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# Ascension of populist parties but relative stability of political balance in the European elections

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Nearly 170 million voters from 28 EU countries went to ballot between 22nd and 25th May last and elected the 751 MEPs to the Parliament in Strasbourg. The first surprise of this election was the turnout was maintained and even increased slightly in comparison with the previous European election between 4th and 7th June 2009. Moreover the ascension of the populist parties was significant in some Member States but weaker and almost non-existent in others. However there is stability in the political balance between the various groups in Parliament.

## Upkeep of turnout

The first striking fact about this election was the upkeep of turnout or rather more, the decline in voter participation. Indeed for the first time since 1979 the date when the first election for the European parliament by direct universal suffrage took place turnout did not decline. It rose to 43.09% [1], i.e. very slightly up (+ 0.9 points) in comparison with 2009. Of course developments have been different according to the Member State. Turnout in the 15 oldest Union countries lay at 45.6%, against 33.6% in the 13 most recent. Quite logically electoral turnout remained low in the States which mostly (except for Cyprus and Malta) have been living in democracy for only 25 years. In these countries turnout in national elections is also lower than that registered in the oldest European democracies.

We should recall that voting is obligatory in 4 Member States (Greece, Cyprus, Belgium and Luxembourg) even though in most of them sanctions are never really implemented. These countries represent only 4% of all European voters.

Many states organised another election on the same day as the European elections: federal and regional in Belgium, referendum in Denmark, regional and local elections on some towns and Länder in Germany, second round of the presidential election

in Lithuania, local elections in some parts of the UK, regional and local elections in Greece, regional elections in Italy and local elections in Ireland. These elections often help to increase turnout in the European election.

Quite clearly turnout was highest in the Member States where it is obligatory to vote (90% in Luxembourg and Belgium). Apart from these two countries 12 of the 15 oldest Member States recorded turnout higher than the European average: Malta (74.8%), Italy (60%) – both of these countries have high turnout traditions –, Greece (58.2%) (where it is obligatory to vote), Denmark (56.4%), Ireland (51.6%), Sweden (48.8%), Germany (47.9%), Spain (45.9%) and Austria (45.7%). In Central and Eastern Europe three countries turned out more than others: Lithuania (44.9%), Estonia (36.4%) and Bulgaria (32.1%). Less than two voters in ten voted in Slovakia (13%) and in the Czech Republic (19.5%).

4 countries recorded a significant rise in turnout in the European elections in 2014 in comparison with 2009: Lithuania (+ 23.9 points), Greece (+ 5.5), Germany (+ 4.6), and Romania (+ 4.4). Conversely some Member States were not as motivated as five years ago: Latvia (- 23.6 points), Cyprus (- 15.5), Czech Republic (- 8.7), Slovenia (- 7.4), Estonia (- 7.4), Hungary (- 7.3), Ireland (- 7), and Slovakia (- 6.6).

1. All of the results provided in this text come from the European Parliament site: <http://www.resultats-elections2014.eu/fr/election-results-2014.html>

### Stability within the European Parliament

The right-wing undeniably dominated the European elections on 22nd-25th May 2014. The main party, the European People's Party (EPP) won 28.5% of the vote and 214 seats in the European Parliament, down however by 59 seats in comparison with 2009. The Alliance for Democrats and Liberals for Europe (ALDE) won 8.5% of the vote and 64 seats (- 19). These two parties alone rallied 37% of the vote and 278 MEPs.

Another group right-wing but Eurosceptic group – the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) won 6.1% of the vote and 45 seats (- 11).

Finally Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) which rallies right-wing populist groups won 5.1% of the vote and 38 seats (+ 7).

On the left the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) lost their bet of becoming the leading party in the Strasbourg Assembly. With 25.4% of the vote they won 191 seats (- 5). The United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) won 5.9% of the vote and 45 seats (+ 10).

The erosion of the EPP vote did not benefit either

the left-wing which together won 31.3% of the vote, nor the ecologists (6.9% and 52 MEPs -5). The latter did however win high scores in Sweden (15.3%, + 4.3 points) and in Luxembourg (15%) – two Member States where they came 2nd-, in Austria (14.5%, + 4.6 points) and in Croatia (9.4%). In Portugal, the Earth Movement (MPT) won 7.1% of the vote.

The decline of the Christian Democrats has especially benefited the populists, notably those which lie on the right.

The non-attached won 5.4% of the vote and 41 seats. There are 60 new MEPs who do not (yet) belong to a political group and who together won 7.9% of the vote.

