.

So, let us then proceed to those educational examples:

1. In the prominent town of Esztergom on the Danube in the north of Hungary is located the largest Hungarian basilica. Every day at 16.30 its bells are tolling as a reminder of the Trianon treaty. What kind of message does it carry of the Danube waters on the neighbouring Slovak town of Štúrovo? Most probably it is: "We'll never forget!" If one wants to understand the way things are going in Central Europe, he/she needs to know what exactly Hungarians are claiming not to forget. As a result of the Trianon Treaty Hungary has lost in 1919 71.5% of its original territory. And every fourth Hungarian found

himself in 1919 outside his historical territory, literally abroad. (a temporary recovery of territory took place during World War II, a rather short one due to the fact of Hungary being of the defeated side). Among other points, this agreement (or dictate) has banned Hungary from any kind of territorial alliance with Austria for the future. This historical fact expresses the Hungarian national feeling of being strongly mistreated, an idea that is deeply rooted in minds throughout the whole nation, regardless of the political preferences and right-left orientation. Since V.Orbán and his party have effectively combined nationalist rhetoric with socio-economic measures that actually benefited "ordinary" citizens, their election results can be regarded as a surprise only by a non-experienced viewer. And they, in reality, nothing to do either with the current EU migrations crisis nor with so-called suppression of democracy.

2. If I want to understand at least key specifics of Balkans we have to take into consideration the historic events of Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. Then one can understand why A. Tsipras government's neck was broken not just by their inability to break out of the austerity policy that was heartlessly slapped on Greece by Merkel, Holland and the ECB team, but also through accepting an agreement with Macedonia, very controversial from the point of view of the Greek public. On the other hand, our Greeks friends are known for their 1913 "Run to Thessaloniki" that has denied Bulgaria access to Aegean sea – a thing Bulgarians as a nation cannot forget even today. Therefore, in eastern Balkans, it is very difficult even to talk about a common European policy that could be of help to all countries in the region. But it is also an example of the imperial practices of all European powers, not one of whom behaved diligently at those times.
3. If we take an example of Western Balkans, then we shall be better aware of the significance of the date of June 28th. This day 630 years ago the Ottoman Empire has opened an entrance door to Europe by winning the Battle of Kosovo Polje ("Vidov dan"). It is crucial Remembrance Day for the Orthodox churches and the communities in the Balkans. It is also a symbolic factor of strong anti-Islamic attitudes in the region.

