



**CHINA-CEE INSTITUTE**

**2019 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
ELECTIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS  
OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN  
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

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# **2019 European Parliament Elections and Domestic Politics of Central and Eastern European Countries**

**Chief Editor**

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**CHINA-CEE INSTITUTE**

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## Preface

The European Parliament is one of the major institutions of the European Union. Along with the deepening of the European integration, the European Parliament is gaining more competence and power in the institutional structure of the European Union, either in legislation, budget, or democratic supervision. And the influence has been extending to almost all the areas of the European Union. This shows the importance of the European Parliament, as well as the European election, the battle field for the new European Parliament.

This book is providing thorough analysis on the 2019 European election in EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe. How the campaign is going on, what are the strategies of the political groups, how is about the connection between the domestic policy and the European election, what are the attitudes of the electorate towards the campaign, what are the results of the European elections in these countries, what are the consequences and impacts for the domestic policy as well as for the formation of the European political groups. For those countries in Western Balkans which are not member states of the European Union, it is also interesting to observe what are the public attitude on the European election, how the political parties react to the election, and also what are the connections between domestic issues and the European election. The book is based on a collection of reports by the associate researchers of the China-CEE Institute. The reports are originated from the Weekly Briefings, a core product by the China-CEE Institute. The views in the book are represented by the individual authors instead of the China-CEE Institute.

The China-CEE Institute is established by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), registered as a non-profit limited company in Budapest, Hungary in April 2017. The China-CEE Institute is building ties and strengthen partnerships with academic institutions and think tanks in Hungary, Central and Eastern European countries, as well as other parts of Europe. The China-CEE Institute aims to encourage scholars and researchers to carry out joint researches, field studies, to organize seminars and lecture series, to hold some training programs for younger students, and make publication, etc.

I hope this book will help enriching the knowledge of the European issues in the region and promoting the bilateral relations between China and CEE countries.

Prof. Dr. CHEN Xin

Executive President and Managing Director, China-CEE Institute

Deputy Director General, Institute of European Studies, CASS



## **The European Union Elections and their Implications for Albania**

Marsela Musabelliu

Battle lines were being drawn ahead of the European elections with more than 400 million people eligible to vote while increasingly it appeared a Europe of stark contrasts. A week prior thousands of fascist sympathizers gave stiff arm salutes and clashed with riot police in Milan; disinformation campaign was said to be running at full tilt and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has warned that if nationalist parties, on the margins of the right and left, take the upper hand it would mean the end of liberal democracy free society. The candidates for the EU parliamentary seats had plenty to argue about, ranging from migration and rule of law to security and sovereignty. As the results were displaying by the hour, it was clear that the European Parliament become more divided by creating more fragmentation and polarization. Populists and Eurosceptics increased their seats in the Parliament to 25% and are likely to insist more in issues like immigration, EU budget and perhaps potential enlargement, even though they might find it hard to forge solid alliances.

### **An Albanian perception**

For the Albanian public perception all events concerning the European Union have particular importance since the county's path to become an EU member is the highlight of every political discourse and the aspiration of the entire population. Before the elections, besides the analysts expressing their opinion on where the EU is headed, some slogans from Slovenia hit the news and social portals by leaving sentiments of bitterness mixed with indignation. The Slovenian Domovinska Liga, in one of the electoral poster had the phrase "Vote for us so that Slovenia does not become Albania" – by comparing Albania to Pakistan or Nigeria the slogans were a harsh wakeup call of external perception of the country.<sup>1</sup> Albanians are sometimes used to have this kind of derogative comments from Western European politicians; however it looks that the same

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<sup>1</sup> The slogans of the elections in Slovenia point to Albania. Translated from *Gazeta Shqiptare*. Available at: <http://www.gsh.al/2019/05/21/sloganet-e-zgjedhjeve-ne-sloveni-votoni-per-ne-qe-mos-te-perfundojme-si-shqiperia/>

attitude coming from the Balkans stroke some nerves. Not because of the slogan itself, but because of the challenging current situation of the country and uncertainties for the future.

The European Parliament elections are important not only for the EU members block, their influence has ramification beyond the countries voting for it, including here the Western Balkans and their path to EU membership. What made the difference in the elections of this year were the surprises of the high turnout, the highest in 20 years, the rise of the Greens and the fact that the populist movements did not receive as much seats as the polls predicted. Regarding the last point it is important for Albania because a more pro-European parliament would represent less nationalist agendas. Regarding the rise of the Greens, for Albania it means a new agenda on the table; the Green agenda is pro Europe, focused on sustainable development, social justice and inclusiveness, the hope for support is found easier on those political lines.

On the other hand, as the European People's Party (EPP) got 182 seats and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) with 147 seats, for the first time will not have the majority of the seats combined, makings so possible for the other streams to influence on the future agenda more intensively making the decisions process more difficult.

Starting from the countries closer geographically the most argued about were the outcomes in Italy and Greece. Italy's Salvini win (not triumph) is however perceived in Albania as a potential risk for the future; his declared anti-immigration agenda, deeply nationalist, anti-asylum seeking and it is expected that his party's views will tamper the Enlargement program for the Western Balkans.

Tsipras loss in Greece attracted comments and opinions in Albania as well; the fact that Greek voters are no longer attracted to the Syriza and is looking for a more conservative path impacts the region as well. The new elections to be held in Greece will influence not only internal decision-making but also foreign affairs, and Albania's southern neighbor attitude is immediately reflected in the country for better or for worse.

The win of France's Le Pen, by beating the person who is usually named a "hero" of the EU, Macron, represents a hefty obstacle for Albanians path to EU. It is no secret for Albanian that France has not been favorable to the integration, and with a more nationalist agenda as the one of the National Front request a reconsideration of the Schengen area which impacts directly Albanian's free movement in EU countries.



The only hope for remains in the fact that the populist did not achieve what they had expected and they are not united enough as to be changing/single voice within the European Parliament.

On a more positive note, the Albanian public opinion was unanimously pleased and proud that for the first time in history, an Albanian born is becomes member of the EP. Arba Kokalari left Albania for Sweden at the age of six; daughter of a diplomat, member of the Swedish liberal-conservative Moderaterna won a seat in the EP.

The main question remains: will the European Parliament elections influence the direction, management and the standards for the Enlargement Agenda of the Western Balkans and Albania in particular?

The Socialist Party believes that the outcome of these EP elections will derive into a pro-enlargement approach. The Head of the Parliamentary Group of the Socialist and co-chair of the EU-Albania Parliamentary Committee on Stabilization and Association, Taulat Balla, through an online statement argues that the outcome of these elections is a clear evidence of the importance and public support of the “European Project”. Balla believes also that the increase in turnout, the highest in the last two decades, is a clear proof of hope and confidence in a strong EU, despite a significant increase in euro-skepticism and populism.<sup>1</sup> The socialist feel confident that the new EP will retain the same support and positive approach in the next five years vis-à-vis the enlargement policy with the Western Balkan countries.

On the other side of the spectrum PD’s leader Basha takes another perspective on the EP elections: through a status on social media he declared to be pleased of the about the emergence of EPP as the first political spectrum with the most number of seats and stated that he is convinced that the EPP will bring strength in the European Parliament and European governance.<sup>2</sup> However, Basha brings the situation closer to his cause, the Albanian elections. In fact, for months his Party has taken the streets of the country by claiming electoral fraud and requiring early elections. No steps back – he states – the strength of the citizens in a democracy is the vote, so the struggle of Albanians for free vote is a vital battle for European values.

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament Elections: Balla, convinced of a pro-enlargement approach. Balkanweb News. Available at: <https://balkanweb.com/zgjedhjet-per-pe-balla-te-bindur-per-qasjen-pro-zgjerimit/>

<sup>2</sup> Basha tries to be inspired by the EP elections – our battle is the free vote. Translated from *Lapsi.al*. Available at: <https://lapsi.al/2019/05/27/basha-kerkon-te-frymezohet-nga-zgjedhjet-per-parlamentin-europian-beteja-jone-vota-e-lire/>

In order for Albania to realize where it actually stands in the integration path there has to be a waiting time until the European Commission (EC) has a clear reaction to the Enlargement Agenda. One of the most important personalities, the reporter for Albania in the EC Mr. Knut Fleckenstein, does not have a seat any longer in the European Parliament, and this was perceived as a setback because of the acumen and the support of Mr. Fleckenstein on a Albania. However, while some sympathizers of the country will not be present any more, there are some new Euro-parliamentarians who are publicly known as supporters of Albania's membership to the EU.

A hopeful green light was given on May 29<sup>th</sup> when the Progress Report on Albania was released from the European Commission. The Commission has recommended the opening Albania's accession negotiations to the European Union. The report notes that Albania has advanced on its European agenda, but there is a marked polarization on the political scene.<sup>1</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the value of the report is special for three reasons: first, because it considers the Justice Reform as an exemplary model for the region and beyond, either for clearing the justice system through the Vetting Process, or through the establishment of new justice institutions that create preconditions for an independent judiciary system. The second element is the role of Albania in the region, where it is estimated that Albania has cultivated good relations with its neighbors and thirdly, it is important to note that Albania is the only country in the region that acts in absolute accordance with foreign policy and EU security.

### **Concluding remarks**

The outcome of these EP elections is perceived in the country with a slight relief and hope – the hope being opening of accession talks. For as long as the “European Project” is strong and willing to endure in the inside, there are more possibilities for Albania to be a member. The country is determined to pursue the European path at all cost; it is up to Brussels now to demonstrate if there is less or more appetite for enlargement.

Not only Albania, but all the Western Balkans is at a crossroad - to understand what the future of the European Union might look like in the region it is important to observe where the Union is headed; for many in Albania the EU goes beyond having a seat at the table in Brussels, it's an opportunity for the much needed economic growth, security and meaningful reforms at home.

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<sup>1</sup> EC Report on Albania, Clear Progress of 5 Key Priorities. Translated from: *AlbanianTelgarficAgency ATA*. Available at: <http://ata.gov.al/2019/05/29/raporti-i-ke-per-shqiperine-progres-i-qarte-i-5-prioriteteve-kyce/>

Albania's next challenge is to translate the Commission's technical assessment into an affirmative political will, so that today's aspirations will be tomorrow's reality.

## A Year of Elections in Estonia: a Political *Perpetuum Mobile*

E-MAP Foundation MTÜ, Tallinn, Estonia

From about September-October 2018 until the end of May 2019, the Republic of Estonia had to go through a long as well as tempestuous political process of electing the newest *Riigikogu* (for the country) and a group of Estonia-bound members of the European Parliament (for the EU). Predictably, the latter segment of the grand-process became a logical continuation of the former one. What the electorate liked or, especially, did not like in the context of the outcome of the *Riigikogu* elections was ‘destined’ to be addressed during the European Parliament-focused campaign, which simply ended up to be a follow-up of the most recent political ‘battle’ on the formation of the country’s Government.

Having been extensively discussed in the previous briefings, the March 2019 *Riigikogu* elections (particularly, its incredible *finale*) made it practically impossible for the Prime Minister’s party (the Estonian Centre Party or ‘centrists’) to count on its pre-March level of popularity. Scoring 23.1% then, the ‘centrists’ were supported only by 17% of the prospective Estonian voters (aggregation trend line Kalman Smooth)<sup>1</sup> on 16 May when the electronic voting in the country had begun<sup>2</sup>. However, before going into any personalities-linked specifics, *Table 1* can assist in generically indicating how different, in terms of popularity among the voters, a European Parliament elections are in Estonia, if compared to the *Riigikogu* elections.

**Table 1: Participation in Voting**

Elections	Eligible voters	Voters turned out	Voter turnout
European Parliament elections 2019	885,417	332,859	37.6%
Riigikogu elections 2019	887,420	565,045	63.7%
Riigikogu elections 2015	899,793	577,910	64.2%
European Parliament elections 2014	902,873	329,766	36.5%

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Estonia – EU election voting intention’ in *Politico.eu*. Available from [<https://www.politico.eu/2019-european-elections/estonia/>].

<sup>2</sup> ‘Election activities and deadlines in 2019 European Parliament elections’ in *Valimised*. Available from [<https://www.valimised.ee/en/ep2019/election-activities-and-deadlines-2019-european-parliament-elections>].

**Source:** *Valimised*

It was only a decade ago, from 1 December 2009, when the European Parliament managed to significantly broaden the scope of its decisive involvement into the EU-wide affairs and policies. Since the *Treaty of Lisbon* entered into force, both the Council of the EU and the European Commission had to ‘accommodate’ the presence of the European Parliament and its members (commonly abbreviated as MEPs) in the decision-making process of the world’s most prosperous politico-economic union. In fact, Estonian top-politicians were among the first within the EU who practically acknowledged the post-*Lisbon* European Parliament’s impact on the process of European integration. For example, it was somewhat shocking for many commentators in the EU, when Urmas Paet, one of the most prominent and highly successful politicians in Estonia (he was the country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs from April 2005 until November 2014), decided to take a substitutional seat at the European Parliament in 2014, instead of Andrus Ansip.

However, it still did not quite make a huge difference in regards of how the citizens of the EU’s Member States would ‘treat’ the entity’s only parliamentary institution – overall and across the EU, the voters had largely been ignoring the fact of European Parliament elections. As it is clearly visible from the *Table 1*-generated data, the Estonian electorate maintained its absenteeism in regards of the EU-wide electoral campaign. The only important segment of the process where the European Parliament elections in Estonia **had ‘beaten’** the one for the *Riigikogu* was the Internet-based voting (I-voting) – not by the number of people who voted electronically, but by the percentage of the I-voters among the actual voters. As in was reported before, during the *Riigikogu* elections in spring, 247,232 citizens voted online, breaking all possible previous records and taking a huge share of **43.75%** in the total number of citizens who did cast their ballots<sup>1</sup>. As for the European Parliament, the I-voters’ number was not that impressive (only 155,521 people), but they represented **46.72%** out of the participating voters. The trend is obvious and, most probably, the next elections (be it for the *Riigikogu* or the European Parliament) will be featured by a majority of Estonian citizens casting their ballots in the Internet.