Most of the political groups in the Strasbourg Parliament declined. Only the extremes either on the left (GUE/NGL) or the right (ELD) – won more votes but only a few seats. It might be said that the number of seats (751) is below that of the outgoing Assembly (766).

Together all of the forces on the right (EPP, ALDE and ECR) won 324 MEPs, far from the 376 which forms the majority in the European Parliament. The left only won 236 seats.

#### European Elections Results 22nd -25th May 2014

Political Groups	% of votes won	No. of MEPs
<b>European People's Party (EPP)</b>	28,5	214
<b>Socialists &amp; Democrats (S&amp;D)</b>	25.4	191
<b>Alliance of Democrats and Liberals for Europe (ALDE)</b>	8.5	64
<b>Greens/Free European Alliance (Greens/EFA)</b>	6.9	52
<b>European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR)</b>	6.1	46
<b>United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)</b>	5.9	45
<b>Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)</b>	5	38
<b>Non-attached</b>	5.4	41
<b>Others</b>	7.9	60

Source : Internet Site of the European Parliament <http://www.resultats-elections2014.eu/fr/election-results-2014.html>

The first impression given by the new European Parliament is one of stability. If we count all of the votes per country distributed according to the national parties the government right won on average 37.8% of the vote in the EU, i.e. 6.7 points less than in 2009.

The populist right won 6.6% of the vote – a result on a

par with 2009. All of the right won 44.4% of the vote i.e. 6.7 points less.

The left-wing which was very weak five years ago has continued to decline. With 30.1% of the vote they achieved their lowest results ever in the European elections. The populist left gained one point in five years and the government left has lost 2.7 points.

**European elections results from 1979 to 2014**

(in % of votes cast)

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
<b>Populist de Left</b>	1,7	2,3	2,1	1,5	2,7	2,9	2,9	3,6
<b>Left</b>	39,7	38,8	39,3	36	33,3	33,3	29,2	26,5
<b>Total Left</b>	41,4	41,1	40,9	37,5	36	36,2	32,1	30,1
<b>Right</b>	51,1	46,6	38,6	42,2	39,8	39,2	44,5	37,8
<b>Populist de Right</b>	2,1	4,6	6,2	7,7	6,8	8,1	6,6	6,6
<b>Total Right</b>	53,2	51,2	44,8	49,9	46,6	47,3	51,1	44,4
<b>Divers</b>	5,4	7,7	14,3	12,6	17,4	16,5	16,8	25,5

**The right wins in nearly two thirds of the Member States**

The government right won the absolute majority in four Member States: Poland (70.8%), Latvia (68%), Luxembourg (52.3%) and Hungary (51.4%).

In Poland, Law and Justice (PiS) led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski (32.3%) just came out ahead of the Civic Platform (PO) led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk (31.3%).

In Latvia, the party in power Unity (V) achieved a high score (46%), the nationalists in the Homeland Union and Freedom (TB/LNNK) took 2nd place with 14% of the vote. The right easily came out ahead of the Russian speaking party Harmony Centre (SC) which won 13% of the vote.

Undoubtedly Jean-Claude Juncker’s bid for the Presidency of the European Commission helped the former Luxembourg Prime Minister’s Party, the Christian Social Party (PCS/CVS) which easily won in the Grand Duchy where it gained an extra 6.3 points (37.6%). The government parties – socialists and liberals – have lost ground in comparison with the elections in 2009.

Finally in Hungary the Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPP) led by Prime Minister Viktor

Orban easily won, less than two months after his victory in the general elections (6th April 2014), with 51.4% of the vote. The left-wing struggled due to their division and were beaten by the far right movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) (14.6%).

**The government right leads in 13 other countries.**

Although the two main parties came out ahead in Germany and also gained points in comparison with the previous European elections the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) led by Chancellor Angela Merkel easily won with 35.3% of the vote over the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (27.3%). The right therefore emerged victorious in spite of the continued collapse of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) (3.4%) and the suppression of the 3% threshold that enabled the entry into the Strasbourg Assembly of MEPs from “small” parties including the National Democratic Party (NPD).

The same occurred in Estonia where the right-wing in office won with 38.2% of the vote in all for the Reform Party (ER) and the Pro-Patria-Res Publica (IRL). On the left the Social Democratic Party (13.6%) won 4.9 extra

points whilst the Centre Party (22.4%) lost 3.6 points. In Bulgaria, the party of former Prime Minister (2009-2013) Boiko Borissov, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), made a net improvement (30.4%, + 6.1 points). All of the parties on the right won 36.8% of the vote against 23.9% on the left. The Socialist Party (BSP) certainly struggled for having chosen as its lead candidate Delyan Peevski who has been involved in several financial scandals.

