



# EUROPEAN ELECTIONS REVIEW 2019

## NEW IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

### POLLING DATA

We look at the latest aggregate [polling data](#) to try and make sense of the rise of far-right parties at the next elections;

### EPP AND ALDE

We take a look at what went on at the [EPP and ALDE conferences](#);

### OUR EXPERTS

Our experts and colleagues from our Fipra Network in [France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland](#) and the [Netherlands](#), give us a run-down of the latest developments in their Member States in the lead up to next year's European Parliament elections in May;

### FIPRA INTERVIEW

Our Partner Willem Vriesendorp sits down with Volt Founder and President Andrea Venzon in our first [Fipra Interview](#), where Andrea tells us more about the new grassroots movement;

**NOVEMBER 2018**

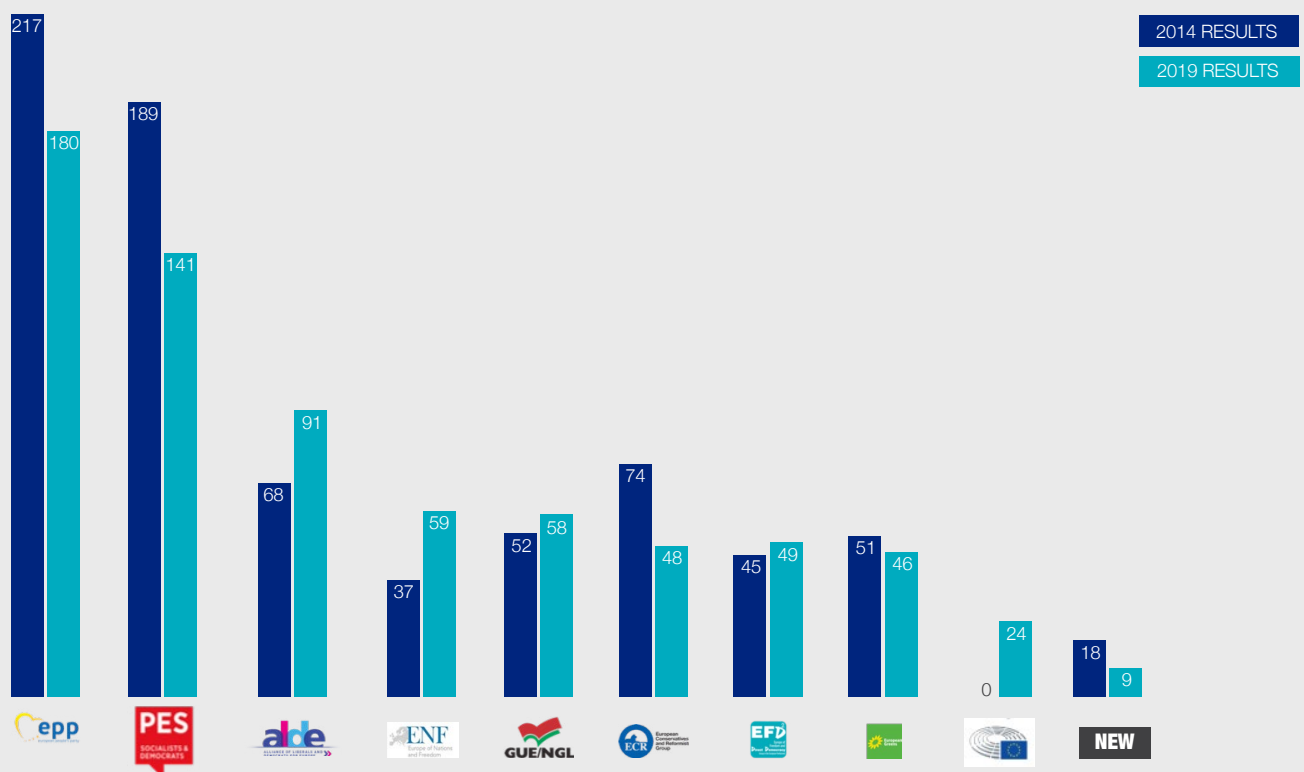
# POLLING

## POLLING ANALYSIS

Polling shows that the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES) are still on track to win next year's elections but with smaller margins than in the past, with the EPP expected to win 180, down from 217, and the PES to win 141, down from 189. If smaller and more radical parties from both the left and right make the gains projected, it will send a warning message to Member State governments across the Union.

Some polls show that Eurosceptic parties may make up to 30% of the chamber and that European far-right will place fourth next May. The Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) needs a threshold of 25 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from seven different Member States needed to form an official grouping and the polling suggests they could do much better, moving from 34 to 59 seats. Radical right-wing parties could secure 26 seats from Italy's Lega and 20 seats from France's Rassemblement Nationale (RN). Earlier this month, the Rassemblement Nationale overtook Macron's La Republique En Marche (LaREM) for the first time since the election of the liberal president, a clear sign of his declining popularity. An increased share for the ENF could have a negative impact on the functioning of the European Parliament, as historically the party has been subject to funding scandals and has been reluctant to cooperate with other groupings.