More precisely on the personalities elected to the European Parliament from Estonia, both *Table 2* and *Table 3* can be a joined ‘guide’ into the past and the present. In a significant addition,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Total of Estonia’ in *Valimised*. Available from [<https://rk2019.valimised.ee/en/voting-result/voting-result-main.html>].

there is **a couple of important points** to be made in the context of different parliamentary elections in Estonia. **Firstly**, even if a candidate has already been a member of a current Estonian Government, or a member of a current European Commission, or elected to the *Riigikogu*, these factors do not prevent him/her from standing for a seat in the European Parliament. Certainly, this is a normal situation in a democracy, however some parties tend to stretch the limits of a fair political game. For example, in 2014, there was no serious expert in the field of international relations who would think that Andrus Ansip would be willing to become an MEP after winning the European Parliament elections (see *Table 2*). By that time, it was known and publically discussed that Ansip, the former long-serving as well as objectively capable Estonian Prime Minister (April 2005 – March 2014), was projected to a high-level role at the Jean-Claude Juncker-led European Commission. Speculatively, the same can be applied to the cases of Mart and Martin Helme (EKRE), Taavi Aas (Estonian Centre Party), and Urmas Reinsalu (Pro Patria) who were, while being members of the current Estonian Government and holding different ministerial portfolios, participating in the 2019 European Parliament elections to give a bit more ‘weight’ to their respective political parties’ lists. It was a *secret de Polichinelle* – a chance that any of them would give up a ministerial position for an MEP role was not worth discussing. In the context of this point, out of all candidates elected for the European Parliament in 2014 and 2019 (see *Table 2* and *Table 3*), only Riho Terras did not have an existing or prospective position on the time of the elections.

**Table 2: The Candidates Elected for the European Parliament in 2014**

<b>Party or independent candidate</b>	<b>Candidate’s name</b>	<b>Votes</b>
The Estonian Reform Party	Andrus Ansip	45,022
Independent candidate	Indrek Tarand	43,369
The Social Democratic Party	Marju Lauristin	26,868
The Estonian Centre Party	Yana Toom	25,251
The Estonian Reform Party	Kaja Kallas	21,498
Pro Patria and Res Publica	Tunne Kelam	18,767

**Source:** *Valimised*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Valimised*. Available from [<http://ep2014.vvk.ee/voting-results-en.html>]

**Table 3: The Candidates Elected for the European Parliament in 2019**

Party or independent candidate	Candidate's name	Votes
The Social Democratic Party	Marina Kaljurand	65,549
The Estonian Reform Party	Andrus Ansip	41,017
The Estonian Reform Party	Urmas Paet	30,014
The Estonian Centre Party	Yana Toom	26,990
The Conservative People's Party of Estonia	Jaak Madison	22,819
Pro Patria	Riho Terras	21,477
The Social Democratic Party	Sven Mikser	2,886

**Source:** *Valimised*<sup>1</sup>

**Secondly**, in order to establish who is a candidate-elect, a particular formula is used, so the votes given towards the candidate are combined with the votes given towards the candidate's party. Without going into a set of details on how the calculation is done, such a system can allow a winner to 'come from' an excellent performance of his/her party, rather than 'getting the cake' because of his/her own performance. This is precisely why Sven Mikser (see *Table 3*), scoring rather modestly in regards of the votes that were given directly towards his candidature, got elected to the European Parliament in 2019.

Arguably, **considering their cumulated experience**, the newest group of Estonian MEPs is, perhaps, one of the most high-profile, if compared to the other national groups. Apart from **Urmas Paet**, the Estonian 'team' includes **Marina Kaljurand** (the undisputed winner of the elections with 19.7% of the total Estonian votes, which is more than any entire local party, other than the Reform)<sup>2</sup> who is the country's former Minister of Foreign Affairs (July 2015 – September 2016), Ambassador to the United States and Mexico (2011 – 2014), and Ambassador to Russia (2007 – 2011). There is yet another former Minister of Foreign Affairs (November 2016 – April 2019) in the group – **Sven Mikser** who has also been the country's Minister of Defence on two occasions (January 2002 – April 2003 and March 2014 – September 2015). **Andrus Ansip** is truly a European political 'heavyweight' – the former Estonian Prime Minister, he has been the Vice-

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<sup>1</sup> *Valimised*. Available from [<https://ep2019.valimised.ee/en/election-result/index.html>].

<sup>2</sup> 'European elections: how they all performed' in *ERR*. 27 May 2019. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/946040/european-elections-how-they-all-performed>].

President of the European Commission for five years. Both **Yana Toom** and **Jaak Madison** are 'quasi-united' in their political extremes, which, essentially, let their respective parties to form the current Estonian Government. There is an educated speculation that Madison – the personality who was instrumental in the process of arranging a recent visit of Marine Le Pen to Estonia – may not end up as an MEP, since there is a certain post-elections 'homework' that his party needs to complete at home. Not much room for a dispute here – EKRE dramatically failed during the 2019 European Parliament elections. Finally, **Riho Terras**, a four-star General and the former Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, in order to start heading to Strasbourg, will have to wait for something truly remarkable to eventually occur, the *Brexit*. If the UK ever leaves the EU, then Estonia will enjoy an additional seat at the European Parliament, and it will be given to General Terras. However, since the concept of *Brexit* is getting through a continuous transformation from being initially a shock, then a surprise, then a sad joke, and then a farce, it is a very uncertain time for General Terras in terms of becoming an integral addition to the Estonian list of the elected MEPs.



## **The Elections for the EU Parliament In Bulgaria Confirmed the Political Satus Quo**

Evgeniy Kandilarov

What does it show the just finished elections for the European Parliament in Bulgaria?

Traditionally the Interest of Bulgarian population towards such kind of elections is very low. That's why usually most of the Bulgarians basically don't vote for anyone. Those who vote usually are doing it not because of the rational reason of choice reflecting on some kind of platform or vision regarding the future development of the European Union, its policies, further Institutional development of future legislation process in the European Parliament which has a direct influence on the National development of every member state of the Union. The Bulgarians are feeling all this issues quite abstract and distant from their real life and current problems related with a concrete living conditions, economic difficulties and shortages as well as series of social issues which most of the Bulgarians connect rather with the domestic political agenda than with the Brussels administration. In the mind of many Bulgarians the members of the European Parliament are just clerks who live far away from Bulgaria and its real problems and just take extraordinarily high salaries for doing work that is hardly noticeable and understandable inside the country. Actually this situation reflects also the attitude of the Bulgarians toward the EU and its Institutions in general. It is something that ordinary people don't really understand completely but accept it as something inevitable and obligatory which has dual impact on the country's development – a positive but also a negative.

This is the reason why usually the elections for members of the European parliament are more or less focused on domestic issues than on European ones. The whole debate and the vote itself turns to be something like a way of legitimizing or rejecting the political status quo in the country, either by reaffirming or not the political support for the government. That is what exactly happened in Bulgaria in this case as well. Before the elections the biggest question was if the results from the elections will lead to the fall of the government due to the lack of enough electoral support and will eventually cause an early parliamentary elections, recognizing and giving a legitimation of an existing alternative of the ruling party and its coalition, in the face of the Bulgarian Socialist Party. That's why the Socialist party was leading all its campaign under the slogan that it is the real Alternative of the status quo in the face of GERB.

All the political scandals related with the so called “Apartment gait” during the last months before the Elections gave reason for analysts to prognosticate and predict that GERB is gradually losing its support, which leads to an increase in the chances of the Bulgarian Socialist Party to take the lead and win the elections.

Finally everything turned out to be completely different from the initial forecasts.

The results of the European vote show that 31.07% of those exercising their right to vote voted for GERB. Bulgarian socialist party received 24.26% of votes, predominantly Turk Movement for Rights and Freedoms - 16.55%, ultra-nationalist VMRO - 7.36%, Centre-right Democratic Bulgaria Democratic Bulgaria - 6.06%.

In contrast to the notably higher voter turnout in most EU countries, in Bulgaria a below-par campaign resulted in near-historic low turnout on Election Day. Even though voting is compulsory in Bulgaria, voter turnout was only 30.83%.

In total numbers it means the following: The Bulgarian Central Election Commission (CEC) said 2,095,575 voters went to the polls in the European Parliament election on 26 May, according to the signatures on the electoral rolls. The number of citizens eligible to vote was 6,288,656. The total number of votes cast in the ballot boxes and recorded in the electronic devices was 2,095,561, with 2,015,341 valid votes (paper ballots and electronic vote) and 80,238 spoilt votes. The CEC announced the distribution of the seats between the parties and the coalition: GERB has won 6 seats, BSP – 5, DPS – 3, VMRO – 2, and Democratic Bulgaria – 1 seat.

Preferential votes for candidates showed reshuffling on two party lists – former party leader Sergei Stanishev moving up from fifth to second on the socialist list, while director Andrey Slabakov’s preferential votes moved him up to second on the VMRO list. On the Democratic Bulgaria list, former diplomat Stefan Tafrov’s preferential votes were not enough to put him ahead of list leader Radan Kanev.

The election’s outcome actually essentially confirmed the political status quo.

The most obvious winner is Prime Minister Boiko Borissov and his centre-right GERB party (EPP-affiliated), ending with a decisive lead over the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party, a massive recovery from GERB’s damaged poll numbers at the start of the campaign, when the controversy over cut-price real estate acquisitions by ruling majority politicians had taken a serious toll. Up until the last ten days, Borissov, who has governed Bulgaria for almost ten years, looked

set to lose to his arch-rivals, the socialists (BSP), according to opinion polls. But finally the results were different than expected.

It is not coincidental that among Borissov's first comments on the outcome of the European Parliament elections highlighted that GERB had held all of Bulgaria's major cities. He clearly is mindful of the contest that awaits at the end of October in the mayoral and municipal elections.

Krassimir Karakachanov's ultra-nationalist VMRO and its hardliner lead candidate Angel Dzhambazki emerged as winners twofold. Second, it emerged the winner among the three squabbling parties that make up the United Patriots. Near-complete results show Valeri Simeonov's ticket with a mere 1.15 per cent and Volen Siderov's Ataka with an even more piffling 1.08 per cent.

Bulgaria's Central Election Commission has already announced the final results but held off announcing the names of the country's 17 MEPs. The nominees have until the end of the day on May 30 to say whether they will take up their seats. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) leader Mustafa Karadayi and the number two on the party's European Parliament candidate list, controversial figure Delyan Peevski, have already said that they would not.

Compared to the previous European elections in 2014, these ones barely produced any change in the Bulgarian political landscape within the European parliament. The only change in seat allocation seems to be an additional Bulgarian Socialist MEP at the cost of an MEP from the liberal ALDE group.

The number of MEPs in the centrist European People's Party, EPP, bloc and in the conservative ECR bloc will remain the same. From a European perspective, Bulgaria produced one of the least altered outcomes in an election that otherwise produced some very great shifts to both right and left in the European Parliament.

Generally speaking Bulgaria's main parties constitute the pillars of an increasingly illiberal status quo in the EU. GERB, the BSP and MRF belong to the largest mainstream European political families, EPP, S&D, and ALDE respectively.

Something that should be also noticed regarding the EU elections is that in Bulgaria, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, green parties remain a negligible force.

One of the main conclusions that have to be made is that GERB remains clearly dominant, having won 12 of the last 13 elections in Bulgaria, but it shares the electoral spoils with the country's two other major parties: the Bulgarian Socialists, BSP, and the mainly ethnic Turkish

Movement for Rights and Freedoms, MRF. Since Bulgaria joined the EU, these three parties have together held at least 70 per cent of Bulgaria's seats in the European Parliament.

Another thing that has to be pointed out is that there was also no surge in support for Eurosceptic or far-right parties in Bulgaria. Although it looks like Bulgaria will retain its two MEPs in the ECR group, the far right underperformed. The so-called United Patriots are the junior coalition partner in the Bulgarian government, but its constituent parties, the NFSB, VMRO and Ataka have been internally divided and engaging in endless fights, which led them to contest the European elections separately. Finally the result is that only VMRO managed to cross the threshold and win a place in the European Parliament, thus squandering at least a third of the former United Patriots' vote

Tracking the profile of the voters, according to the exit poll exams, they are generally people who are more economically active, live better than average, and are wealthier and better educated. They are more integrated in the situation and have a lot to lose. Obviously, everyone else who is disintegrated, a large part of Bulgarian society is excluded even by large economic and social systems, they are beginning to feel disintegrated politically as well, and this is a problem that really has to signal a very worrying tendency and there cannot be concealed the general disappointment or the general passive protest not against a particular party but against all parties. The most problematic is that this passive protest can be transformed into dissatisfaction and resistance to the entire political system, since there is a number of people who do not recognize this political system as working for them. They are convinced that it only works for a certain circle of privileged parts of society and it is clear that they do not see any sense of active participation in politics, because they are convinced that this political system will reproduce the same dependencies, the same privileges, the same directions of development.

This leads to the conclusion that despite the strong support for the EU among the Bulgarian population, shown with the election results, the low voter turnout, against the backdrop of high voter mobilization across the EU, including "Brexiting" Britain, could be a cause for concern, especially, since Bulgaria remains the poorest country in the EU and is struggling with persisting problems such as corruption, which EU membership has not helped to resolve.

Another reason for concern is that the electoral campaign barely touched on genuine European policy issues, as parties seemed bent on pursuing domestic agendas, or on using the European elections merely as leverage in national politics.

The vote highlighted the lack of an alternative to governance and confirmed the already chronic weakness of the largest opposition party - the Bulgarian Socialist Party - to offer one. The question is not how GERB and Borisov govern, but whether the voters believe that another political force would do better than the party in power of a third term. Obviously for now the answer is rather negative.

## **EU Elections 2019: A Macedonian Perspective**

Anastas Vangeli

### **Introduction**

The Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter Macedonia) is not an European Union (EU) member state (yet) and therefore it takes no active part in the EU elections. However, as a candidate country that aspires for full membership in the EU it is surely a stakeholder in the EU elections. More even so, at the current temporal juncture (summer 2019), the political dynamics within the EU are particularly relevant for Macedonia's domestic and foreign affairs. In the summer of 2019, all eyes in Macedonia are on the pending start of the accession talks with the EU (which are deemed to be a “make or break” moment for the SDSM-DUI government, and the country as a whole), and this is the prism through which European politics, including the EU elections 2019 have been observed in the country. While the new EU Parliament itself will likely have no particular role in the decision to open them (the EU Parliament has already discussed the case of Macedonia on a number of occasions and has been in favor of opening the accession talks; and it seems that the EU enlargement will not be high on the agenda of the new Parliament) the potential change of the balance of power in the Union and in particular the potential political shifts inside its member states that could occur as a result of the EU elections can affect the decision of the EU Council of Ministers, and thereby have a ripple effect on the trajectory of the country: as all other decisions of the EU Council, the decision whether to grant Macedonia opening of the accession talks can be made only with the unanimous support of all 29 member states. Furthermore, what also matters is the make-up of the incoming EU Commission, which will be a subject to negotiations of the European politicians in the coming weeks. While the black box of political decision making in the EU Council and the formation of the new EU Commission is impenetrable, the EU elections and their outcomes clarify some parts of the puzzle.