The right-wing won 38.8% of the vote in the Czech Republic. But the latter are divided however. ANO 2011 led by Finance Minister Andrej Babis (16.1%) came out ahead of TOP 09. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) (7.6%) continued its demise: it has lost 17.2 points in five years.

The right-wing won 42.3% of the vote in the Netherlands where the Democrats 66 (D66) won the election with (15.4%) ahead of the Christian Democratic Party (CDA). The Labour Party (PvdA) won 9.4% of the vote ie a decline of 2.6 points in comparison with 2009 and was beaten by the Socialist Party (SP) far left (9.6%, + 2.5 points).

In Spain, the People's Party (PP) of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy won the election with 26% of the vote. In spite of a decline in comparison with 2009 (- 16.2 points), he managed to beat the Socialist Party (PSOE), also clearly down but which won 23% of the vote (-15.5 points). Socialist leader Alfredo Rubalcaba resigned the day after the election.

In Cyprus, the Democratic Assembly (DISY) of President of the Republic Nicos Anastasiades won 37.7% of the vote whilst the Progressive Workers' Party (AKEL) lost 8 points in five years (26.9%).

In crisis ridden Slovenia (Prime Minister Alenka Bratusek (Slovenia Positive, PS) resigned on 5th May last) gave its vote to the Democratic Party (SDS) (24.8%) whilst the Social Democrats (SD) lost 10.4 points in five years (8%). The party's leader Igor Luksic resigned after the election.

The two "main" parties won in Ireland: 22% for Fine Gael (FG) in office and the same for Fianna Fail (FF), both however were beaten by independent candidates. In Austria, the People's Party (ÖVP) (27%) came out ahead of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) of Chancellor Walter Faymann (24.1%). Both parties which

govern together nationally were followed closely by the Liberal Party (FPÖ), on the far right which won 19.7% of the vote, i.e. + 7 points in comparison with 2009.

In Finland, the Prime Minister, Jyrki Katainen's party, the Conservative Assembly (KOK), dominated the election with 22.6% of the vote. Its government partners, the Centre Party (KESK) won 19.7% of the vote. The left-wing lost ground.

Although the New Flemish Alliance (NV-A), Bart de Wever's populist party won in Belgium in the Dutch speaking college (26.7%) rising by 16.9 points in five years, the Socialist Party (PS) of Prime Minister Elio di Rupo took first place in the French speaking college (24.3%, - 4.8 points). In the country as a whole the right-wing came out ahead of the left.

Finally in Croatia the majority went to the right-wing opposition led by the Democratic Party (HDZ) (41.4%).

### The government left drew ahead of the right in 7 Member States

The Democratic Party (PD) led by President of the Italian Council Matteo Renzi won his wager winning 40.8% of the vote far ahead of the indefinable Five Stars Movement (M5s) led by Beppe Grillo (21.1%). Matteo Renzi, one of the rare European leaders to have undertaken a pro-European campaign is now the leader of the left in the Union.

The Socialist Party (PS) won in Portugal (31.4%) ahead of the alliance of the two parties in the government coalition led by Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho (Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the People's Party (PP) (27.7%).

The Labour Party (PL) led by Prime Minister Joseph Muscat became the first party in power to win the European elections in the Maltese archipelago. It won 53.3% of the vote ahead of the Nationalist Party (PN) (40%).

The same situation occurred in Lithuania where the Social Democratic Party (LSP) of head of government Algirdas Butkevicius just won with 17.3% of the vote. An achievement since Dalia Grybauskaitė was re-elected as President of the Republic on the same day.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) achieved a landslide victory in Romania with 37.6% of the vote. The right wing, the National Liberal party (PNL) and the Demo-

cratic Liberal Party (PD-L) won 27.2% of the vote i.e. 17 points down on 2009.

At just four months from the general elections that will take place on 14th September the Social Democratic Party (SAP) won in Sweden (24.4%). The right is on the wane probably because of being in office for too long (since 2006). The Moderate Assembly (M) led by Prime Minister Fredrick Reinfeldt has lost 3.5 points in 5 years.

Although Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) of Prime Minister Robert Fico won in Slovakia the left lost a great deal of ground in comparison with 2009 (24.1%, - 7.6 points). The right is divided but together they won 41.7% of the vote.