The French La Republique En Marche has announced it will co-operate with the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), which will make it the third largest grouping in the European Parliament with 91 members. The progressive group may also ally with the European Greens to form a new pro-EU block in the Parliament. The Greens are expected to drop by six seats to 46 members despite a good showing in Belgian and German regional election.



# PARTY CONFERENCES

## EPP CONGRESS

The EPP Party held its congress on November 7th, featuring a landslide victory for the German Manfred Weber in the race to the EU top job. Unsurprisingly, Stubb and Weber debated and exchanged opinions in a very peaceful and friendly way - both keeping in mind the need to show a unified EPP party.

As we might have expected, the tone got less friendly in the Congress when Macron was mentioned. The newly elected Lead Candidate for the EPP Party had strong words against the French President and on his visions of the EU. Several participants slashed the ALDE's recent refusal to elect a Spitzenkandidat process.



While we can't neglect Weber's impressive approval rates within his own family, his lack of governmental experience and the recent turmoil faced by his national party are dragging behind his candidacy. Michel Barnier's name is still circulating as an alternative but the Frenchman missed the opportunity to run as a lead candidate, complicating his appointment as president of the European Commission.

While his direct contender Alexander Stubb faced a consequent defeat, he most probably ensured himself a comfortable seat in the next College of Commissioner. Rumours has it that the Finnish might have a chance in leading the Digital Directorate in the next legislation, as he has proved to the public his knowledge on technologies.

**STUBB AND WEBER DEBATED AND EXCHANGED OPINIONS IN A VERY PEACEFUL AND FRIENDLY WAY - BOTH KEEPING IN MIND THE NEED TO SHOW A UNIFIED EPP PARTY.**

# PARTY CONFERENCES

## ALDE CONGRESS

The ALDE Party held its congress on November 8th, featuring an official coalition with La République En Marche (LaREM) and a Manifesto to guide the next political priorities of the liberal family. With regards to the Spitzenkandidaten process, liberals announced they will suggest a list of nine candidates, in a bid to challenge the EPP and S&D parties, which have already appointed their lead candidates.

While Macron's people will considerably strengthen the liberal group in the European Parliament, the French political movement. French officials from LaREM are keen to keep doors open to more alliances, insisting that they will collaborate with the ALDE group, and not join the ALDE Party itself.

As polls place En Marche and Ciudadanos as biggest party of the ALDE Group next year, speculations say that they will most probably suggest a new leader to replace Guy Verhofstadt.

Once a vocal defender of the Spitzenkandidat process, the ALDE party revisited its positions. The liberal family will suggest a list of nine candidates on February to the Council, most probably lead by the current figures of Vera Jourova and Margrethe Vestager. By proposing nine candidates, the ALDE party increases the chances to see one of its favorites heading the Parliament, Council or Commission presidency.



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# NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS STATES



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### THE ELECTIONS' DYNAMIC IS EMERGING BUT REMAINS BLURRY

To win this election, La Republique En Marche is relying on President Macron's ability to move lines and position himself at the centre of the debate. His strategy is to draw the battle lines clearly between the camp of democrats/progressives, led by him, and populists/Eurosceptics, led in particular by the Hungarian Viktor Orban, the Italian Matteo Salvini and the French Marine Le Pen.

Questions involving LaREM alliances remain unanswered. At the European level, although the centrist party ALDE and the President's party LaREM announced a coalition, Emmanuel Macron is still reaching out to several Europhiles parties across Europe to try and form a coalition extended to social-democrats at large. The collapse of the two historic major parties (Parti Socialiste et Les Républicains) during the elections last year gives Emmanuel Macron the opportunity to try and expand his electorate to embrace Europhiles from both the center-right and the center-left.

Eurosceptic parties will benefit from the current weakness of the traditional parties. This is indeed the first time that both LR and PS will be running in the European elections in such an anaemic condition with no heavyweights being fielded. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and La France Insoumise (FI) may prove the real challenger to Emmanuel Macron. Taking advantage of the collapse of the Socialist Party, they may well occupy the political space as the social opposition to the Government and the European Commission.

The Rassemblement National (RN), is counting on the rise of nationalism and Euroscepticism in several countries (Italy, Poland, Hungary, Netherlands...), to enhance their previous score (25% in 2014) and build an influential group in the European Parliament. Although not very organized at the moment, RN nonetheless still has the support of around 20% of the French electorate.