### **The EU Elections through the Prism of the Pending Accession Talks**

Currently, the consensus among Macedonian policymakers and the concerned observers is that 2019 is the high time for the EU Council to grant opening of the accession talks with

Macedonia. Any further delay, as the mainstream opinion holds, risks restoration of the political crisis. The opening of the EU accession talks has been delayed for about a decade (back in 2009 the EU Commission made its first recommendation that the EU should open the accession talks with Macedonia); after the nationalist turn in 2008-2009 under Gruevski, Macedonia faced the obstacle of the Greek veto; in the next following years, the VMRO-DPMNE-DUI government has captured most of the institutions, which led to Macedonia's backsliding in terms of the fulfillment of the benchmarks set by the EU. During the political crisis 2015-2017 Macedonia has lost most of the support among the EU countries; and by the time the government changed (2016-2017), it was considered to be as far away from EU membership as it has ever been. After getting in power in 2017, the SDSM-DUI government has pursued a vocal pro-European foreign policy, announced a number of reforms in accord with the expectations and recommendations of the EU, and most importantly, implemented the Prespa Agreement to resolve the name dispute with Greece, all of which were framed as investments (and sacrifices) made to restore the European course of the country and regain the support of European governments. Seeing most of these measures as a trade-off, Macedonian policymakers (and much of the intellectuals in the country) have been since expecting a reward for their efforts in the form of the opening of the accession talks in 2018. Nevertheless, despite the opinion that Macedonia deserves the opening of the accession talks was shared among many in the EU administration, and despite the support from Greece, the EU Council did not grant opening the accession talks in 2018 (instead, it commended Macedonia's government on its progress and made commitment for opening the accession talks in the future). It has been publicly argued that the main reason for that outcome was the attitude of individual member states, in the first place France and the Netherlands, who have adopted a cautious approach towards the EU enlargement. Thus, in 2019, the Macedonian attentive public has started to pay closer attention not only to the words and actions of the EU administration, but also to the internal political dynamics of the EU member states – including the run up to and the outcome of the EU elections.

One of the first lessons drawn from the EU elections campaign is that the enlargement of the Union is almost a non-existent topic for both the European political parties and the voters, as they have increasingly focused on rather existential issues, including Brexit, migration and struggles over competencies (i.e. the never-ending tug of war between the member-states and Brussels). The EU enlargement is rather insignificant issue in comparison. There is also a

common belief that ahead of the elections many European politicians, that are otherwise supporters of the EU enlargement to the Balkans, adopt a cautious tone in order not to provoke backlash by Euro-skeptic voices. For the average EU politician, there is little to be gained in front of the domestic audience by talking about admitting the Balkan countries in the EU – but given the somewhat orientalized image of the Balkans, it carries a lot of potential risks. Therefore, in sum, it was expected that EU enlargement will attract little attention during the EU elections campaign; and that the predominant discourse will be a rather negative one.

The most significant remark on the enlargement issue, however, did not come from the Euro-skeptic forces, but from the most pro-European ones. Nathalie Loiseau, the French Minister for European Affairs, who was also a leading candidate of the “Renaissance” list of Macron's *La République En Marche* (LREM), having repeatedly claimed that EU is not fit for enlargement at the current juncture, during the campaign proudly stated that she had prevented the EU enlargement to Albania and Macedonia. Her statements reverberated in Macedonian media and were interpreted as sign of yet another possible delay in the opening of the accession talks.

Another major issue in the EU elections that implicated Macedonia has of course been the situation in Greece. The Prespa Agreement had locked Skopje and Athens in a political interdependence – the EU elections were the first national-level plebiscite in Greece after the signing of the Agreement, and much of the debate leading to the elections centered on the Macedonian issue, with the rising *Nea Demokratia* heavily criticizing the Prespa Agreement and in general, Tsipras' attitude towards the issue. While Greece under the government of Tsipras has turned into a great supporter of Macedonia's EU accession, a potential shift in Greece can mean deterioration of the new harmonious relationship.

Finally, it is interesting to consider the activism of Macedonian politicians and netizens (including the ones from the diasporic communities) in light of the elections. The two largest Macedonian parties are active within the European party families – SDSM is a member of the Party of the European Socialists, while VMRO-DPMNE is a member of the European People's Party. However, there were no significant activities or endorsements made by the two major parties in the days leading to the EU elections. Paradoxically, the only form of activism that could have been noted was the one of far right activists who expressed their support for the far right and Euro-skeptic parties, calling voters from the Macedonian diaspora who have the right to vote in the EU elections, to support the far right.



### **Post-Elections EU and the Prospects of Macedonia's EU Membership Aspirations**

Generally speaking, the EU Elections led to palpable changes in the distribution of seats, although these changes were less significant than many had anticipated. This has allowed for various interpretations of the result: some have argued that those who are in favor of a stronger EU maintained their majority in the Parliament, while others have argued that the Euro-skeptics won. Regardless of the interpretation of the results, the emerging consensus has been that the major division in European politics – that is on one hand, those who are for a status quo (and potentially deeper) Union, and on the other hand, those who are for loosening the Union (or even disbanding it) – has been reinforced, and the two opposing camps are now further entrenched. While the Euro-skeptic camp has not been triumphant in the 2019 election, it has managed to set the terms of the European political debates, and this in turn makes the “pro-European” camp more defensive and cautious on questions on the future architecture of the Union, including the question of enlargement. For the Macedonian attentive public this offers an important lesson on the background and context in which the Macedonian government's efforts to bring the country into the EU takes place: they are sailing through stormy waters, and potentially against the wind.

This reality is even more striking when we examine the outcomes and consequences of the EU elections in the context of individual member states. In Greece, the EU elections signaled the beginning of the end of the rule of Syriza and Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and the return of Nea Demokratia to power – to a significant extent also because of the public dissatisfaction in Greece with the Prespa Agreement – all of which can disrupt the current trajectory of the Greco-Macedonian relations and the Greek strong support for Macedonia's EU membership. Greece will now head to early parliamentary elections, and the result of these elections will certainly have an effect on the Greco-Macedonian relationship. In France, which already had a rather negative approach towards the EU enlargement under the “pro-European” government of Macron, the Front National led by Marie Le Pen managed to win (though by a tiny margin) over LREM. While this may not signify an impending downfall of Macron, the victory of FN in the EU elections in combination with the ongoing mass protests in France (which are Euro-skeptic in nature), will certainly perpetuate the cautiousness, or rather animosity with which Macron's government approaches the question of EU enlargement. The EU elections outcome also led to a political turbulence in Germany, which in recent years has emerged as the most significant proponent of the EU enlargement in the Balkans. As a result of the dismal performance in the EU

elections, the leader of SPD, Andrea Nahles (the junior coalition partner in the CDU-led government), resigned. Her resignation has been interpreted as a direct threat to the survival of Germany's ruling coalition. Should Germany head to early parliamentary elections, its commitment and pro-active role on the question of enlargement may dampen for the time being. Another supporter of EU enlargement, that is Austria, is also in the midst of a political crisis (which was set off by leaked tapes prior to the EU elections) and facing early parliamentary elections, which will render the question of EU enlargement unattractive and potentially risky for politicians.

These developments, however, do not seem to discourage and deter Macedonian policymakers. Regardless of the EU elections outcome, they have been ever more enthusiastic when talking about Macedonia's prospective EU membership and the opening of the accession talks in the summer of 2019. In the days following the EU elections, the outgoing EU Commission led by Juncker has doubled down on its recommendation for starting the accession talks, by making its most explicit endorsement of Macedonia's performance to date. It remains to be seen whether this year the EU Council will act upon the recommendation of the Commission, before any dramatic shifts take place. For Macedonia, the best case scenario is that the EU Council opens the negotiations before a new Commission is established (since there is no guarantee that the new Commission will remain supportive of the enlargement process), and before the early elections in Greece (since the impending Nea Demokratia victory may complicate the outcome of the Prespa Agreement). For now, there is no talk of a plan B.

## **BIH- European Elections**

Ivica Bakota

### **Introduction**

There are two questions that are important for BIH after the European elections in May 2019: -Will a new power balance in the 9th European Parliament have impacts on EU's enlargement policy and dynamics of BIH integration and accession to the Union? -Will there be any changes in the relations with Croatia as its first neighbor and a member-state that could also affect Bosnian Croats as well as inter-ethnic relations in BIH?

Both questions were raised in BIH media, but not much answered. More elaborate discussions are expected to follow in next months after the new parliament starts with sessions. On the other side, it is safe to say that enlargement policy remained not very extensively discussed issue during the EP campaign. As a matter of fact, main political parties across the union scared of EU-sceptic, anti-EU and populist parties avoided to talk about enlargement at all, and BIH and BIH-EU relations during the campaign likewise mostly stayed under the radar. Possible exception was only Croatian national campaign for EP where BIH was discussed in the context of violation of rights of representation of Bosnian Croats or assuming a "chief position" in supporting European BIH, as mentioned in HDZ program.

### **Impacts on enlargement policy and BIH accession prospects**

Soon after the first results were published, BIH Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak shared his opinion to FENA, saying that the electoral results despite earlier fears confirmed that no major disturbances will occur in the European political landscape, and the continuation of the current EU policy towards BIH and the countries of the region is to be expected in the coming period.

Many other politicians and political analysts agreed to a bottom line that regardless of power balance and relationship between political groups in the new European Parliament the same tasks for BIH EU integration will continue to exist, primarily those emphasized as a priority in the last years' enlargement strategy for the Western Balkans, adopted by the European Commission, i.e. making substantial progress in the field of the rule of law and the fight against crime and corruption. As it was emphasized by Democratization Policy Council's Senior Associate Bodo

Weber, "For this fight, the composition of the EP is not important, but only what the politicians in BIH do or not do in this direction."

One of the first tests of the impact EP election could have had on the enlargement policy was scheduling agenda of the next Commissioner's reports for the Western Balkans. The Foreign Policy Committee of the European Parliament (AFET) officially announced that EU Neighborhood & Enlargement Policy Commissioner Johannes Hahn will present an enlargement package for BIH and other WB countries on May 29, but since this event was not in the official calendar of the European Commission, some opinions held that it might be rescheduled. Namely, there were fears some member-states, right after the EP elections might want to postpone decision to give a green light for start the accession talks for North Macedonia and Albania and granting candidate status for BIH in June and that consequently the whole negotiation processes will be slowed down. However, this didn't happen and Commissioner Hahn presented his report on Wednesday.

There are still some confusions about the opinion AFET has given for BIH candidate status, since its spokesperson "confirmed positive opinion for BIH candidate status", while Commissioner Hahn mentioned only continuous support for BIH membership in the EU. According to insider info given to Klix.ba, Hahn's report did not recommend to AFET a green light for BIH candidate status, but rather taking into account the recommendations that are still needed to be implemented (14 key priorities in the field of Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights, according the Acquis communautaire) and discussing further steps for candidacy. Same opinion suggested that this means BIH candidacy won't be on the agenda on the next ministerial-level meeting in June, for which the EC only recommended opening accession negotiations for North Macedonia and Albania. The same opinion claims: "In the best scenario, candidacy will be discussed in September, before the appointment of the new European Commission. If not, nothing before November."

Some Bosnian analysts together with colleagues from the other WB countries argued in favor of continuing dominance of EPP&SDD duopoly on the EP floor in order to at least secure continuity of enlargement talks. Basic logic is that as long as the EC is failing to create a clear political strategy for enlargement, the call will likely remain in key member-states. Hence, the next "ideologically diversified" EP could only resonate disunity of member-states, raise bargain costs in passing resolutions or even bring a chaos in enlargement policy. This is sound, but for

time being, irrelevant argumentation. BIH has to do its part of job first, regardless of who sits in the EP. This means meeting all the recommendations made by the EC, but above all, form a government and redress the Reform Agenda. Given the current speed, it is a very ambitious plan.

### **Changes in relations with Croatia and impact on Croat factor in BIH**

Although BIH is not EU member-state, one sixth of its citizens and residents (around 500 000 people) had right to vote on the recent elections for the European Parliament organized for Croatia on May 26th. Bosnian Croats and the rest of dual citizenship holders residing in BIH and eligible to vote in BIH turned out to the poll stations, but not in traditionally higher percentage than Croatian citizens in Croatia. Only about 11 000 people registered vote in 41 polling stations in BIH. First-hand explanation for this was generally low turnout for the EU elections, despite unusually higher turnout in Croatia (around 30%, as opposed to 25% in 2014) and similarly positive trend registered in Croatian diaspora. As opposed to rest of the vote from diaspora, difficulty in assessing how Bosnian Croats voted is in a large number of them having double residence and are eligible to vote in Croatia and BIH. This is one of big political controversies within Croatian electoral system and the reason why turnout in diaspora (also administered as a special constituency for national elections where the vote from BIH constitutes overwhelming majority) can have relatively huge oscillations from election to election. Another controversy with diaspora vote is their traditional loyalty to center-right HDZ (not to be confused with HDZ BIH, its ‘daughter party’ in BIH) and far-right political options. This time Bosnian Croats again proved their loyalty. According to unofficial data of the Croatian State Electoral Commission published on Monday, HDZ with 75.35% achieved a convincing victory. It was followed by Christian ultra-conservative Hrast (9.25%) and coalition of conservative Neovisni (Independents) and far-right HSP (5.40 %). For comparison, in Croatia HDZ won ‘only’ 22.7% and center-left SDP (apparently winning not more than 2% in BIH) was second with 18.7%.

BIH vote was also clear-cut in preferential votes. Most of the ‘preferentials’ gained HDZ Zeljana Zovko, former MP for BIH in Croatian Parliament, dubbed also as “a voice of Bosnian Croats in the EP”. She was followed by Ruza Tomasic, a Bosnian Croat, previous MEP and Croatian Conservative Party leader. Both secured seats in the EP (out of 12 allocated for Croatia) and both are considered to be only two MEPs having BIH and Bosnian Croats in their agenda. While the latter nourishes more bottom-up nationalist stance regarding Croat minority in

neighboring BIH and Serbia, advocates strong ‘bilateral conditionality’ regarding the accession of Serbia in the EU (in reality it means blocking Serbian accession before it solves all open bilateral questions with Croatia) and, therefore, would continue to be highly critical towards secessionist aspirations in Republika Srpska, Bosnian Serb war crimes, Banja Luka-Belgrade relations; Zovko is expected to bring more nuanced nationalism of HDZ on the EP floor and, by extent, increasingly assertive policy Croatian government has towards BIH.

