Better Alternatives in the EP - An Election Assessment

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This year, 720 MEPs will sit in the European Parliament, where the traditionally largest moderate right-wing European People's Party (EPP) has increased its number of MEPs from 176 to 185, the European Conservatives and Reformists from 69 to 73 and Identity and Democracy from 49 to 58 compared to the 2019 elections. The left has visibly weakened, with the Socialists and Democrats gaining 137 seats, three fewer than five years ago, while the Greens lost 19 seats, now holding just 52, and the left-wing party family will have 36 MEPs in the EP, with one seat lost. The most exciting part is just beginning, as 100 MEPs currently have no party family, and even within the aforementioned political groups, there are some who will not continue as part of the same party family within European politics.

The parties that think in terms of a sovereign and strong Europe of nations have retained their positions in the Visegrad countries, becoming the parties in first and second place in terms of winning the most votes in their countries. These parties are in government in Slovakia and Hungary. In Poland and the Czech Republic, they have even achieved outstanding results in opposition politics (the ANO party is one of these parties).

The Rise of Sovereigntist Forces in Western Europe

In the large Western Member States, such as Germany and France, right-wing forces have been particularly successful. Not only has there been a breakthrough of the right in France, but the country's traditionally strong left has been reduced to an unprecedented minority. The National Rally more than doubled its number of seats, leading to an outright crisis in government, with Macron immediately calling early elections. This brought down the government led by Gabriel Attal, although Macron will remain in office until 2027. After the French parliamentary elections on June 30 and July 7, it is likely that the president, under the semi-presidential system in place in France, will have to work with a very different government.

In Germany, two right-wing opposition parties have also gained in popularity over the governing coalition parties, and there is a widespread perception that the EP vote was clearly an assessment

of the work of the "traffic light coalition" government currently in office. The conservative CDU/CSU received the most votes (30%), more votes than all the parties in the Scholz government could get collectively. AfD, much criticized in recent times, was apparently unaffected by the scandals, the ban on its list leaders in the run-up to the campaign, or the split between the AfD and the National Front in France days before the vote. The party still managed to get 15% of the vote. Meanwhile, the coalition parties, which have been almost unable to cooperate with each other since 2021, saw their support plummet in the run-up to the EP elections, as everyone expected.

The left-wing populist BSW party, led by Sahra Wagenknecht, is a major phenomenon in Germany, with 6% of the vote. The party is the successor to the former East German state party, the Left, and has been able to draw votes mainly from social democrats and liberal voters. Their plan is to create a new left-wing faction within the EU that is critical of both Ukraine policy and the current line. There have also been rumors that the Fico-led SMER, for example, or the Italian Five Star Movement could become the important ally needed to create a European radical new left platform.

In Italy, Fratelli d'Italia has now won 24 seats in the EP elections, compared to 10 seats in the previous elections, while the Democratic Party in second place has won 20 seats. However, Lega, led by Salvini, suffered a big defeat, winning only 8 seats this year instead of 23. Giorgia Meloni's weight in European politics has increased considerably, and it seems that the Le Pen-Meloni partnership will be the most important factor in deciding how many factions the sovereigntist right will form and who will be able to sit in the European Parliament.

Sovereigntist Parties Continue to Make Ground in Central and Eastern Europe

As far as our immediate neighborhood is concerned, right-wing or sovereigntist political forces have prevailed almost everywhere. In Austria, the opposition Freedom Party (FPÖ) won for the first time, while the center-right governing People's Party (ÖVP) came a close second. The election results are also interesting because there will be parliamentary elections in Austria in the autumn, and these results are a good indication of the support for each party.

In Croatia, the parliamentary elections had just been held, so the EP elections did not bring much excitement and the campaign was not as energized by domestic issues as in other countries. There were no surprises. The right-wing governing party HDZ won 6 seats with more than 30% of the vote,

the center-left opposition SPD won 4 seats and the other sovereigntist governing party, Domovinski Pokret, and the green, new-left opposition Možemo, also won a seat in the EP.