### Ascension of the Populists

Although the populist ascension in the European elections is undeniable notably in some Member States it has remained relative on Europe-wide. Left-wing populists have gained ground (+ 0.7 points) across the Union in comparison with 2009 and achieved their highest result in the European elections those on the right have stagnated (6.6%). The populist progression, which has been real but relatively weak across the Union as a whole is especially strong in some countries. The right-wing and left-wing populists both criticise the elites deemed to be incompetent, corrupt and deaf to the problems experienced by the populations, they question plurality, representation and intermediary organisations, the value given to the national (or regional dimensions in Italy, Belgium and Spain) and they are hostile to the European Union and more widely to globalisation which Brussels is seen as being a vector. Although populism on the far left focuses its attacks on Brussels socio-economic policy, those on the right focus more on a rejection of immigration including when it involves citizens from the EU, notably Central and Eastern Europe and more precisely Romania and Bulgaria.

In all the populists on the right won MEP seats in 13 countries, which is just under half of the EU Member States. They won more than 20% of the vote in three countries where they came out ahead (UK, Denmark and France).

With 26.6% of the vote the Danish People's Party (DF) beat the Social Democratic Party (SD) of Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (19.1%). The question of the Welfare State, and notably the social advantages enjoyed by (non-Danish) citizens was at the heart of the campaign in this country, which, in the end, benefited the party led by Pia Kjaersgaard. The DF, which supports the re-introduction of border checks is demanding a dispensation so that the Danish Parliament can decide alone about the conditions governing the attribution of social aid.

In Denmark, the European elections traditionally favour eurosceptic movements (People's Movement against the European Union, F mod EU). This party won 8.1% of the vote but the eurosceptics seems to have preferred to vote for a party which is against the Union but more soundly established in the heart of national political life. Finally the escapades of former Prime Minister (2009-2011) Lars Lokke Rasmussen (Liberal Party, V), accused of spending sumptuous sums of money certainly did not help the right-wing. According to a post-electoral poll 2/3 of the vote won by the populists on 25th May came from the Liberal Party.

The situation was the same in the UK where the populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) which focused its electoral campaign on the rejection of immigrants from the Eastern part of the Union, notably from Romania and Bulgaria, won 26.7% of the vote i.e. +10,6 points in comparison with 2009. The UK was one of the rare EU States to have allowed the free movement of citizens from the 10 new Member States in 2004, a choice which the country in full boom has amply taken advantage of. Many Britons are not against people coming from eastern Europe whom they consider to be formidable competitors on the job market and whom they accuse of wanting to take advantage of the kingdom's social advantages.

In the UK, Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative Party (23.3%) was just beaten by the Labour Party (24.7%). It is the first time since 1918 that a national election was won by a party other than the Tories or Labour.

In France, the main right-wing party, a Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) (20.7%), was beaten by the

Front national (FN), which won 24.9% of the vote, ie +18,6 points against 2009. The result achieved by the FN led by Marine Le Pen seems to be as much, if not more, the collapse of the government parties (notably the Socialist Party) than a success for the FN in its own right. It does however highlight the true mistrust of the French population regarding the political classes and a rise in concern about the country's future.

The populists won more than 10% of the vote in five other countries (19.7% in Austria, 14.6% in Hungary, 13.2% in the Netherlands, 12.9% in Finland and 11% in Poland) and less than 10% in Sweden (9,7%), Greece (9,3%), Belgium (6,9%), Italy (6,1%), Bulgaria (5,9%) and in Slovenia (4%).

The populist left won seats in 10 countries. They won 32.7% in Greece (Radical Left Coalition, SYRIZA and the Communist Party, KKE). Alexis Tsipras's party which undertook a campaign against the austerity policy came out ahead of New Democracy (ND) led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (22,7%). The government left, Elia (Olive Tree) won only 8%.

The populist left won more than 10% of the vote in Spain (17.8%) (with the list Podemos (We can) which took up the programme set out by the Indignados and condemns the austerity measures along with the Izquierda unida (IU)), in Portugal (17,1%), in Ireland (17%) and in Czech Republic (10.9%). They won 9.6% in the Netherlands, 7.4% in Germany, 6.3% in France, 6.3% in Sweden and 5.7% in Luxembourg.

In this election as in the previous ones of the same kind the protest vote is undeniably more often one for the right than for the left.

