May 28, 2019

European elections – UEIL’s Update on the Results

Summary:

Elections to the European Parliament took place between 23 and 26 May. These elections determine the composition of the European Parliament for the next five years, and will provide an important indication of the direction of the European Commission. Later this week, European Council President Donald Tusk will convene an extraordinary summit of European heads of government to have first discussions on the President of the European Commission.

Election trends in a nutshell:

• **Higher turnout than in 2014:** Turnout rose across the European Union, with figures rising in almost all Member States. The total turnout is estimated to be 51%, up from 42.6% in 2014. Turnout in European elections has long been a concern of the European Institutions, for fear that low turnout contributes to the perceived lack of legitimacy of the European Union. Only in Malta, Portugal and Ireland did turnout significantly fall from 2014.

• **Loss of traditional majority:**
  - The two largest parties of the European Parliament since its first elections in 1979 – the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) – have for the first time lost the ability to form a majority on their own, losing seats across Europe. According to latest provisional results made available, EPP returned 180 seats, and the S&D returned 146.
  - The winners of the elections are the liberals, greens and Eurosceptics. The liberals increased their seats in Parliament on account of the joining of French President Macron’s La République en Marche. The liberal group (ALDE) was also bolstered by a very strong performance from the UK, where the Liberal Democrats beat the Conservatives and Labour, coming in second place to the Brexit Party.

• **The Green Wave:** The Greens, who increased their share from 50 seats to around 69, are describing a ‘Green Wave’ in Europe. They saw surprise gains in France, Germany and Ireland.
  - Many national parties in the European group of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) campaigned on promises of a greener EU. And ALDE, the liberal group, will have many green-minded MEPs who demand tougher action on emissions.
  - We can expect the Greens to try and ensure sure as much of their program is included in the portfolio of next Commission.
• **Limited influence of Eurosceptical power:** Eurosceptic parties are also on the rise, with Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement national winning 22 seats and beating Macron for share of the popular vote. In Italy, Eurosceptic party League, led by Matteo Salvini, has come top, with 28 seats, up from 5 in 2014.
  
  o However, despite having grown in number, the Eurosceptic parties are known to have difficulties reuniting themselves around a common programme. They will be part of the decision making process, but it will be key to assess how much they intend to participate in legislating.
  
  o In the recent past, their involvement in such activities has been rather minimal, so business has been able to disregard them. Perhaps their implication in decision making processes will slightly differ now, but their ability to reunite and disrupt decision making should still be limited.

**Composition of the European Parliament:**

*See provisional results [here](#)*

- **EPP:** 180
- **S&D:** 14
- **ALDE:** 109
- **Greens-EFA:** 69
- **ECR:** 59
- **ENF:** 58
- **EFDD:** 54
- **GUE/NGL:** 39
- **Non-attached:** 38

**Significant National Results:**

• **United Kingdom:** The traditional major parties in the UK the Conservatives (4 seats) and Labour (10 seats) both suffered losses, with Nigel Farage’s pro-leave Brexit Party (29 seats) and the pro-remain Liberal Democrats (16 seats) topping the polls. However, the Brexit Party polled 31.7% with the remain vote fragmented between several parties.

• **France and Italy:** Nationalists from Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini’s Lega and from the Rassemblement national (formerly Front National) of Marine Le Pen topped the polls in Italy and France and are expected to sit together as the centre of gravity for a new right-wing group. President Emmanuel Macron’s La République en Marche (LREM) party entered the European Parliament for the first time with 21 seats and will form the centre of gravity in a renamed liberal centrist group.

• **Germany:** In Germany the centre-right party of Chancellor Angela Merkel remain in top spot taking 28.7% of the vote and 29 seats, beating an insurgent Green Party into second place with 20.7% of the vote and 16 seats.

• **Austria, Finland, Latvia and Ireland:** Centre-right parties topped the polls in Austria, Finland, Latvia, Ireland and all South East Europe Member States, including in Hungary were President Viktor Orban’s Fidesz Party took over 50% of the vote.
**Portugal, Sweden and the Netherlands:** Centre-left social democrat parties topped the polls with strong showings in Portugal, Sweden and the Netherlands. The Italian Democratic Party (PD) also fared well coming second in Italy with 16 seats. However, the centre-left lost significant ground in former strongholds including Germany and France.

**Greece:** The ruling Syriza Party of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras suffered a significant defeat the European and regional polls in Greece with the Prime Minister subsequently calling a snap general election likely to be held in June. Greece had been scheduled to vote nationwide in Autumn 2019.