In Romania, contrary to expectations, the extremist and anti-Hungarian Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) did not perform as well as expected, but the governing coalition did exceptionally well. The alliance of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) won almost 50% of the vote, winning such a high percentage in part because of the exceptionally high turnout (more than 50% of eligible voters). This was due to the fact that the local elections were held at the same time as the EP elections. AUR won 14.95% of the vote, while the United Right Alliance (ADU) won 8.63%. The RMDSZ performed very well in both the local and EP elections. In the latter, it won more than 6% of the vote, giving it two MEPs in the EP, Gyula Winkler and Loránt Vincze.

Slovakia has traditionally had the lowest turnout in EP elections at EU level, but the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Robert Fico in mid-May mobilized some of those otherwise passive on EU issues. The opposition Progressive Slovakia managed to win the most votes, giving it one more seat than SMER. The Fico-led SMER, the largest governing party, came second. Third place, surprisingly, went to the Republika party, which will gain two MEPs. The Hlas party, led by the President of the Republic, won only one seat, as the party was unable to articulate and mobilize the right messages during the campaign following Pellegrini's departure. It is likely that the Republika party managed to lure voters from both Smer and Hlas, as well as from the third coalition partner, the Slovak National Party, which performed very poorly in the elections. A fifth party, the opposition Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), could also send a member to the EP.

Despite having a chance according to the polls, the Hungarian Alliance failed to win a seat and did not even manage to get 4% of the vote. This is a surprising result, despite the fact that in this year's EP elections there was a higher turnout in the Hungarian regions, and only the Alliance stood as a Hungarian party. In the districts with higher numbers of Hungarians, a very high number of people voted for Slovak parties, especially Progressive Slovakia and SMER, thus confirming the trend that started years ago, whereby a growing number of Hungarians in Slovakia prefer to vote for Slovak parties. Lajos Ódor, the leader of the Progressive Slovakia list, will sit in the EP as a Hungarian politician from Slovakia, but not only representing Hungarians from Slovakia.

As far as the other V4 countries are concerned, the interesting result in the Czech Republic was that two extra-parliamentary parties managed to win seats. The party of former Prime Minister Andrej

Babiš, currently in opposition, delivered the expected results, winning seven seats with 26% of the vote. ANO, which is currently part of the liberal Renew Europe party family, is expected to seek partners mainly on the right. Spolu, the three-party alliance that form the governing coalition, won six seats and although the gap has narrowed, together they still represent an important political force. The Drivers' Party no longer in parliament managed to get 10% of the vote, sending two MEPs to the EP. What is certain is that they will not form an alliance with the Greens, as one of the keys to their existence is to oppose the EU's green transition in Czech society, which is very proud of the Škoda car brand. The Communist party KSČM, also not currently in the parliament, performed similarly well, winning two seats. The STAN mayoral party also won two seats, while the pro-government, pro-Green Pirate Party and the right-wing SPD also managed to win one seat each.

In Poland, the two parties PiS and KO are neck and neck, while the rest of the Tusk government did not do well in the elections. The Third Way barely got more than 7% of votes, and neither the Polish People's Party nor the more liberal Poland 2050 managed to mobilize enough voters. Nor was it easy for them, as the parliamentary elections at the end of last year were followed this year by municipal elections, which meant that by the time of the EP elections, many voters were tired of campaigning and the changes that followed the ousting of the PiS government. The failure of these two parties, however, was welcomed by the right-wing Confederation, which managed to win almost 12% of the vote. The left-wing Lewica fared even worse, winning just over 6% of the vote.

The New EU

The fate of the seats in the EP is now decided, but the actual balance of power between the parties and the political groups will only become clear in the coming days. What is clear already is that the balance of power will shift significantly, with implications for relations between EU institutions and the development of EU policy. Although the EPP has been strengthened, the Socialists and Democrats and Renew Europe have also lost seats, so the three traditional “big party families”, which have historically been the main shapers of European policy, have been weakened overall. It is likely that the parties grouped around ID will not be as influential in the governance of the new EP, but the ECR will be an important factor in the future—provided that the two groups remain and that a single right-wing group is not created.

The fact that the EP has been renewed with the elections is only the beginning of a longer process, as the most important decision will come after the elections: the President of the European Commission will be decided by the new European Parliament. There are indications that von der Leyen, the EPP candidate, may be ready to negotiate with the ECR to gain support for her candidacy. It is therefore likely that a Polish-Italian sovereigntist axis will emerge, which could even be joined by the French right, led by Le Pen. The negotiations, bargains and compromises of the coming weeks will be crucial in the medium and longer term.