Only few months ago, Croatian leadership was accused by Sarajevo and international community for attempt to undermine BIH constitutional order when it more openly stood behind HDZ BIH in demanding electoral reform for the Croats, even being equivocal about ‘third entity’ idea. Croatian PM Plenkovic and MEP-elect Zovko among others have made demands to the EP to tackle Election Law reform and the Verdict in the Ljubic case. Knowing that the current HDZ government in Croatia will likely continue to address the position of Bosnian Croats on the EP floor and probably assume patronizing role by shaking European complacency regarding the Bosnian status quo, some Bosnian (non-Croat) media made critical remarks during the campaign, mostly on HDZ account. A week before Croatian EU elections, German Chancellor Merkel paid a visit to Zagreb in “running a campaign” for EPP Spitzenkandidat Weber and giving support to HDZ, an important partner in EPP family. While some media tried to downplay the importance of “politically dead” German Chancellor, some captured nationalist song heard during the rally (Oslobodjenje, Faktor). As reported, Thompson’s song was a provocation and perhaps even an attempt to trick Merkel in giving support to a policy directly adversarial to neighboring countries. This may sound as an exaggeration, but Thompson built his bard-like status on the Croatian Right with controversial songs about Herzeg-Bosnia (Croatian term for Croat-inhabited areas in BIH). If Merkel was unaware of (the meaning of) the song, HDZ, as implied, had all intentions to show that their subtly concealed nationalist rhetoric is making passes in Europe.

This is the reason why Sarajevo-based politicians are not that much comfortable with Croatia trying to become a patron of the European BIH and why BIH media reported with a certain relief that the last EC report on BIH didn’t include Croatian proposals on electoral reform.

## **Elections to the European Parliament in Poland**

Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska

On Sunday, 26 May, 2019, elections to the European Parliament were held in Poland. Citizens voting in Poland selected 52 MEPs. These were the fourth elections to the EP since Poland's accession to the European Union. Although the Poles chose their representatives for one of the most important institutions of the European Union, the dominant topics in the campaign were not present issues or future challenges of Europe, but strictly Polish matters, especially those related to social assistance, significance of a traditional family, health service, fight against pedophilia and patriotism understood as something that is "our, Polish" and not imposed by the European Union, in which the membership is, after all, considered as a great success by 87% of Poles. Analyzing this battle - de facto treated as primary fight before the elections for the Polish parliament scheduled for autumn this year - attention should be paid not to the campaign itself (which was rather demeritorius), but to the issues of opinion polls presented constantly by the parties and the media, the issue of confidence in individual party groups and the reasons for their success or failure.

The Polish National Electoral Commission announced the final results of the European Parliament elections on Monday afternoon (May 27). The official election results are as follows:

1. in the first place was the Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), which received 45.38% of votes (altogether 6.192,780 votes); this translates into 27 seats in EP;
2. the second place was taken by the European Coalition with the result 38.47% of votes (altogether 5.249,935 votes); the Coalition won 22 seats. The European Coalition, combines many parties representing central, liberal and leftist circles and is understood as a broad opposition to PiS (Civic Platform, Democratic Left Alliance, Greens, Modern, Now!, Democratic Party, Polish People's Party, Union of European Democrats, Social Democracy of Poland, Liberty and Equality, League of Polish Families and Feminist Initiative);
3. Robert Biedroń's Spring (Wiosna) came third with 6.06% of votes (826.975 votes); it won 3 seats.

Below the electoral threshold, which is 5% of votes, were the extremely right-wing Confederation of KORWiN, Braun, Liroy, Narodowcy (Konfederacja) – 4.55% (621.188 votes). Moreover Kukiz'15 gained support at the level of 3.69% (503.564 votes), and the Left Together (Lewica Razem) earned 1.24% of votes (168.745). Other electoral committees (Polska Fair Play, Polesit - Koalicja, Jedność Narodu) obtained results lower than 1% (altogether 84.134 votes).

Despite the fact that nine committees took part in the election race, it was the rivalry of the strongest - namely Law and Justice and the European Coalition - that dominated the election fight. After the announcement of the first survey results, which pointed smaller differences between the main opponents, the Leader of Law and Justice Jarosław Kaczyński thanked all “advisers, sociologists, all those people who, with great effort, did not give up in better and worse times, and worked harder”. In turn, chairman of the Civic Platform (leading party in the European Coalition) Grzegorz Schetyna said that these elections “are the first half of the match. We know everything is still ahead of us”. Later he admitted “we took a big step together, together we have built a European Coalition and this is our great success”.

The results of the elections have proved to be a surprise, even for the winners, and they show the great change that has taken place over the last few years in the voters' awareness, their interest in politics, their engagement in the politicians' accountability for the election promises and social commitment of the citizens. The elections showed moreover what politicians and many commentators of political life do not want to see. Namely, closing up in a bubble of statistics and empty phrases, which caused the failure of several political parties and the emergence of only three parties that will finally send their representatives to the EP. In recent years there has been also a huge change in quality of lives of many Poles and indeed mainly Law and Justice Party was able to respond to the specific Polish need of feeling European, but at the same time being in a safe, Polish home, where there is economic growth and social support (as in western Europe), but at the same time, problems known from foreign media (immigrants, riots in the streets, etc.) are not at risk. The other parties were silent about this subject or did not notice it, thus not responding to current social moods.



### **Reasons for the success of Law and Justice**

Law and Justice, so far the party voted for by the conservative inhabitants of eastern Poland, now performed a breach and gained significant support in most of the regions - also in Lower Silesia and the municipalities in Wielkopolska, which until now were bastions of the Civic Platform.

The reasons for PiS success can be understood only in relation to the situation in Poland, because in these elections the European issues were really marginal - the victory was the triumph of the future vision of Poland and not of Europe. The causes were as follows:

- phenomenal activation of their own electorate and renouncing the undecided voters to their vision of Poland (to a lesser extent the vision of Europe);
- gaining largely the support of residents in the countryside (59.1%). This means that a significant part of PiS electorate were former voters of the Polish People's Party (currently a member of the European Coalition), which indicates that the profile of PiS voters is changing - this is no longer just a party of citizens living in the eastern, poorer part of Poland, but more and more often residents of villages or small towns throughout the country that chose Law and Justice as their political representation;
- actual implementation of the electoral program - Law and Justice consistently implements its postulates, and yet voters expect that the government will fulfill its promises;
- social support - the main electorate of PiS is the elderly generation, therefore a one-off, additional pension (the so called Thirteen pension or Retirement+) worked as planned. According to the exit poll of IPSOS, the highest percentage of voters were people aged 50-59 and voters 60+. Therefore the populist and expensive service proved to be motivating to vote for PiS;
- creation of a powerful party machine with huge financial resources, but at the same time implementation of earlier election promises.

### **Reasons for the failure of the European Coalition**

Commentators in Poland are speaking now about the Americanization of the political scene and that a two-party system is being created in Poland. However, it is too early to say so, but the situation is in progress. The European Coalition is a faction that associates several political

entities. If each of these entities separately took part in the elections to the European Parliament, then the EC's result would be fragmented and there would be no question of Americanization of the political scene. The fact is that the result of such fragmentation would be a greater failure of center-left groups and a more successful PiS victory.

The reasons for failure can be explained as follows and only in reference to individual members of the European Coalition:

- The European Coalition has almost become a twin entity to the United Right (Law and Justice Party together with the two other right-wing parties of two important ministers Jarosław Gowin and Zbigniew Ziobro), but with one exception. Civic Platform is not able to exert such a strong influence on other entities, as PiS did with the party of Gowin and Ziobro. So the departure of any smaller group from the coalition may immediately affect weakening and creating divisions in the camp;

- The Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) lost the battle for its hard electorate – the rural one. With the possible departure of the PSL from the coalition, they may face a similar fate, which is experienced by another party - the Democratic Left Alliance. It is worth noting that the Polish People's Party is treated as a rotating party, therefore it is possible that the PSL will stay alive, only thanks to PiS, which could see in this party a coalition partner for the upcoming elections in autumn;

- In turn, the location of Modern (Nowoczesna, N.) is much more difficult than the PSL, because N. does not have such extensive structures as the PSL. Staff shortages, transfers from N. to Civic Platform and financial problems imply further doubts about this political project;

- The Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) maintained the status quo in the number of EP seats that were obtained by their representatives (five in 2014 and five in 2019). Interestingly, the SLD within the EC won 5 seats with the support of around 6% (810,000 votes) on the national scale - it is two more seats than the Robert Biedron's party Spring (Wiosna), for which almost 827.000 people voted.

Therefore, participation in the European Coalition was very profitable for this party;

- The strongest grouping in the Coalition, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) was disappointed by the results and probably in near future may take over some of the members of the above-mentioned parties, but it still will be too little to compete with such a consolidated opponent as PiS. The PO also failed to attract the centrist electorate through the involvement of

Donald Tusk (earlier chairman of PO, now chairman of the European Council); in addition, the slogans and topics of the campaign used by PO (i.e. pedophilia in the Catholic Church, reform of the education system, ecology) did not meet with wide interest of voters.

### **The situation of Robert Biedroń's Spring**

There is also the issue of the party of Robert Biedroń, which is a perfect example, that it is not worth to hope in polls. The group, established in March 2019, competed with around 16% support and lost 10% within 3 months. It is the only Polish party that recorded such a large drop in 90 days. Spring was a fresh breeze in Polish politics, but the closer to the elections, its situation was getting worse.

The party's postulates focus on aspects related to worldview and ecology. However, this is not enough to be a real alternative to the European Coalition or PiS. The election result of Robert Biedroń's Spring proves that building a strong position on the Polish political scene is not such a simple task at all. In turn, taking away the votes of the party Left Together should not be any achievement for the grouping that wants to aspire to a strong third force in Polish politics. Therefore the upcoming elections to the National Parliament will be a real test for Spring. The proposals of this party are primarily directed to the domestic policy of the state (i.e. the secular state, departure from coal industry, more efficient health service), hence paradoxically, if Spring can count on a better result, it is in the autumn elections.

### **Conclusion**

Today we are witnessing the evolution of the Polish party system, in which space is created for groups able to cooperate with each other or effectively impose their narrative. Previous years indicate that few political parties have been able to cooperate well.

Elections to the European Parliament are a different process than to the national parliament, because the representation of the nation is small (only 52 seats), hence the voters may calculate that it is better to have a strong representation of two or three groups, than to have MEPs representing small parties, whose influence on the functioning of the EP will be insignificant.

Nevertheless, it must be said that these elections proved to be a success of democracy in Poland. For the first time, the turnout was very large (for Polish conditions) - 45.68%. In

comparison, in previous elections the turnout was 23.83%, in 2009 it was 24.53% and in 2004 - 20.87%.

And despite the fact that the public opinion talks about the PiS victory and the defeat of the Coalition, it is necessary to look at these choices from a broader perspective - PiS won 6,19 million votes in the election, and the democratic opposition (European Coalition together with Spring) 6,07 million. In mandates it was 27 to 25. As for the real power in the European Parliament, the deputies of the EC and Spring will co-rule there, and the PiS will be a part of the opposition. Probably also very poor one, because of the fatal result of the British conservatives with whom they so far formed one parliamentary faction.

Therefore, on the contrary to the highlights presented in the media, there was no sudden change in the image of Polish political scene. There are still two large political camps, differing statistically significantly from each other in the issues of education, place of residence, professed values, etc. Moreover there is still quite a large camp of anti-system voters, including those with very extreme views. In autumn, these two camps will undertake another electoral battle. Politicians now depend on what party configuration this encounter will take. Due to electoral law in Poland, this is a crucial decision, since many voices can easily be lost through careless movements. What has changed is certainly political dynamics. The opposition has declared a failure and begun settlements, instead of mobilizing itself to harder work. The wind blows in PiS and personally in Kaczyński's sails, but in reality nothing is yet sealed.

## **External Relations Briefing: European Parliament Election and Montenegro**

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Between 23 and 26 May, elections for the European Parliament were held, which is one of the most important events this year in relation to the further direction of the EU's development and its strategic path. Citizens of the twenty-eight countries chose their representatives in the European Parliament and in comparison to the elections that were held five years ago, a larger number of voters used the right of choice. The results of this year's elections shows, on the one hand, a fall in confidence in the two biggest parties in the parliament, European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (SD) and, on the other hand, strengthening of Greens and liberal democrats, but also the extreme right parties. Although pro-European parties still have a majority in the European Parliament, the recomposition of votes between the parties will have an impact on European politics, which will also affect countries that are candidates for EU membership, including Montenegro.

### **Election results: Pro-European parties still have a majority in European parliament**

About 400 million voting-age citizens of EU had opportunity to vote at elections for the European Parliament. The total turnout in this year's elections was at the level of 51%, which is also the highest percentage of voter turnout in last twenty years. Compared with the previous elections in 2014, when the voter turnout was 43%, this represents a significant growth, which is primarily fueled by the growth of citizens' interest in important issues concerning the future of the EU, its development policies and trends, and hence the future of the citizens. First of all, the migrant crisis, Brexit, the growing problem of climate change are some of the topics that have been occurred and emerged in the previous period and which have encouraged citizens to become more involved in politics and decision-making process and in some ways determine the course of Europe's path in the coming period. Campaigns that were organized and promoted this year's elections may have affected higher voter turnout in elections.

Although this year's elections have influenced the transfer of votes between the parties, the elections have not brought significant changes in the European Parliament. According to the

results of the election, the largest number of seats in parliament came to pro-European parties. Compared to the previous elections, these political parties lost a significant number of seats, but still retained the highest representation in parliament. However, pro-European parties can not boast that they have made a significant victory. Namely, the highest number of mandates was made by the EPP with 179 seats or 23.8% of the total number. It has won every election for the last twenty years, but lost 42 seats in these elections. The second strongest party that has won a significant number of mandates, 153, is SD. This party suffered a loss of 38 seats. Since the founding of the European Parliament, these two parties have lost the combined majority, where the summarizing result has reduced the number of mandates from 412 to 332 seats in parliament between two last elections.

On the other side, a significant gain was achieved by liberal and green parties, i.e. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and European Greens / European Free Alliance, which will be factors of change, because by this success they will limit the power of the two largest parties that have so far had majority power. Greens have made great progress in the major European countries, thus gaining an important role in the decision-making process in parliament. Also, the characteristic of these elections is certainly the progress of nationalists who have won 58 seats in parliament. The election results, reflected in the loss of pro-European parties, and the growth of liberal and green parties, as well as nationalists, can influence the decision-making in the EU in the future. However, significant changes can not be expected until the next elections, since most of them still have pro-European parties, but more discussion on important issues can be expected, since more votes of representatives will be needed for decision-making, which was not the case so far, because the two sides had the most important role. This will affect the greater involvement of parties in debates and greater compromises between the parties.