- Exactly on the same day in 1914 Ferdinand d'Este was shot dead in Sarajevo, an event that has triggered the start of World War I with all its consequences, some of them persisting nowadays. A century ago, again on this day, a Versailles Treaty was signed, officially ending the World War I war and setting the ground for World War II. At this day 31 years ago, the process of eliminating the SKJ from Kominform was launched, starting the process of splitting the European Communist movement. In order to understand the Western Balkans well, we also need to know the history of Yugoslavia's Krajina region, where ethnic cleansing was carried out in 1990s by Croats with the US and EU consent with a goal of assuring of achieving a mono-ethnic state. The explosive rise of regional nationalism was shamelessly exploited the Western powers to their advantage while the Left in Europe kept their silence, not speaking about any active opposing these courses of actions.
4. Let's not forget about Poland either. If one cannot really recall a schoolbook story of the three consequent divisions of Poland carried out by Russian, Prussian and Austrian Empires in XVIII century one can hardly understand the phenomena of the strong influence of the Polish Catholic Church in the society who used play at those days of Polish state non-existence the role of sole guardian of the Polish national identity. The notorious Polish society-wide Russophobia, continuous distancing from Germany and the strive for trans-Atlantic support all come from this part of the country's history. We shall note as well with a certain degree of caution a fact of latent antisemitism (similarly to the one in Hungary) that prevails among the population. Poles belong to convinced Europeans who feel that their national system is broken (34%). But for example, in RO the ration is a whopping 64%, in HU 43% and in ES 40%. So the Poles are not out really of the way. The ratio of those who consider both the EU and their national systems to basically function properly makes 24 % of the EU electorate. In PL it is 25%, in DK 55% (!), but in FR is just 10% (!), in SK 12%. If we talk about Poland (and to a certain degree Ukraine) it is necessary to keep in mind its common historical experience with other lands of Austria-Hungarian and Russian Empires regarding the region of Galicia. It is the place where the interests of Poland, Habsburg Austria (in particular Hungary) and Russia have been confronted over the centuries. This region is also infamous for widespread antisemitism among its population. It also currently serves as a source of substantial Polish-Ukrainian tensions.
 5. Let us stop for a moment on Slovakia: there was clearly evident a trend of weakening of the ruling SMER-SD party and strengthening of both populist right-wing platforms, mainly represented by LSNS-Kotleba, and the "newly" shaping European liberal structures that have been attempting to replacing the existing not many successful policies of traditional liberal, right-wing, or Christian-Conservative parties. The near future will show whether this mostly PR activity in promoting new faces (Z.Čaputová) or new political organizations will bring a substantial change in the country's political landscape. The only influence-relevant left-wing movement- SMER-SD is ripe with the internal rivalries with its Europhilic wing (MEP M.Beňová) that represent the classical Social-Democratic policy is openly conflicting with a left-radical group represented by L. Blaha that takes an anti-globalist and nationalist approach and is highly critical of the current EU practices. It is also a reaction to the shift of the part of the leftist electorate to LSNS. For the radical left, the election's result was even worse than the last one – the KSS + Vzдор (coalition) gained only 0.62% (6199 votes vs. 8510 votes in 2014). On the surface SMER-SD won the majority in most districts, but the victory by the number of mandates went to the newly-shaped Progressive Slovak Coalition and SPOLU– Civic Democracy, gained by the electoral successes in Bratislava and its vicinity (but even there the winners have not gained more 40% of vote, except one district), rich areas of Western Slovakia, Košice, or important tourist area of High and Low Tatras. SMER-SD received at most 33.6% in the Poltár district. The correlation between the economic level of economic development combined with its attribution to the EU with the relevant electoral outcome has also been confirmed here. A slightly different situation was in Hungary. Here only in two counties (from 20) was FIDESZ under 50%. It reached 49,3 % in one county and 41,2 % in Budapest (compared to 19,8 % for Democratic coalition – soc. democrats)
 6. The evergreen of these elections was migration. What did the elections tell us? Only in Hungary migration was considered to be the issue number one. Everywhere else in CEE this was Islam – Islamic radicals (as ideology=theology). The ratios of problematic migration/Islamic radicals are: HU 25%/17%, PL 10%/20%, CZ 22%/25%, SK 15%/22%, (AT 16%/23%). This witness that the electorate in Poland has no problems with immigrants from

Eastern Europe (UA, BY, etc.), the same is true for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and other countries. What the radical left has entirely missed is the degree of severity of outbound migration for CEE countries – so in Poland and Hungary this is considered to be a significant problem, and the activities for reversing this trend are supported by 50% of voters (in ES or GR sees this ratio is even 60%). At the same time in Czechia, this indicator has a modes value of about 25%. The biggest difference between fears above outbound vs inbound emigration is displayed by Romania (> 50%).