The progression of the populists was greater in Western Europe ie in 15 of the older Member States than in the East where these parties are clearly declining (the Movement for a Better Hungary achieved a comparable result to the one it did five years ago). Some like Ataka (A) in Bulgaria, the Grand Romania Party (PRM) and the National Slovakian Party (SNS) won no seats.

Recent events in Ukraine probably strengthened the government parties in this area of Europe where Russian military manoeuvres are worrying the populations and where the threat of invasion by Moscow is felt more strongly than elsewhere. This is most evident

in Latvia and even in Poland. The Civic Platform (PO) of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk presented itself as the defender of Ukrainian interests in Europe and the guarantor of security in Poland, with its campaign slogan being "A strong Poland in a safe Europe".

The populists were on the decline in Belgium where the New Flemish Alliance (NV-A) continued to syphon off votes from the Vlaams Belang (VB) and in the Netherlands where the Freedom Party (PVV) led by Geert Wilders lost 3.7 points in comparison with 2009. Some of the PVV's electorate did not seem to understand the alliance of its leaders with the FN.

The usual explanation for the rise in populism being that of the economic crisis seems to be correct as far as the far left is concerned, which achieved its highest results in three countries which have been obliged ask for international aid (Greece, Portugal and Ireland) and in Spain. Except for France the populist right won a majority of their votes in the North of the EU (UK, Denmark, Austria, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden) which have low unemployment rates and a relatively satisfactory economic situation. Voters in these countries undoubtedly expressed their concern about the future of their way of life, their values in an increasingly globalised world.

Part of the populist right led by FN leader Marine Le Pen said they wanted to form a group in the European Parliament. To do this they have to rally a minimum of 25 MEPs by 1st July who have to come from at least a quarter of the Member States (i.e. 7 countries). The first condition has now been fulfilled since the FN alone won 24 seats. The second condition will be more difficult to achieve.

### Reality of the protest vote

The European elections are organised at different moments in the national electoral cycles in each of the Member States. These elections which are often intermediary and often deemed as secondary often give the rise to the expression of discontent on the part of some of the electorate and are sometimes used by the latter to punish the government in office. In 2009 voters sanctioned the power in office in 10 of the 27 Member States. In 2014 voters did the same in 12 Member States.

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The protest vote was particularly strong - in France where President François Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) achieved the weakest result in its history in a national election (13.9%), but also in Bulgaria, Portugal, UK, Slovenia and in Sweden, and to a lesser degree in Denmark and Greece.

**Protest vote table Tableau in the European elections 22nd-25th May 2014**

(in red, the States that witnessed a protest vote)

	Political colour of country	Political party that won in the European elections 2014
<b>Germany</b>	Coalition Right-Left	Right
<b>Austria</b>	Coalition Left-Right	Right
<b>Belgium</b>	Coalition Left-Right	Right
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Left	Right
<b>Cyprus</b>	Right	Right
<b>Croatia</b>	Left	Right
<b>Denmark</b>	Left	Populist Right
<b>Spain</b>	Right	Right
<b>Estonia</b>	Right	Right
<b>Finland</b>	Coalition Right-Left	Right
<b>France</b>	Left	Populist Right
<b>Greece</b>	Coalition Right-Left	Populist Left
<b>Hungary</b>	Right	Right
<b>Ireland</b>	Right	Right
<b>Italy</b>	Coalition Left-Right	Left
<b>Latvia</b>	Right	Right
<b>Lithuania</b>	Left	Left
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Coalition Right-Left	Right
<b>Malta</b>	Left	Left
<b>Netherlands</b>	Coalition Right-Left	Right
<b>Poland</b>	Right	Right
<b>Portugal</b>	Right	Left
<b>Rep Czech</b>	Coalition Left-Populist	Populist
<b>Romania</b>	Coalition Left-Right	Left
<b>UK</b>	Right	Populist Right
<b>Slovakia</b>	Left	Left
<b>Slovenia</b>	Left	Right
<b>Sweden</b>	Right	Left

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Finally the European elections enabled various parties to send MEPs to Strasbourg – regionalists or positioned on one specific issue like the Animals party (PvdD) in the Netherlands or Feminist Initiative (FI) in Sweden – and new parties to make their debut in the European Parliament. Hence the Five Stars Movement (M5s) led by Beppe Grillo (21.1%), which adopts a left and right wing populist stance, remaining politically indefinable today won 17 seats or the Alternative for Germany

(AFD) led by Bernd Lucke, who supports doing away with the euro and the relinquishment of all financial aid to euro zone countries which make no effort to manage their government finances won 7 seats.

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