### **Why and how is it important for Montenegro?**

Montenegro is leading EU integration policy and this integrations is the most important foreign policy priority of Montenegro. It has been a candidate country since 2010 and has started negotiations with the EU seven years ago. In pursuing a policy focused on EU integration, Montenegro is implementing reforms that are aimed at fulfilling obligations from negotiating chapters. It is quite certain that Montenegro will continue to act on the path to the EU in the

future. Thus, the events in the EU are important for Montenegro, so this year's elections for the European Parliament play a significant role.

Montenegro's commitment to EU integration was emphasized by the President of Montenegro, Mr. Djukanovic at the 2BS (To Be Secure) Forum held in Montenegro a few days after the election in the EU. It has just been emphasized the importance of the EU enlargement, which is primarily reflected in the stability factor in the WB. Mr. Djukanovic pointed to the positive side of the enlargement policy, which can contribute to the more stability of Europe and the better competitiveness of Europe on the global political scene.

The integration into the EU is in the interest of all countries of the WB region and Montenegro, with a good position on the path to the EU and as a member of NATO, has a significant role in that regard. However, the position of the future parliament in terms of enlargement policy is of great importance.

Inauguration of the new convocation of the European Parliament is scheduled for the beginning of July, when the President of the European Parliament will be appointed, as well as the vice-presidents and the composition of parliamentary committees. The composition of the European Parliament will inter alia affect the attitude of the EU enlargement policy. The type of policy that the EU will lead in the next period will directly affect Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries.

Although there has been a loss of confidence in pro-European parties, the reduction in the number of seats has been in favor of increasing the number of seats in parliament for the liberal and the Greens. Certainly, for the enlargement policy, it is positive that the voters did not turn to the opposite side, that is, the radically right parties and anti-European parties. According to EPP and SD representatives, there is a willingness to cooperate with the liberals in defining a common strategy for the next period. On the other hand, a positive signal is that there are announcements by these two parties that they will not cooperate with the extreme right parties. This gives space for discussion and continues to implement the EU enlargement policy, which is of great importance for Montenegro, taking into account its commitment and engagement on the European path.

The direction of enlargement policy can also be influenced by the leading European countries, Germany and France, given that the largest number of MPs come from these two countries (96 and 74, respectively), but also from the attitudes of other member states towards

enlargement. The progress of the right-wingers in certain EU countries, such as France, Hungary, Italy, but the United Kingdom may have an impact on slowing down the enlargement process, or to put the issue of EU enlargement at the end of the list of questions in the future composition of the European Parliament. Thus, right-wing party in France won the Macron's political party, while in Hungary the number of votes for the right block was recorded. The right-wing party, the Northern League, recorded a significant increase in the number of votes in Italy compared to the previous elections. In addition, during the previous period, there was no great enthusiasm of EU member state countries for joining the WB countries in the EU, nor can any significant steps be taken in this direction. Many socio-economic and political processes in Europe and the world, above all the migrant crisis, may have affected such an atmosphere and mood among EU country members.

As Montenegro opted for EU integration, it is expected that it will lead such a policy in the future and promote European values. Therefore, it is very important that the EU responds and continues to pursue an enlargement policy. As the composition of the European Parliament changes, it is a very important to convince MPs to promote and represent the enlargement policy. From the present standpoint, that would be representatives EPP, SD and representatives of the liberal parties and Greens. The picture will in any case be clearer after determining positions in parliament, as well as appointing positions in key institutions, so Montenegro can define a strategy for further advancement and relations with member states.



## **European Parliament Elections: Unexpected Results across Europe and in Croatia**

Nikica Kolar

### **Summary**

European Parliament elections were presented in media as an "either-or" situation regarding the fate of the European Union: would the pro-European political allegiance succeed to keep enough legitimacy for putting forward the European Union project, or would the right-wing populist, nationalist-sovereignist and far right allegiances, riding on a wave of the recent refugee crisis and Brexit process, continue to gain electoral support to that degree that it might cause existential threat to EU institutions? Mainstream, mainly centrist political forces were capilarily spreading fear of catastrophic consequences of potential victory of anti-EU forces in the public and managed to mobilise the EU citizens to vote in much larger numbers than in the previous electoral cycle, thus lowering the expected share of support for the radically-right-wing parties.

### **Introduction**

The pro-European majority has been preserved among the Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the conservative European People Party (EPP), the Greens and liberals (ALDE), from which the European Commission will be able to form and continue the process of the European integration. However, in some Member States, such as Croatia, there has been a serious unexpected turnaround in the outcome of the election. Particularly, unlike the overall results at the EU level, where the share of the anti-European right has slightly increased, and power relations reorganised within the pro-European alliance, the results of the Croatian European Parliament elections have shown that, although the mainstream pro-EU electoral lists won the absolute majority in seats (9 out of 12), on the micro-level, by the total number of votes, it is evident that the entire electorate has ideologically shifted to the right. The main party of the right electorate, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), has lost its ideological right-wing allure and scored evenly in seats with its centre-left rival Social Democratic Party (SDP). In a Member State where many analysts expected that there would not be any entrance of the anti-European forces in the European Parliament due to the ruling pro-European-oriented HDZ, the resurgence of relatively successful results of anti-European right-wing parties in the EU elections raises the question

about the stability of the centre-right-oriented HDZ and its success in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

### **Overall election results for the European Parliament**

The election results for the European Parliament in 2019 were beyond any expectations. It was anticipated that due to recent refugee crisis and Brexit, the right-populist, nationalist and far right parties would seriously endanger the supremacy of the pro-European political powers, but that did not happen. On the other hand, neither did the main political affiliations – EPP and S&D win. On the contrary – they lost 72 seats total in the European Parliament, which for the first time in the last 40 years prevent them from forming a grand coalition and choosing the European Commission president from their ranks. The biggest surprise of the elections are the Greens, with 69 seats won (17 more), making them the fourth group, ahead of all Eurosceptics and anti-EU forces. Furthermore, the liberal group ALDE has also achieved a remarkable success at the expense of the well-known centrist alliances, and has won 37 new seats (a total of 105 seats) in the European Parliament, which makes them the third power by the number of seats and most likely a key partner for the formation of a Europarliamentary majority, as well as political actor with sufficient bargaining power to impose the conditions to choose its Spitzenkandidat for the next president of the European Commission.

Contrary to the success of pro-European political affiliations in the EP, anti-EU forces have also gained significant success, particularly in key EU economies, such as the UK, France and Italy, but this overall success was not strong enough to destabilize the pro-European majority. The fear of the right-populist, nationalist and far right parties to gain ruling power in the EU was spread in the public by the mainstream centrist political parties and had a mass-mobilization effect among citizens to counter the rising support to right-populist alternatives to the EU. However, the victory of the anti-EU forces in some Member States is by no means an insignificant threat to liberal democracy. In France, Marine Le Pen with National Front topped the vote over Macron's party, a signal in which direction the outcome of the next presidential elections in France may result. In the United Kingdom, the six-week-old anti-European political party of Nigel Farage won overwhelmingly more seats than all the other candidates, and undermined the legitimacy of Conservatives in the upcoming negotiations on Brexit. In Italy, the League gained far more support than other parties, which gives Matteo Salvini, the president of

the League, public image of a new leader of the European right. Salvini called all anti-European forces to unite into a single pan-European block of right-wing parties. With such election outcomes, despite the absolute victory of the pro-European forces, it is increasingly important to gain insight into the political situation in the Member States which are not expected to give rise to anti-European right-wing parties.

### **Results of the European elections in Croatia**

The case of Croatia is a perfect case in which the reflection of this pro-European and anti-European ideological struggle can be seen. The Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, a former MEP and the chairman of HDZ, the most influential political party in the country, has striven to bring EU institutions and its decisionmaking closer to Croatia. Despite the fact that the PM is a strong advocate of the EU, HDZ was defeated, even though primarily in terms of votes. The elections resulted in a tie with the rival party SDP by the number of the EP seats won – each won four seats. A huge drop in support from the last election cycle (from 41% to 23%) is definitely not what the HDZ's campaign headquarters had expected. A large number of electoral lists (33 in total) was known in advance, but this large number did not represent an imminent danger to the leading status quo parties, because candidates on the majority of small and new electoral lists did not have the organisational capacity to withstand the dynamics of the EU elections. Nevertheless, the threat to success of the pro-European, centre-right HDZ has materialised as a result of the election campaigns of anti-European right-wing affiliations and because of the intra-party factional frictions that have been taking place since Plenković assumed the office of the party chairman.

By forming the coalition with the liberal HNS party and supporting international documents such as the Istanbul Convention on the prevention of violence against women and the Marakesh Declaration on the regulation of legal migration, a significant part of the right oriented electorate started to perceive Plenković's leadership of the HDZ as betrayal of their will as voters and the party's conservative national identity.

The right-populist, nationalist and far-right political powers took advantage of that sentiment to win votes for themselves and thus against the European Union project, which they presented in corruptive character and work of Andrej Plenković. A Eurosceptic and nationalist group Croatian Sovereignists (HS) won over 8% of the votes and the most of the preferential

votes, winning one secure seat and getting close to winning two seats, landing them a good start from which to build a radical right alternative for Croatia. The political party Human Blockade (Živi zid), a representative of the right-populists, won 5% (1 seat), though two were expected by some estimates. However, the biggest surprise of the Europarliamentary elections in Croatia was the independent list of Mislav Kolakušić, who overtook a large share of votes from Živi zid also with his populist rhetorics, and somewhat from other political parties, resulting with slightly less than 8% and thus 1 seat in the EP.

Furthermore, the right-populist and crypto-clericalist political party Bridge (Most) and the far right political formation Independent for Croatia (NHS), despite the predictions that they would win a seat each, have not passed the electoral threshold, but their results show they took away cca 9% of overall votes from HDZ. The questionable status of the current and future electoral legitimacy of the HDZ is even greater when it comes to the fact that the number of votes won in the European Parliament elections is very close to the number of members of the party itself, which undoubtedly leads to the conclusion that many members of the party did not deliberately vote for HDZ, which calls into question the stability of the centre-right and pro-European orientation of HDZ. The defeat of HDZ is even greater when a fact is brought to light that its main rival party SDP won the same number of seats in the EP, which not even the SDP campaign headquarters expected, taking into account the recent period of an extremely destructive factional conflicts within SDP and the long-term non-consolidation of the party.

### **Conclusion**

In general, the pro-European parties in Croatia have, measured by seats, won the majority (9 out of 12 seats). On the other hand, the European trend of the increasing right-wing populism is much more permeating the Croatian electoral body in case of elections for the European Parliament. The right-populist, nationalist-sovereignist and far-right political currents in Croatia total 35.51% of the electorate who voted, indicating that, generally speaking, the Croatian electorate has made a shift towards the right. Unlike the outcome at the European Union level, where the power relations were mainly reorganised between the centrist political blocs, a shift of power in favour of the anti-European right occurred at the Croatian level, hence it will inevitably dictate the pace of the campaign for the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

The beating of the drums of illiberal (authoritarian) democracy is getting louder and more acceptable after the EU elections in Croatia.

## **The European Elections in Lithuania See the Ranks of the Elected Eurosceptics Decrease by a Large Margin**

Linus Eriksonas

The elections to the European Parliament which were held in Lithuania jointly with the second round of the presidential elections on 29 May produced the results which mirror, to some extent, the status quo of the domestic politics. Out of eleven contested seats in the European Parliament three went to the Conservatives, two to the Social Democrats, two to the Farmers and Greens Union (the governing party), two to the Liberals (including a representative of the Liberal party and an independent candidate elected on the ballot list of a public electoral committee), and one seat was taken by the Lithuanian Polish minority party leader.

According to the data by Politico, an online news and policy watchdog organization in Brussels with a focus on the EU-related politics, comparing to the previous elections in 2014, the share of Eurosceptics among the elected MEPs in Lithuania has decreased from 37% to 17%. This is a relatively low figure within the context of the growing popularity of the parties and the movements with the Eurosceptic views across the EU. To put into perspective, the number of Eurosceptics elected in the European elections is the highest in Hungary (62%), followed by Italy (58%), Poland (54%), the Czech Republic (52%) and, unsurprisingly, the UK (45%). Among the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, Lithuania is somewhere in the middle: the lowest number of the elected Eurosceptics as Members of European Parliament is in Romania (none were elected), Croatia and Slovenia (10% in both cases), Bulgaria and Estonia (13% each).

Below is a brief discussion of the main results of the European parliamentary elections in Lithuania including the outline of the main factors which might have markedly contributed to the decrease the Eurosceptic vote in Lithuania in these elections.

Eleven parties and five public electoral committees of bi-partisan candidates were registered to participate in the European elections in Lithuania. Only five parties and one public electoral committee succeeded in getting their candidate or candidates elected. The Conservatives (Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats) received the highest number of votes –

19,67% (in 2014 – 17,43%), followed by the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party which gained 15,93% (in 2014 – 17,26%). The ruling party (the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Party) ended up on the third place with 12,60% of the popular vote (in 2014 they received 6,61%). The Labour party and, especially, the Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania have suffered losses by receiving 9,03% and 6,55% (in 2014 – 12,81% and 16,55% respectively). The Polish and Russian minority party alliance (Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas Christian Families Union and Russians Alliance Coalition) gained 5,54% (in 2014 – 8,05%). The newcomer, the public electoral committee of independents led by the Member of Parliament Aušra Maldeikienė, received 6,45%.

When comparing with the number of mandates gained with the seats secured in the previous elections, the mainstream political parties (the Conservatives, the Social Democrats, and the Liberals) all managed to sustain their share of representation in the European Parliament without changes. The only change – two seats which were held by the Eurosceptic party (the Party Law and Order) now went to the public electoral committee led by the outspoken parliamentarian Maldeikienė and the governing Farmers and Greens Party. The turnover in these elections was higher by approximately 5% (53,43% as against 47,35% five years ago).

Although the voters had an opportunity to cast their votes for two Eurosceptics parties (Lithuanian Centre Party and the Party Order and Justice) and four Eurosceptics public electoral committees (the Public Electoral Committee “Prezidento Rolando Pakso judėjimas“ („Movement of President Rolandas Paksas” – in English), the Public Electoral Committee “Vytautas Radžvilas: susigrąžinkime valstybę!” (“Vytautas Radžvilas: Return the State”), the Public Electoral Committee “Stipri Lietuva vieningoje Europoje” (“A Strong Lithuania in United Europe”), and the Public Electoral Committee “Lemiamas šuolis” (“A Decisive Jump”). As result of this bewildering plethora of options for attracting the populist and indeed the Eurosceptic vote which, if all the votes received by the above parties and the electoral committees are added up still accounted for 17,7% of the popular vote, was spread thinly and none of the above electoral ballots succeeded to get enough votes to produce at least one MEP.