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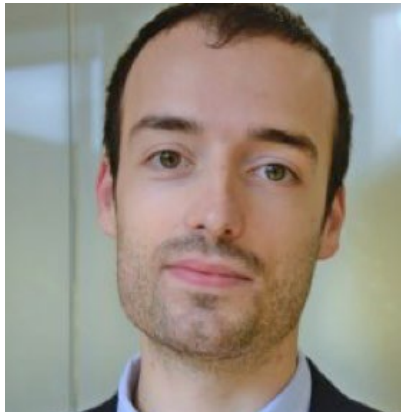


### THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE MERKEL ERA

Campaigners for a new leader to head the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party -- now chaired by German Chancellor Angela Merkel -- have little time left to line up delegates before the party conference in Hamburg 6-8 December. The race pits Merkel's choice of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer against two determined opponents of the current chancellor: Friedrich Merz and Jens Spahn. The outcome of the race between the three might well determine the success of the right-wing AfD at the European Parliament elections in May 2019.

Merz supports an ever-closer union for the EU, favours a European army and says Germany is the biggest winner from the existence of the EU. His opponent, Health Minister Jens Spahn, is less enthusiastic about EU integration than Merz. Both Merz and Spahn are trying to take a bite out of the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and its anti-migrant views by distancing themselves from Merkel's once-tolerant approach. By contrast, Kramp-Karrenbauer largely represents the status quo and, like Merz, is pro-European and favours a European Army.

Justice and Consumer Protection Minister Katarina Barley is dropping out of Merkel's cabinet to run as the lead candidate of the German Social Democrats (SPD) European list. The Greens have already chosen as the leaders of their campaign two members of the European Parliament, Ska Keller and Sven Giegold. The right-wing, populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) is again putting forward European Parliamentarian Jörg Muethen to help promote its message against migrants and refugees, a story which has resonated with voters. Unlike some of the other right-wing populist parties, Muethen and most other candidates of the AfD favour keeping Germany within the EU. However, neither AfD nor the German liberal Democrats (the Free Democratic Party, or FDP), will act until early next year to put finishing touches on their platforms.



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### WILL THE YELLOW-GREEN COALITION TIGHTEN ITS GRIP?

Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini declared he may consider running for European Commission Presidency. "It's true, friends from different European countries have asked me, suggested it," he told the Italian press. "It is nice that they see me as a point of reference for the people's defence, even outside Italy". With the League polling around 30%, in fact, the party can be expected to gain a significant slice of Italy's 76 seats at the European Parliament.

While the EU's top job may be beyond reach for the far-right Interior Minister (a possibility made even less plausible by the Spitzenkandidat process), prospects of a good performance may help him build bridges across EU capitals with like-minded leaders, starting from Marine Le Pen.

Within the Democratic Party, former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi may also seize an opportunity. After having considered running for the Commission Presidency, Renzi had to downsize his ambition in the wake of poor election results. In September Renzi co-signed the pro-European manifesto along with En Marche! and other European leaders, and he may well join their ranks as a heavyweight MEP.

The crisis the Democratic Party (PD) is currently undergoing, however, makes these moves tenuous and to some extent subject to changing dynamics within the party. The PD congress is expected to elect a new Party Secretary on March 3rd, 2019.

The ruling Five Star Movement, meanwhile, is seemingly holding on its public support (polling around 28-30%, though losing a few percentage points from its record high of 32.7%). The leader Luigi Di Maio talked about a 'new European group', although it remains to be seen whether and how they may prove a competitive force in European political space (possibly outside of the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy).



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### A EUROPEAN WAVE AGAINST PIS

Poland will be electing 52 Members of the European Parliament on Sunday 26th of May. The electoral system is rather complicated as voters in the 13 constituencies vote from an open candidate list and can therefore choose the person they wish from the list. This effectively means that candidates from the same party compete within their own lists, making the result of the elections unpredictable. There also exists a threshold of 5% for parties to secure seats.

Poland currently has a strong political conflict between the ruling party PIS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc – ECR Group) and other smaller parties which oppose to the nationalist government, effectively making the situation quite unique in Europe. There is speculation that the majority of the pro-European opposition will be able to run united in opposition to PiS, who is being accused of preparations for a Polexit.

The four main opposition parties are considering a common list: PO (Platforma Obywatelska -EPP), PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe - EPP), the new liberal party Nowoczesna (ALDE), SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – S&D). Negotiations are expected to be finalised by January 2019. This process is strongly supported by Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, whom opinion polls show to be the most popular and trusted Polish politician today.





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### **AHEAD OF THE GAME**

Over the past month, Dutch political parties have made progress in the lead up to next year's Parliamentary elections. On November 24th the final version of the VDD (ALDE) election programme was adopted at the party's congress. The Liberal Conservatives presented a strikingly pro-Europe programme, something which contrasts their previous electoral programmes for the European elections.