7. It is interesting to look at the perceived importance of countries' mono-nationality/ethnicity: HU – 60% (I hope this is not surprising for anyone), RO and PL – 55%, AT, HR, SK, ES, DE, IT – 45%. Where are those feared “nationalists”?
8. War and Peace: anyone who says that the greatest danger for Europe constitutes in a potential conflict in the civil war in eastern Ukraine then witnesses about his provinciality. How does it look like in reality? A significant proportion of Europeans (west and east) considers the real military conflict between EU countries – AT and FR – 35%, PL and HU – 33%, CZ – 31%, DE – 27%, NL – 38%. What about the danger at a NATO-Russia boundary? Does the left care? Concerns about Russia has 11%/ 8% of EU citizens – depending on the allegiance to pro-EU or anti-EU camps. Do you know where there is the highest degree of worries about Russia? In Romania – almost 20%. If we consider the European military conflict, then the probability is highest in these areas – border Baltic States and the Russian Federation (strategic direction to St. Petersburg), an enclave of Kaliningrad (deployed Iskander missiles and other RF weapons systems), across the Black Sea (including surrounding states – Georgia, Abkhazia, Moldova and Transnistria, Crimea and the coast of Ukraine. There are important interests of Turkey and Iran in this Black Sea region. There are significant US bases that exist on the basis of bilateral agreements between Romania, Bulgaria and the US, outside NATO).
9. Will it be better than it used to be for a previous generation, will better economic opportunities arise? A positive response was given by just 50% in DK, below 50% in SE, then between 40-45% in AT, SK, RO, IT, ES, HU. At the end with less than 30% are FR and GR. What does it suppose to mean for the Left? It seems that this aspect was not (or insufficiently) responded to by the left in her campaign in the region of CEE (at least). This situation is recording the growing feelings without the prospect of life for disadvantaged groups of citizens. This is likely to strengthen the sense of unimportance of the elections or, on the other hand, the voter votes to “new” entities that combine a national approach with alternative solutions (criticism of transnational monopolies, protection of domestic economy and market, against capital outflow, etc.)
10. Last optimistic information: What is the EU's perspective? So most Europeans think the EU would fall. This applies to all EU countries except ES. It should be added that it is meant by the EU in its current form. Overall the EU is 40% of citizens. And there is no relevant difference here between the Western and CEE countries. But even in ES, there is no overriding attitude towards the EU's positive outlook for more than 50% of citizens (40% for/44% against). In key countries (DE, FR, IT, PL), a positive perspective is seen by about 30% (against 50 % in DE, 57 % in IT, FR, PL). The most negative view of the future is in GR, where 60% are expecting the worsening future, followed by FR, ES, PL, RO – more than 40%.
11. We hear from many commentators a joyful statement about the active participation of voters. However in all CEE states apart RO (51%) and LV (53%) the participation rates were below the European average of 50.97%, and quite far from the average – SK, SLO, HR and CZ below 30%, BG 30.8%, HU 43.36% and PL 45.7%. Thus, in CEE, half or more citizens were not interested in European elections, at least not in going to the ballots. It is not for technical reasons; it is much more about active non-citizenship. Many of them do not want to be associated with contemporary society, nor are they involved in its political formation through elections.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The EU states from CEE do not show to be lesser-oriented to the values that Western countries consider to be a key to the EU. They are not the splitting edge of Europe. In contrast, the inhabitants of CEE region regard EU and its institutions to be a sort of a greater guarantee against the excesses of their “national governments” and has somewhat greater confidence in the EU's institutional action.
- Certain Western statesmen (even within the left) are concerned/irritated about effective political coordination between V4 countries. Taking into essence the fact these V4 activities do not jeopardize the fundamental principles of the EU this concern is used as a propagan-

distic factor of neoliberal (west) European forces. The data show that even the West the societies are not homogeneous. There is a relatively significant difference between southern and northern EU member States in their fears about the world. This clearly shows whether states are more interested in immigration or emigration.

- In general, however, in the CEE region, there is a very strong feeling that they are considered to be a semi-periphery of Europe. And both private individuals as well as for states are considered to be suitable objects for the “colonialism XXI Century”.
- A mix of all these fears, feelings and real knowledge in the CEE region leads to a predominant sceptical view of not only about the actual EU-form of continent’s integration but also to the equally sceptical adoption of the so-called ‘ (radical) leftist European policy ‘.

Notice: Data is from open sources. Sociological researches: CVVM, MEDIAN and STEM Czechia, Eurobarometer, EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, FES, official European election results published by relevant local authorities (statistical offices, ministries) etc.



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