Of eleven elected MEPs five were re-elected for the second term: MEP Vilija Blinkevičiūtė from the Social Democratic Party, MEP Petras Auštrevičius from the Liberal party, MEP Bronis Ropė from the Farmers and Greens Union, MEP Viktor Uspaskich, the leader of the Labour party, MEP Valdemar Tomaševski, the leader of the party representing the Polish minority in

Lithuania (the full name of this party is the Lithuanian Polish Electoral Action – the Union of Christian Families).

Six new MEPs are on the way to join the European Parliament from Lithuania. Three of them are the political heavy-weights and Members of Parliament. Two are representing the leadership of the Conservative Party, namely Andrius Kubilius, the former leader of the party and the former Prime Minister (in the years 2008-2012), the Deputy Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, and Rasa Juknevičienė, the Deputy Chairman of the National Security and Defense Committee (and a former Minister of Defense in the Cabinet led by Kubilius in the years 2008-2012). The third one is a seasoned politician coming from the ranks of the leadership of the Social Democratic Party - Juozas Olekas, Leader of the Social Democratic Parliamentary Faction, Member of the National Security and Defense Committee and a former Minister of Defense (in the years 2012-2016). It is expected the participation of these high-level politicians in the European Parliament could result in strengthening the ties of the political elites with the largest European political groupings, to which both parties belong (the European People's Party in the case of the Lithuanian Conservatives and the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – in the case of Lithuania's Social Democrats).

Three newly elected MEPs are very well-known figures in Lithuania. Dr Liudas Mažylis, a Professor at the Department of Public Administration in the Faculty of Political Sciences and Diplomacy at Vytautas Magnus University, who has been teaching the course on Lithuanian political system. He became a popular public figure (achieving a media celebrity status) due to his involvement in finding in the archives and bringing to Lithuania a copy of the Act of Independence two years ago, at the time when the plans for celebrating the centenary of independence were underway; Dr Aušra Maldeikienė, an economist and publicist known for her plain-speaking style, who led the public electoral committee entitled “Aušros Maldeikienės traukinys” (literarily, “the Train of Aušra Maldeikienė”) and Šarūnas Marčiulionis, a former basketball player and a sports entrepreneur, who was included on the ballot list for the Farmers and Greens Union. However, in the latter case, after winning the seat Marčiulionis changed his mind and announced that he would not go into politics (causing incredulity for his motives to join the ballot in the first place and then step back). Thus, the second MEP seat won by the Farmers and Peasants Union has passed over to Stasys Jakeliūnas, the Chairman of the



Committee of Budget and Finance, who was the next choice on the ballot list after the ranking by the voters.

When considering the low performance of the Eurosceptic and populist vote in these elections, the analysts have drawn parallels between the anti-European vote and the discourse on migration. The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), a center-right think-tank specialized on analysis and promotion of Europe's sustained role in the global affairs, has noted in its pre-election analysis that, contrary to all other EU Member States, the topic of migration in Portugal, Ireland, and Lithuania was not expected to feature prominently in the European election debates. And this was the case. Specifically, ECFR noted that "as Lithuania has one of the most pro-European societies in the EU, there is little room for anti-European rhetoric in the public debate. This is why parties most often campaign on a socio-economic rather than an anti-European (or identity-based) platform".

According to the policy analysts, the practice of holding the presidential and the European parliamentary elections at the same time (which for the first time occurred in Lithuania in 2014 and was intended to increase the voters' turnover) inadvertently shapes the political debates in the European elections in such a way that they become focused almost exclusively on domestic issues or the foreign relations related to the domestic political agenda rather than on the European or foreign relations agenda. The presidential election campaign then becomes the shaper of the agenda for the EU parliamentary elections as well. "As most presidential candidates remain strongly pro-European, it is likely that their discourse will overshadow any radical positions. Due to their absence on the Lithuanian political agenda, immigration issues are unlikely to feature in the electoral campaign", - predicted ECFR prior to the elections and these judgements proved to be accurate.

The presidential elections (their second round) held in parallel with the European elections in Lithuania has increased the relevance of the outcomes of the European elections for the domestic politics, making the European elections a sort of national by-elections where the outcomes are seen as the barometer of the popular preferences for the individual political parties. Hence, the results of the European elections has been interpreted by the political parties as the popular vote on the governing majority, and this would be taken into account when putting together a new government following the inauguration of a new president (due on 12 July), whose duty is to appoint the prime minister and to approve the composition of the Government.

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## Romania and the European Parliament Election

Oana Cristina Popovici

*The turnout rate in European Parliament elections in Romania reached 49.02%, a record as compared to previous similar events, and very close to the EU average of 50.5%. Romanians restated their pro-European attitude. As the National Liberal Party won the elections, Romania's contribution is the highest (10 mandates) for the European Popular Party. The ruling coalition recorded a harsh defeat and the political picture in Romania is changing. The referendum for justice, which was held in the same day with the EU elections, was also validated.*

The electoral debate was less focused, in Romania, on important themes at European level, such as the climate change, migration or pollution. As in the last elections, it was rather a vote that sanctioned the ruling parties especially for the changes in justice and other sideslips. As a consequence, the Social Democrat Party (SDP) lost about a third of the votes it had won at the previous elections.

The election for the European Parliament, which were held on the 26th of May, lead to some unexpected results:

- **Record in the turnout rate**

The number of Romanians who voted in the European Parliament elections reached 49.02% of those with the right to vote, totalling almost 8.955 million persons inside the country and another 0.37 million from abroad. In the elections for the Romanian Parliament at the end of 2016, the attendance was only 39.5% in the country and 106,038 people voted abroad, while the turnout rate was 32.16% in the elections for the EU in 2014 and under 28% in 2009.

The result could be considered free of any suspicion of fraud, as each voter's data was introduced into the IT system for voting attendance and prevention of illegal voting, in order to avoid multiple voting.

The most important problems were signalled abroad, where Romanians in Diaspora had to wait for hours in order to vote, although the number of the pooling sections (441) was doubled as compared to last elections. However, the request for extending the voting period was rejected,

and several Romanians didn't get the chance to vote. The President and the opposition parties asked for the resignation of the Government following the difficulties in the organization and deployment of the voting abroad.

**• The lowest historical score for the senior ruling coalition party and important victory of the opposition**

The ruling coalition registered a bitter defeat at the elections for the EU Parliament. The SDP, which is the senior party in the ruling coalition and one of the most important in Romania in the last 30 years, managed to obtain only 22.5% of the total votes, in a sharp decrease from the 45% result obtained at the last elections for the members of the Parliament in December 2016. In addition, the coalition partners, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), had a worse than expected score, gathering only 4% of the votes, although it was credited with almost 10% in the polls. Given that the result is below the threshold of 5%, the party will not be represented in the EU Parliament.

The elections were won by the National Liberal Party (NLP), with a final score of 27% according to the Central Electoral Bureau, an increase after the 20% votes obtained in December 2016. The other representatives of the opposition, the Union Save Romania (USR) and Plus (conducted by the former EU Commissioner for Agriculture and technocrat Prime Minister, Dacian Ciolos), who formed the Alliance 2020 USR-Plus, was on the third place, with an overall score of 22.4%, a result which was not envisaged even by the most optimistic among the coalition leaders. Both are very young parties, USR obtaining only 9% at the last elections, while Plus being formed at the end of last year, and none of them has a well-developed political infrastructure. Their result is surprising as their score is seriously competing that of SDP: there is a difference of only 13,000 votes between SDP and USR-PLUS. Moreover, analysts consider that if there were no problems with the vote in Diaspora, the Alliance would have surpassed SDP. The two parties were mostly supported in big cities and in Diaspora, gathering over 40% of the votes in Bucharest and outside Romania.

The fourth place was occupied by the Pro Romania party, also recently founded by the former SDP Prime Minister Victor Ponta, which obtained a score of 6.6%. The members of the party are usually those dissatisfied with the SDP leader, Liviu Dragnea, therefore it could be considered that at least a part of the votes to SDP were diverted to this party.

Another party which met the threshold of 5% is the Popular Movement Party (PMP), founded by the former president Traian Basescu, which obtained 5.7% of the total votes. Finally, the last party who will be represented in the EU Parliament is the Democrat Hungarian Union (UDMR), with 5.4%. All the other participants in the EU elections had a score under 2%.

These results mean that NLP will have 10 mandates in the EU Parliament, followed by 8 representatives from the part of SDP and USR-Plus and two representatives in the EU Parliament from each of the remaining three parties who exceeded the electoral threshold.

#### • **The validation of the justice referendum**

The EU elections were doubled by the referendum organized at the request of the President following the changes to the justice laws and criminal codes. The justice referendum addressed the will of Romanian for banning the pardon and amnesty for people convicted for corruption and forbidding the Government from using emergency ordinances in order to change the essential legislation in the justice sector.

Almost 41.3% of the Romanians participated in the referendum, over the needed threshold of 30%. As a consequence, the referendum was validated, as compared to the last one – the referendum related to the traditional family, which did not achieve the minimum turnout in November last year. In addition, over 80.5% of the voters answered “Yes” to both questions, thus clearly signalling the rejection of the ruling coalition’s changes to justice laws and confirming that the protests in the last months against the changes in the justice were not only the will of some people.

The high turnout rate was one of the reasons for the drastic drop of the ruling coalition, but almost no one foresaw such a large participation in elections. The analysts consider that, if the presence was normal, the SDP’s number of votes would have provided a soothing score.

However, the result of the votes for both the EU Parliament and the referendum point to several realities and tendencies of the population:

#### • **The pro-European attitude of the Romanians.**

In the last period, SDP and ALDE showed a more pronounced attitude against the EU and launched accusations towards the EU leaders, especially on the topic of justice. However, Romanians gained a lot following the EU adhesion, such as the free movement and the labour

rights in other EU countries. In addition, there are many families in Romania with emigrants in all countries of the world. As a consequence, Romanians in Diaspora went out to vote in massive number, for preserving the rights they enjoy. Romanians in Diaspora showed a critical attitude against the ruling coalition, highlighted in August 2018, when a large protest was organized and ended in violence.

Moreover, Romanians tend to trust more the EU institutions than their own Government, according to surveys. The Romanian Government caused important concerns at the EU level in the last period, following the attempts to undermine the rule of law through the changes in justice. In consequence, the attitude of the EU towards Romania was clear, sending signals that the ruling coalition is in contradiction with the EU core values. Another negative signal was the decision of the European Socialists to freeze relations with the Romanian SDP on the verge of elections. The ruling parties also lost voters following their intention to boycott referendum, based on the fact that it is only a tool for bringing more people to the polls. However, it was seen by the population as another attempt against justice. Therefore, the result of the vote was a clear signal for eliminating the danger of populism and Euroscepticism that risked devastating effects.

#### • **The involvement of the younger generation**

Usually, the attendance in all type of elections in Romania was the appanage of the older generation. This time, it is noteworthy the increased participation of the most active age group, those between 35-44 years old. The turnout rate was 10% higher in 2019 as compared to 2016, an unprecedented record for the European Parliament elections, which usually draws the lowest interest of the population. The analysts consider that a new generation was finally stimulated to participate in establishing the fate of the society and, although this generation doesn't exactly know what it wants, it clearly knows what it doesn't want: further corruption, populism, Euroscepticism, lack of infrastructure, poor education and health. The lesson that must be learnt by all political parties is that serious reforms for the middle class should be taken from now on, as nepotism, local barons and populist measures as usual ways of doing politics until now became less and less feasible. The ruling parties were also sanctioned for their speech and measures against multinational companies and private business, where a large part of the young population is working and enjoying higher salaries and other types of benefits, such as subscriptions to private medical clinics.

- **The mobilization of some inactive voters, especially in urban areas**

The interest in politics has grown in large cities and the population here increased, while the share of population in rural areas and small towns have steadily decreased in the last period. SDP won in their traditional rural areas, but these were rather low and were not able to compensate for the large participation in urban areas. In fact, votes in urban area were one million over those in rural areas.

People's attitude towards the ruling parties started to become clear during the electoral campaign period. Each rally organised for supporting SDP and ALDE where important leaders participated also gathered groups of protesters who showed even better the discontent of the population. The negative feelings were even more exacerbated after the decision to investigate the anti-government protesters at the ruling party's electoral rallies in some cities. Following these circumstances, a very large rally which was to be held in Bucharest was cancelled.

In addition, the USR-PLUS Alliance has succeeded in attracting some voters who had not voted in the past, in activating an electorate who was no longer voting following disappointments of the government policies. It ranked first in each of the 9 largest cities in terms of and in some other important cities in Romania.

## **Forthcoming European Parliament Elections from an EU Candidate State Perspective**

Ivona Ladjevac

### **Abstract**

*Enlargement is not a particularly favoured topic among the European political elite nowadays. As European Parliament Elections are approaching, there is a growing awareness among European audience that EU has to undergo a process of reform, in order to be able to successfully answer pending global challenges. Unfortunately, the prospect of EU accepting new members along this way is not ranked very high, if at all, on the political agenda of the lead candidates for the European Commission Presidency.*

The European Union will chose the heads of its most important institutions by the end of this year, and in the process, lay down the essential political and economic foundations of the bloc over the next half decade. New presidents of the European Commission, European Central Bank and European Council will be appointed in months after European citizens elect new members of the European Parliament.

This May's elections for the European Parliament are taking place in a rather peculiar political setting. As economic crisis is presumably over and European economies are back on track in terms of growth, investment and employment, voices that advocate for more effective and united Europe, i.e. profound political reform, are getting consistently stronger. Indisputable, one of the most prominent among them is French President Emmanuel Macron, whose proclamation made last March, about the need to embrace reforms, is considered by many a long awaited incentive for a "European renewal". The bad news for the Western Balkans is that previously mentioned manifest of a strong European leadership is deeply skeptical about new EU enlargement happening any time soon. Everyone in its own domain, EU, EU candidates and potential candidates have to engage in the comprehensive reform process.

Having in mind political and economic context in which European integration has been unfolding during the last few years, a considerable political weight is placed upon the EU parliamentarians. As EU's only directly elected institution, hence exclusively responsible to European citizens, European Parliament is faced with a difficult task of ensuring democratic



legitimacy of the European unification project. Especially, since euro crisis resolution mechanisms have left negative consequences on the Eurozone governance, in terms of democratic accountability and legitimacy. At the same time, the ongoing crisis of liberal democracy in some of the Eastern European member states is threatening viability of the European project as a community of values. Arguably, its role as a democracy promoter is now more important than ever.

It is widely presumed that after these elections, anti-EU sentiments and rhetoric will be on the rise. There is a growing concern that the current upsurge in populist movements and anti EU parties who are positioned mostly on the right side of the political spectrum, would reflect on the electorate results, eventually paralyzing EU decision making and preventing it from moving forward. That this fear is fairly exaggerated, show recent surveys of the public opinion across the Union and projections of the next European Parliament. According to these, traditional pro-EU forces would remain the strongest party groups in the Parliament, although they would probably have to contend with the loss of some seats.