The Christian Democrats (EPP) also released their programme, which puts an emphasis on giving the EU autonomy on dossiers that "evidently lead to better result" if enacted on the EU level. Their programme also stresses the need to make clear arrangements on when countries can work together on dossiers. The CDA also stressed that matters of sustainability, the environment and on the transition to cleaner energy, should increasingly be considered when discussing (economic) wealth. The final candidates will be presented at the party congress on February 2019.

The candidate list for the PvdA (Social Democrats) was presented on November 29th. Also, this month, Frans Timmermans was officially nominated as Spitzenkandidat for the Social Democrats group on November 6th.

Former MEP Derk Jan Eppink was nominated as the leader of radical right-wing Forum voor Democratie. Eppink is familiar with European politics as he served as an MEP and worked as a speech writer for Commissioner Frits Bolkestein. Eppink has been connected to the conservative think tank London Center for Political Research and his party Forum voor Democratie, is a right-wing populist party which – like the PVV- is pro "Nexit."



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### A STRONGER SPAIN

Pedro Sanchez sees Brexit as an opportunity for Spain. In the Prime Minister's opinion, Brexit would allow Spain to climb over several positions within the hierarchy of Member States in the European Union. This, coupled with the budgetary crisis in Italy, reinforces the Prime Minister's opinion that Spain can improve its representation with the European Commission, and he is putting his trust in Josep Borrell, the current Foreign Affairs Ministers, to secure a vice-presidency. To do so, Sanchez plans to place Borrell as Number 1 on the list of candidates for the socialists in the European elections of 26 May 2019.

Borrell already headed the socialist candidacy in the European elections of 2004 and was the president of the European Parliament between 2004 and 2007, after which he chaired the European University Institute, based in Florence. Another of the names being considered for the Socialist list by Pedro Sanchez is the current Finance Minister, Nadia Calviño. The Prime Minister values her knowledge and her contacts with Brussels. Sanchez is convinced that her independence from the party will give her an advantage in the race and will allow her to position herself as a worthy replacement to Miguel Arias Cañete's role as Energy Commissioner within the College of Commissioners.

In the Partido Popular (EPP), MEP Esteban González Pons, who is currently the PP spokesman in the European Parliament, is best placed to lead the conservative list, although party leader Pablo Casado has not yet confirmed his candidacy. With regards to the Catalan nationalists, the president of the nationalist party ERC ("Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya") has rejected the offer made by the former Catalan Premier and exiled politician Carles Puigdemont to jointly run in the European elections, with himself as top of the list. Oriol Junqueras, who is currently in prison for treason, will be the head of the list for ERC, and will run separately from Puidgemont.

# FIPRA INTERVIEW

OUR PARTNER WILLEM VRIESENDROOP SITS DOWN IN OUR FIRST FIPRA INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA VENZON - FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT VOLT EUROPE



What is Volt? **VOLT**

Volt is the first pan-European party to campaign for the upcoming EP elections. Volt is a progressive movement that stands for a new and inclusive way of doing politics and that wants to bring real change to all European citizens. We speak on behalf of the Erasmus generation – but not only – who think that we as Europeans have more in common than what separates us.

A new pan-European approach is needed to overcome current and future challenges, such as - among many others - climate change, economic inequality, migration, international conflict, terrorism, and the impact of the technological revolution on our jobs. National parties are powerless in dealing with these challenges because they go beyond national borders and need to be tackled by all Europeans, acting as one. **As a transnational party, we believe we can help unite the European people**, create a shared vision and understanding, exchange good practices across the continent and come up with effective policies together.

## Why did you start it?

I felt that there was a need for a pan-European bottom-up answer to the challenges and opportunities of our time that are by definition cross border in nature, looking at migration and climate change. I also believe that change from within the establishment goes too slow. If you look at the challenges ahead, we need to act now. **Working as a management consultant I felt that I could do only so much so I started this – as a start-up really.**

On 29 March 2017, when article 50 was triggered, the team set up a first Facebook page and started challenging the status quo. Without funds, big names, or political endorsements, Volt has now grown into a political movement with thousands of members in every European country.

## What do you hope to achieve?

Our first political target is the European elections of 2019 and we aim to run for these elections in at least seven European countries. Why seven? Because if the movement manages to elect 25 MEPs out of seven European countries, it will be able to form the first united and transnational party in the European Parliament - something that no one has ever achieved in the history of this continent! **After the European elections, Volt will start campaigning also for national and local elections**, all-over the continent and beyond. And, if we do not get any seats in the EP this time, we will campaign at other levels; and we have at least started a movement. A new way of doing politics, for a new millennium.