**What do the results say for energy & climate policies?**

Along with the Eurosceptics, the Greens are perceived as the winners of these European elections. In several countries, including France, Germany and Ireland, their share of votes has risen, reflecting the growing concerns climate change causes and the urge from citizens all over Europe to decision-makers to act and preserve our planet.

Familiar faces from the previous European Parliament’s mandate are returning with these elections, including (non-exhaustive):

- **Bas Eickhout**, Greens/EFA, the Netherlands
  - Co-candidate for the Greens to become Commission President, although the Greens are unlikely to win the Commission’s top position.
  - Bas Eickhout also supposedly expressed his will to become Vice President in charge of energy and climate to media. If unsuccessful, Bas Eickhout would keep working in the European Parliament.

- **Jerzy Buzek**, EPP, Poland
  - Former Polish Prime Minister and European Parliament President from 2009 to 2012, Jerzy Buzek has now been an MEP for 15 years.
  - Jerzy Buzek’s main priority will be to make sure that the energy transition in the EU is fair to citizens and to regions that still heavily depend on fossil fuels.
  - Jerzy Buzek wants to return to the industry and energy committee (ITRE), hoping to become its chair once again.

- **Peter Liese**, EPP, Germany
  - Peter Liese was the EPP’s environmental coordinator in the last European Parliament, and played a central role in the development of environmental and climate policies.
  - Peter Liese is of course keen to holding this role again, and one of his priorities would be to get the EU to adopt a 2050 climate neutrality goal.
  - He also expressed in media his will to use the momentum on climate change to push through more ambitious positions in the EPP group, which traditionally is pro-business and has been opposing higher emission reduction targets that could undermine economic competitiveness in the EU.

- **Kathleen Van Brempt**, S&D, Belgium
  - Kathleen Van Brempt was a member of the industry and energy committee (ITRE) and worked on climate issues, including the Dieselgate scandal. However, she said to media she is now willing to move on to something else. (without further indications at this stage)

- **Morten Helveg Petersen**, ALDE, Denmark
Morten Helveg Petersen, former Vice-Chair of the industry and energy committee (ITRE), said he would like to continue working on the same topic and in the same committee.

The upcoming reform of the EU’s gas market will be his main focus. Denmark is more advanced in the production and commercialisation of green gas than most EU Member States, he would therefore like to bring this national experience in Brussels.

Morten Helveg Petersen was rapporteur on the proposal for a Regulation establishing a European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (a key file in the Clean Energy Package).

- **Miriam Dalli, S&D, Malta**
  - Miriam Dalli highlighted that priorities for this mandate should include incorporating SDGs into EU policy impact assessments, boosting emission reduction efforts, investing in climate-proofing infrastructure, developing trade rules with the Paris Agreement, and boosting the local production of batteries.

- **Fredrick Federley, ALDE, Sweden**
  - Frederick Federley helped negotiate the EU clean energy and climate goals for 2030, and is looking to integrate the environment (ENVI) and agriculture (AGRI) committees in this mandate.
  - He expressed his will to focus on the shipping and aviation sectors in this new mandate, and on a review of the EU Emissions Trading System in early 2020.

**NEW! New MEPs coming in (non-exhaustive):**

- **Pascal Canfin, ALDE, France**
  - Pascal Canfin is the former Head of WWF France and part of President Emmanuel Macron’s La République En Marche movement.
  - Pascal Canfin will push the French President’s green agenda in Brussels and aims to be part of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee (ECFIN), where he hopes to work on sustainable finance and make the EU agricultural policy greener.

- **Alice Bah Kuhnke, Greens/EFA, Sweden**
  - Alice Bah Kuhnke served as Sweden’s Minister for culture and democracy from October 2014 to January 2019.
  - In her new role as an MEP, she wants to focus on climate policy, including pushing for more EU funds for climate than currently proposed as well as higher emissions reduction targets.

**Next steps**

- **Tuesday 28 May**: The Council (heads of 28 Member States) will meet for dinner to discuss how to proceed with the designation of the European Commission’s President, with the expectation that he/she will be designated before the summer recess.
- **29 June**: European Council will agree on the nominations for the next European Commission (President & proposed Commissioners)
- **June**: Newly elected MEPs will build their political groups & elect their Presidents. “Horse-trading” between groups will take place to allocation MEPs in Committees.
- **2 to 4 July**: At the first plenary sitting, MEPs will elect the Parliament’s President and 14 Vice- Presidents, and confirm existing Committees.
- **July**: Committees will then meet to elect their Chairs and Vice-Chairs.