Still, Europhiles should not underestimate the disruptive potential of anti-establishment parties of wide ideological spectrum that may engage in a pragmatic cooperation and coalition building for the sake of blocking EU initiatives on an ad hoc basis. Due to likely growth of polarization after the 2019 elections, European Parliament could easily become a major battlefield for contested visions of the future European order.

Will this European Parliament Elections change the EU's political dynamics in a way that is significant for the continuation of the enlargement process?

This is commonly asked question in Serbia nowadays. Or at least, among those who are still in favour of country's European path. Latest public opinion polls on European orientations of Serbia citizens demonstrate that little more than 50% of them support the accession of Serbia to the European Union. General public and domestic media outlets are mostly interested in the future composition of the European Commission, in particular who will occupy the positions of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Institutional setup and the person in charge of the later is something that the whole region of Western Balkan is concerned about; since, even the designated name of the institution can offer a hint about the enlargement prospects. Arguably, it is not the same if the next Commissioner would exclusively take forward

EU's enlargement policy, or, as it was the case so far, both enlargement and neighborhood policy, and even if he or she would be in charge of the Directorate-General for Enlargement or Enlargement Negotiations. Indicative of the lack of importance of the enlargement policy for the future European leaders is the absence of this topic from the recent political debates of the lead candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission. We could hear their attitudes concerning migration, rule of law, environmental policy, economic growth, unemployment, international trade, Brexit, foreign, security and defence policy. Anyone who has been even a casual follower of the European elections campaign could notice that enlargement won't be among the top priorities of the next Commission. However, this is in accordance with the aforementioned initiative of the French President. Only after EU has reformed itself, it can expand its membership. Historians of European integration are teaching us that European Commission rarely openly contradicts the interests of its strongest member states. Another indicator of this ongoing trend of diminishing support for EU accepting new members, is a fact that more than 45% of EU citizens are against further enlargement of the EU, as latest Standard Eurobarometer shows.

The Union has been facing with the numerous crises in the first decades of the 21st century, followed by the wide spread enlargement fatigue. The most striking expression of this can be seen in the absence of the topic of enlargement in the White Paper on the Future of Europe ("Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025"), published by the European Commission in March 2017. Surprisingly, shortly thereafter, came the statement of Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, in his State of the Union speech, that the next enlargement could potentially be expected in 2025. His words strongly echoed across the region. Optimism was spreading, especially in Serbia and Montenegro, as they were portrayed by political analysts as frontrunners of the enlargement process. Only two years later, it seems like no one even remembers Juncker's indicative enlargement date. Western Balkan's European saga has been fraught with shattered hopes.

Undisputedly, EU is interested in maintaining its influence on the Western Balkans. It doesn't look all favorably on the increasing political and economic ties that Serbia is forging with other dominant international powers, in the first place China and Russia. The geopolitical interests of the European elite require anchoring the region to the European project. The only way to pursue this is through a credible membership perspective, based on the fulfillment of

objective criteria and transparent political conditions. The leadership of the Commission and the emphasis it puts on the importance of the reform process, are blurring the fact that Member States are the ones who will have the final say regarding the admission of new members. At least for the moment, they can't reach a harmonized position on a number of political issues that are of the utmost importance for the future of the whole region.

On the other side, it is important that the Western Balkan's elite don't fall into the trap of underestimating the importance of meeting the Copenhagen accession criteria. Despite growing awareness that general support for the enlargement process expressed numerous times by the European officials is lacking in substance, Serbia as a candidate country that has already opened significant number of the negotiations chapters (16 out of a total of 35), is supposed to do its part in terms of reaching European standards and norms. The biggest issues remain developments in the rule of law area and media freedoms.

Serbia is faced with no simple challenge of positioning itself in the ever changing European political and economic circumstances. As the candidate for the European Commission President needs the support of a majority of members of the European Parliament in order to be elected, in the coming days, after the election results are known, there will be at least an indication of the EU future orientations.

### **Conclusion**

Observers across Europe are wondering what is on the horizon after this May's European Parliament elections. Will there be "more" or "less" Europe in the near future? The well-known integration theory compares EU to a bicycle: if it stops moving forward, it will eventually fall over. Thus, Western Balkans should not be left in the EU's membership waiting room. Deepening of integration, has always gone hand in hand with the widening of the EU.

## **External Relations of Slovakia: the 2019 Elections to the European Parliament**

Juraj Ondriaš

The 2019 elections to the European Parliament (EP) took place in Slovakia on Saturday, May 25. These were the fourth EP elections Slovakia participated in since becoming a member of the EU on May 1, 2004. Just as in elections to the national parliament, for the purpose of EP elections, Slovakia consists of one electoral district, with a 5% quorum to gain representation to the EP. In the last two terms, Slovakia had 13 Members of the EP (MEPs). This was originally supposed to increase to 14 seats due to the expected division of several British EP seats following Brexit, but the delay of Brexit forced a change – Slovakia will continue to have 13 MEPs, which will be increased to 14 if and when Brexit takes place. This arrangement caused trouble after the elections, as will be seen below.

Of the 31 political parties and coalitions that vied for seats in the EP, six of these groupings gained representation in the new EP. The unexpected winner was a new center-right coalition of two parties, the Progressive Party (Progresívna strana, PS) and the SPOLU party. This coalition of PS and SPOLU gained 20.11% of the vote, which translated into four seats. The runner-up in second place was the winner of all previous EP elections and the current favorite, the ruling center-left Smer-SD. It gained 15.72% which means three seats. In third place was the extreme right-wing Peoples Party – Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS) with 12.07% of the votes and two seats. This was the first time this party (or any ideologically similar party) gained representation in the EP for Slovakia. Next came the Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH) with 9.69% which also means 2 seats. Fourth place went to the libertarian Freedom and Solidarity party (Sloboda a solidarita, SaS) with 9.62% and two seats. In sixth and last place came the center-right party Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti, OĽaNO), which got 5.25%, meaning 1 seat. Together, the total makes 14 seats, although only 13 will be occupied until Brexit. The method deciding the assignment of the 14<sup>th</sup> seat caused some scandal when it became known that this seat will be allotted to KDH – meaning that it will only occupy one of the two mandates it has won until Brexit, when it will gain the other. This is despite the fact that KDH received more votes than SaS, which will have two seats from the start. Such a development led KDH to turn to the Constitutional Court to dispute the method of mandate allotment.

But it is not only the result of the elections which are of interest in the case of Slovakia. Ever since its first EP elections in 2004, Slovakia has been the country with the lowest voter turnout among all the EU member states. This election was no exception, with turnout in Slovakia standing at 22.74% of all eligible voters, compared to 50.62% for the entire EU. On the other hand, this was the highest turnout in Slovakia compared to turnout in all other EP elections since 2004. This fits into the projected upswing of voter turnout across the EU, reversing the trend of declining turnout in each successive election. The question could be posed whether this is merely a result of a massive campaign by governments, EU institutions and NGOs to get people to vote, or whether it reflects a genuine increase of interest on the part of the electorate in EU topics. In the case of Slovakia, EP elections are a clear example of what is called “elections of the second order”, meaning elections which are considered as less important in the public consciousness, compared to elections to the national parliament, or perhaps also presidential elections. This ties into the perception among Slovaks that the EU is something distant and irrelevant for their daily lives – unless there is a EU-wide controversy that impacts domestic politics, such as the migrant crisis or the eurozone debt crisis, which, however, have died down to a significant extent compared to previous years. When such EU issues are not significant, the election contest tend to become an extension of domestic politics and internal issues. This was the case this year as well.

Seeing the EP elections as elections of the second order leads to the necessity of analyzing what the results portend about the evolution on Slovakia’s political scene in the near future. As stated above, the result of the elections was an upset, as it was generally expected that Smer-SD would win and retain its dominance of the political scene. The fact that it was not so, ties into the decline of support for Smer-SD over the past year. This is connected especially with the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in February 2018, while he was working on a case of land and tax frauds in Eastern Slovakia, which suggested links between organized crime and people close to Smer-SD. This along with several other scandals concerning several sponsors of Smer-SD tends to reinforce the idea among the general population that Smer-SD has been in power too long (since 2012, in fact, and previously in 2006-2010) and its elites have become complacent and corrupt. However, despite this general trend of decline, Smer continues to be the largest party in opinion polls, and the only party polling over 20%, with several of its rivals jockeying over second place at around 15%. While Smer-SD maintains a clear lead over its rivals, it has ceased to be the double-digit lead it consistently enjoyed over the past decade and a half. It is not expected to lose

its privileged place in the near future, thanks to strong support among rural and less educated working class voters. However, it appears likely that while it still may win the next elections to the national parliament (scheduled for February 29, 2020), it will not be able to put together a majority coalition.

Connected to the previous development is the rise of the coalition PS-SPOLU, which won the election. This coalition has emerged as the main beneficiary of the reaction against Smer-SD and its coalition partners. This coalition, like most center-right parties opposed to Smer-SD, draws its support mainly from urban, wealthier and more highly educated voters. This however means that it is yet another center-right party fighting for the same voter groups. This is linked to the continuing fractured state of the center-right in Slovakia, with no party currently dominant on this part of the political spectrum. PS-SPOLU is merely the latest in a series of parties whose fortunes has risen to appear as the main challenger of Smer-SD, only to fall in the space of a few years. In this respect, PS-SPOLU has taken the place of SaS, which was the second strongest party since the previous national parliamentary election in 2016, but whose appeal seems to be waning since a new spate of center-right party formation occurred within the previous year. This new round of party formation, catalyzed by the murders mentioned above (as well as the looming 2020 elections) also led to the current rise of PS-SPOLU. The creation and rise of new parties mean that the center-right is splintering even more, instead of consolidating itself. In short, the more things change on the center-right, the more they stay the same.

But the most important and the most widely commented-upon consequence, is the accession of the far-right ĽSNS to the EP as the third-place finisher. This result confirms the continuing growth of the far right not only in Slovakia in the shape of the ĽSNS, but in the EU as well. The general reason for the rise of ĽSNS is discontent among poorer Slovaks with their low share of the fruits of Slovakia's economic growth and a perception that the current political elites are distant and corrupt and are doing nothing to promote their interests. But a more specific reason for the success of the far-right party can be traced to the controversy surrounding the migrant crisis when it seemed that Slovakia would be forced to take in a prescribed quota of immigrants over the objections of the government and public opinion. The result of this party is seen as strengthening its position before the national parliamentary elections, with it already predicted to finish in third place behind Smer-SD and PS-SPOLU in opinion polls. Whatever the consequences will be for

the country, the EP, or the EU, Slovakia has to come to terms with it being one of the countries that contributed to the strengthening of the far right in the EP.

To get a clear picture of what the results of the EP elections mean for Slovakia, it is necessary to take a look at which parties failed to defend their mandates and will no longer be represented in the EP. The most relevant is the absence of either of the two main parties representing the Hungarian minority (which makes up 8.5% of the population of Slovakia), both of which were represented in the EP in the election cycle leading up to 2019. This means that the loss of representation cannot be attributed to splitting of the vote between them. Rather, it is the result of a decline of support for the larger of the two parties, the governing center-right Most-Híd party. This decline is seen as the party being tainted among center-right voters by its cooperation with Smer-SD, which the party leadership previously claimed it would not do. The reversal of this party's stance was due to political deadlock after the last national parliamentary election in 2016. Be that as it may, this trend may result in a hardening of the stance of center-right parties in general towards Smer-SD, since a softer stance like that of Most-Híd would be seen as politically damaging. The result would be a greater polarization of Slovak politics. This would mean the weakening of the possibility of a united front of centrist parties against the rising far right. The second notable absence is on the part of SDKÚ-DS, the former dominant party of the center-right, which has disintegrated under the weight of corruption scandals. Its demise led to the above-mentioned fracturing of the center-right.

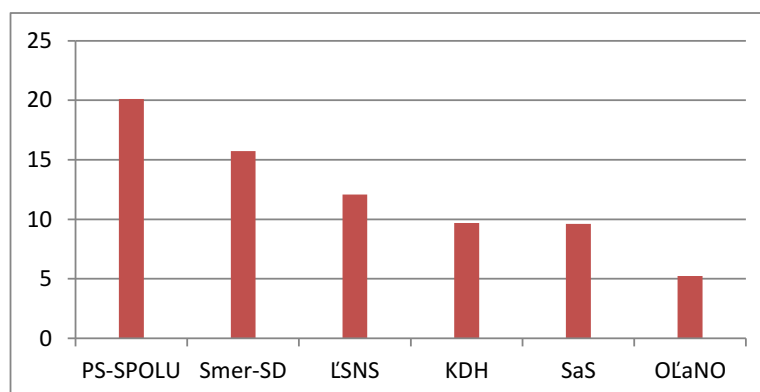
Nevertheless, the consequences of the latest EP elections for Slovakia do not depend merely on which political parties will or will not be represented in the EP, but also on the individual MEPs representing the country. The three most influential MEPs from Slovakia over the past three years, as defined by the NGO VoteWatch which does a survey of the most influential MEPs and releases a table ranking the top three most influential MEPs of each member state,<sup>1</sup> will not be present in the new EP. More broadly, only two Slovak MEPs were reelected, with the remaining eleven (or potentially twelve) being new to the EP. This fact will probably lead to a decrease of the influence of Slovakia in the new EP, since the new and inexperienced MEPs will probably have a harder time gaining positions in the EP, its committees, subcommittees and groups compared to their more experienced colleagues. According to VoteWatch, this influence of member states is measured in relation to the number of MEPs it has and ultimately to the size of its population in

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<sup>1</sup> As seen in: <https://www.votewatch.eu/blog/update-top-3-most-influential-slovak-meps-september-2017/>

the EU. The most influential MEPs are generally those at the head of the EP, the chairmen and chairwomen of political groups (with larger political groups naturally bestowing more influence to its officeholders) and rapporteurs of legislative acts. In general, VoteWatch shows that Slovakia's MEPs were less influential than the EU average in the past couple of years. The subaverage results of Slovakia show a lack of success in obtaining these positions within the EP and thus making their mark on its work. While it is a matter of simple math that the senior positions in the EP and political groups go to the MEPs from the larger EU member states, due to the larger number of their fellow countrymen MEPs that support them as well as the size of their domestic party delegations in the specific political groups in the EP, the same excuse cannot be made in the case of rapporteurs. Slovak MEPs therefore have trouble dealing with the competition in the EP. Of course, in theory it could be argued that the EP should be independent of the influence of member states and should instead be an arena of contest of political ideologies and groupings. But in fact MEPs can have a valuable role in pushing bringing attention to issues concerning their native countries and influencing legislative acts in this direction. Due to the inexperience of the newly elected Slovak MEPS, this may prove to be a challenge in the coming European Parliament.

**Figure 1:** Parties gaining representation to the European Parliament for Slovakia – result in percentage points



Source: Own processing according to <https://volby.pravda.sk/eurovolby/?rok=2019>



## **European Parliament Elections**

Helena Motoh

### **Summary**

Eight new Slovenian Members of European Parliament were elected on Sunday, May 26th. After a lot of shifts and turns before the campaign started, the campaign itself was fairly calm. The results largely matched the predictions with the votes split evenly between the left and the right side of the political spectrum, and matched the general EU phenomenon of a limited success of extreme political parties. The reactions in Slovenian media and general public to the results in other, especially neighbouring countries were more critical.

### **Turnout and the campaign**

After it became clear that United Kingdom will not exit EU before the elections are due, it also became evident that Slovenian voters will be electing eight Members of European Parliament. These were the fourth European Parliament elections since Slovenia joined EU in 2004 and this time the voters were choosing between 14 candidate lists and 103 candidates. . After very intense campaigning by both European institutions and the Slovenian political parties for people to come to vote, the trend in the falling turnout was reversed. With the general note of this turnout campaign being that these might be the most important EU Parliament elections so far, the final turnout was quite surprising with a high rate of 28.36%. Compared to other EU countries, such turnout is still fairly low. EU as a whole reached the highest turnout in 20 years, with more than 50% of EU citizens eligible to vote taking part in the elections. Turnout increased in 21 countries (for more than 10% in seven of those). With an increase in turnout, Slovenia still ranks among the countries at the very bottom of the list, with a lower turnout only being reached in Slovakia (22.74%). Compared to the highest rates (88.47% in Belgium, 84.10 in Luxemburg or 59.80% and 54.50% in the neighbouring Austria and Italy respectively), Slovenia falls more into the category of the new member countries of Eastern Europe, where the turnout is comparatively lower. E.g., Czech Republic only reached a slightly higher number than Slovenia with 28.72%, Slovakia 22.74% and Croatia 29.86%. The rise in turnout numbers was also

slightly smaller than in EU as a whole, since the 2019 turnout in Slovenia was only 15% higher than the numbers showed in 2014, while for the whole EU it was almost 20% higher.

As the media and the candidates themselves have often remarked publicly, the campaign for the European Parliament elections in Slovenia was rather uneventful. Compared to the heated debates before the national parliamentary elections a year ago and those at the subsequent local elections, this time no larger scandals or media surprises erupted and the general tone of the public debates was not aggravated, what was seen most often as a result of the exhausting »super-election-year«, where political parties had to organize three campaigns in the span of a year. For the same reason the financial resources were also obviously limited. The super-election-year was so financially exhausting that all but one of the parliamentary parties were in large debt before the European Parliament Elections campaign even begun. The deepest in debt were Democratic Pensioners Party (DeSUS) and Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) with almost half million Euros debt each, with government parties Miro Cerar Party and Social Democrats having just under 400,000 Euros debt each, New Slovenia (NSi) just under 100,000 Euros, Alenka Bratušek Party (SAB) and The Left (Levica) just under 80,000 each, Slovenian National Party just under 30,000 Euros debt and the only parliamentary political party not in debt being Marjan Šarec list. Obviously, the campaigns of these parties had to be reduced to low cost strategies. Not a lot of expensive advertising was used, very few posters and other printed material, with more emphasis being placed on direct contact with the potential voters and the lower cost internet advertising. The political parties relied mostly on the grassroots strategy of travelling around the country and organizing small scale meetings with voters. The also obviously made it a priority to entice their loyal voters to attend elections, much more than trying to convince new voters to choose them now for the first time. Therefore it is not surprising that the long-standing old political parties had the most success, with the only exception being the new Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ).

### **Results of the elections**

The majority of the candidate lists were organized according to the pre-existing political parties, i.e. those that already ran for the parliamentary elections in 2018. Although talks were held in preparation for the elections by the three left-centre coalition partners – Prime Minister's Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ), Miro Cerar's Modern Centre Party (SMC) and Alenka Bratušek Party

(SAB) – about the forming of a coalition, they had not reached an agreement about the candidate list and each of the parties eventually ran for the elections separately. Media speculated that the motivation of the leading Marjan Šarec list not to join with the other two potential partners was that their poll results were rather high, while the other two could actually hinder their result. On the right side of the spectrum the three largest parties also negotiated possible coalitions, with the one between Christian democrat New Slovenia Party (NSi) and Slovenian People's Party seeming most likely. Finally another combination was realized between Slovenian Democratic Party of Janša and the Slovenian People's Party, while the New Slovenia ran separately. Other parties all ran individually as well, with several new small movements and parties competing as well. One of them was the newly established extreme right movement Dom (Patriotic League), whose members were former Slovenian Democratic Party protagonists. Another extreme-right wing movement on the elections was the United Slovenia Movement (ZSI) of Andrej Šiško, while the otherwise right wing Green Party of Slovenia, led by former Slovenian Democrats Member, and emphasized the environmental elements in their programme more prominently than the typical right wing rhetoric. The less politically profiled anti-corruption oriented Dobra Država (Good State) party and the "Let's join" (Povežimo se) initiative also ran for elections.

The results largely confirmed the polls' predictions. The coalition of Slovenian Democratic Party and Slovenian People's Party got 26.43 % and 3 Members of European Parliament. Social Democrats got 18.66 % and 2 MEP. A bigger surprise was the Marjan Šarec List, for which the polls showed the most varied results. There was even a lot of media speculation, whether the failure of Šarec's party to get their own MEP could potentially result in him resigning from the position of the Prime Minister, resulting in pre-term elections. Contrary to these predictions, they got 15.57 % and two MEP. New Slovenia was the last, fourth candidate list to successfully compete for EU Parliament and they got 1 MEP with a result of 11.07%. With these results, the overall result in the term of European Political alliances is 4 MEP seats for the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), 2 MEP seats for the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and 2 seats for the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE&R). None of the right-wing sovereignist and eurosceptical European political groups got a MEP in Slovenia, as neither did the left wing The Left. By the percentages reached, the results are comparable to the overall results for the European Parliament. In Slovenia, EPP got 37.5% S&D 18.66% and ALDE&R got 15.57%.

While the election results in Slovenia were fairly consistent with the overall trend in European Parliament Elections, where the voters seemed to opt for the pro-European moderate political parties, the results in the two neighbouring countries showed a worrying opposite trend. In Italy, Salvini's League reached a high result of 34.33% and despite this being complemented with the 22.69% by the social-democratic Partito Democratico it still shows a worrying trend toward extreme right sovereignist politics. Due to historical reasons the rise of Salvini's revival of some of the problematic nationalist policies causes a great concern in Slovenian public and media. The results in Austria were also debated a lot, especially due to the last minute shifting of votes between the Austrian right wing parties due to the Strache scandal. The results of Hungarian EU Parliament elections with the absolute majority obtained by the coalition between Fidesz and Christian Democratic KDNP marks another sign of the move towards the nationalist right which was debated in media extensively.

### **Conclusions**

As correctly predicted by the polls, the results of the European Parliament elections in Slovenia seem to show a general EU trend of preference for political parties of the more traditional orientations. The results polarized between the right and the left (or left-centre) also reflect the political relations of power in Slovenian national politics. A low turnout, however, still casts a doubt onto how representative these elections are, especially if compared to the EU average.

## **The Results of the European Parliamentary Elections in Hungary and its Interpretations**

Csaba Moldicz

This analysis mainly focuses on the results of the European Parliamentary Elections in Hungary and at the same time, it tries to shed light on how the results are being interpreted in the Hungarian political discourse, what effects are expected, more precisely how the results might alter the political landscape in Hungary and the upcoming local elections. At the same time, it is still not clear how the relations between the European People's Party and the Fidesz-KDNP will change and whether the results will be a game changer in this aspect, this question is to be touched upon in the briefing.

### **Final Results of the European Parliamentary Elections in Hungary**

The European Parliamentary Elections were held in Hungary the 26<sup>th</sup> of May in 2019, where 43.7 percent of the eligible voters (3.409.785 voters) participated in the elections. This ratio is the highest one in the short history of the Hungarian European Parliamentary Elections. Four years ago, 28.92 percent of the voters cast a vote in the elections; and in 2011, 36.1 percent of the voters went to the polls.

The National Election Bureau (Nemzeti Választási Iroda) published the final results late on Sunday night. The Fidesz-KDNP received 52.14 percent of the votes, winning 13 seats in the European Parliament, 16.26 percent of the voters went to the DK, thus the DK has 4 seats in the EP between 2019 and 2024. The Momentum was supported by 9.9 percent of the eligible voters. This number of votes resulted in 2 seats, while the MSZP-Párbeszéd only received 6.68 percent, the Jobbik 6.44 percent, which brought them 1-1 seat. (In the European Parliament, each country has a maximum number of seats, Hungary has 21 seats in the EP.)

### **Consequences and Shifts in the Political Landscape**

If comparing these EP results to the 2018 Hungarian Parliamentary elections, significant changes can be observed. (See table 1!). One element was the substantial increase in the support of the Fidesz-KDNP, but it might be more important that the power relations in the camp of the opposition parties were entirely reshaped by the results, and two, until now less important parties

were rewarded by the growing sympathy of the voters. Though some analysts underlined the significance of the changes and spoke of the total transformation of the opposition, it should not be forgotten that around 5.7 million votes were cast in the last year's elections, while this time only circa 3.4 million voters went to the ballots. In our opinion, this significant difference makes it difficult to draw relevant conclusions as for lasting changes in the political landscape.

Table 1 Political support in 2018 and 2019						
Elections	Fidesz-KDNP	Jobbik	MSZP-Párbeszéd	LMP	DK	Momentum
2018 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections	48.51	19.51	12.33	6.92	5.58	2.84
2019 European Parliamentary Elections	52.14	6.44	6.68	2.19	16.26	9.9
Changes compared to 2018	+3.63	-13.07	-5.65	-4.73	+10.68	+7.06
Source: own compilation						

Since significant and unexpected changes and shifts occurred in the mind of the voters, the pollsters' forecasts were inaccurate. On the one hand, we can say that the final results reflected the expectations of the pollsters as for the ruling party's position, which could extend its EP seats by one, but on the other hand the forecasts were terribly wrong as for the political support of the Jobbik, and the MSZP-Párbeszéd, while the biggest winners seem to be the Momentum<sup>1</sup> and the DK. It is no exaggeration to say that the biggest success of its history was achieved by the Momentum this weekend when the party received 9.9 percent of the votes.

As a response to the disastrous results, the co-president of the LMP along with the presidency drew the conclusions and resigned from leading positions, however, the co-president blamed the weak results on the tactical voting (meaning that voters don't vote for candidates that – they assume – won't be elected.) However, it must be pointed out, that the reasoning is fundamentally flawed since the same logic did not work in the case of the Momentum. (This party has had lower support levels in the surveys, than the LMP.) In our opinion, the catastrophic results could be traced back rather to the party-infightings over the course of the last year.

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<sup>1</sup> The Momentum was founded in 2017, that became known to the broader public, when the party initiated a successful campaign against the Olympic Games in Budapest and as result of that the government was forced to withdraw Budapest's nomination for the Games.

On the eve of the elections, the MSZP also held a press conference, where the leadership told the media, they take full responsibility for the miserable results, however, they don't resign. At the same time, the president and parliamentary faction leader of the party accused the DK of copy-pasting their programme. According to his interpretation, that was the reason for the success of the DK. This reasoning too seems to be miserably weak, since it can be questioned why the same programme didn't result in the success of the MSZP as well. (It is worth noting that the DK had a very clear pro-EU programme, in which they argued for stepping up the European cooperation, and the establishment of the 'United States of Europe'. None of the parties had this vision, or at least none of them communicated this vision so clearly!)

Parties	Fidesz-KDNP	Jobbik	MSZP-Párbeszéd	DK	
Nézőpont Institute	14	3	2	1	1(LMP)
Závecz Research	12	3	3	2	1(Momentum)
Final results	13	1	1	4	2(Momentum)
Source: own compilation					

The effects of the European Parliamentary elections can be framed twofold in our opinion:

—On the one hand, the significant strengthening of the DK and the Momentum might give incentives to the opposition parties to renegotiate the elections agreements regarding the upcoming local elections. The Momentum already signaled to the public that it doesn't want to reject the former understanding among the opposition parties, but the name of the Budapest mayor candidates must change. At the same time, they used the media attention to communicate their basic messages to the public by emphasizing the following points: (1) they don't focus on immigration, but emigration, (2) how EU transfers are being spent in Hungary, which they find extremely important, since they would like to shift the focus to health care and education, they argued.

—On the other hand, the extremely good results of the Fidesz-KDNP must be framed both in the Hungarian and the European context. It rarely happens that a ruling party can improve its results after one year in power, however, the broad European results did not reflect the expectations of the Fidesz-KDNP entirely. In the European Parliament, though

the European People's party became weaker, it remains the most powerful party in the EP. There are countries such as France, the UK, and Italy where populists surged in the elections, but at the same time, liberals and green parties were successful in other countries such as Germany. The European People's Party and the Social Democrat Party in the EP (the so-called Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) had 54 percent of the votes between 2014 and 2019, now they only have 43 percent, in other words, for the first time in the history of the EP elections, the European People's party and his ally won't be able to control a Parliamentary majority. It is also a question which strategy the Fidesz-KDNP should pursue in its future relationship with the European People's Party.

### **Summary**

The final results of the election clearly reconfirmed the election strategy of the Fidesz-KDNP to focus on migration, however, it must be added the power of this strategy would have been significantly weaker if the economic results would have not bolstered the slogans. Since the migration topic is old in the Hungarian political discourse, it is very likely that it only addresses a fraction of the voters, while others are more focused on the economic issues, thus we can conclude as long the economy performs, there is no need to change the slogans. At the same time, the relative success of the DK and the Momentum remains a reminder to the strategists of the ruling party that the European Union still has significant support among the Hungarian voters, and the likelihood of the shift in the opinions is extremely low. In other words, balancing between anti-EU and pro-EU arguments is a strategy worth pursuing. As for the broader context, it must be maintained that the populist parties did not reach the breakthrough on a European level, however, they have been strengthening over the course of the last 15 years, and the likelihood of influencing the political debate and topics has been growing from election to election during this period. Though it is not clear what the allegiances of the Fidesz-KDNP will lay in the new European Parliament, it cannot be excluded that the Fidesz-KDNP will change the camp.



