



2019 European Elections Review

October 2018

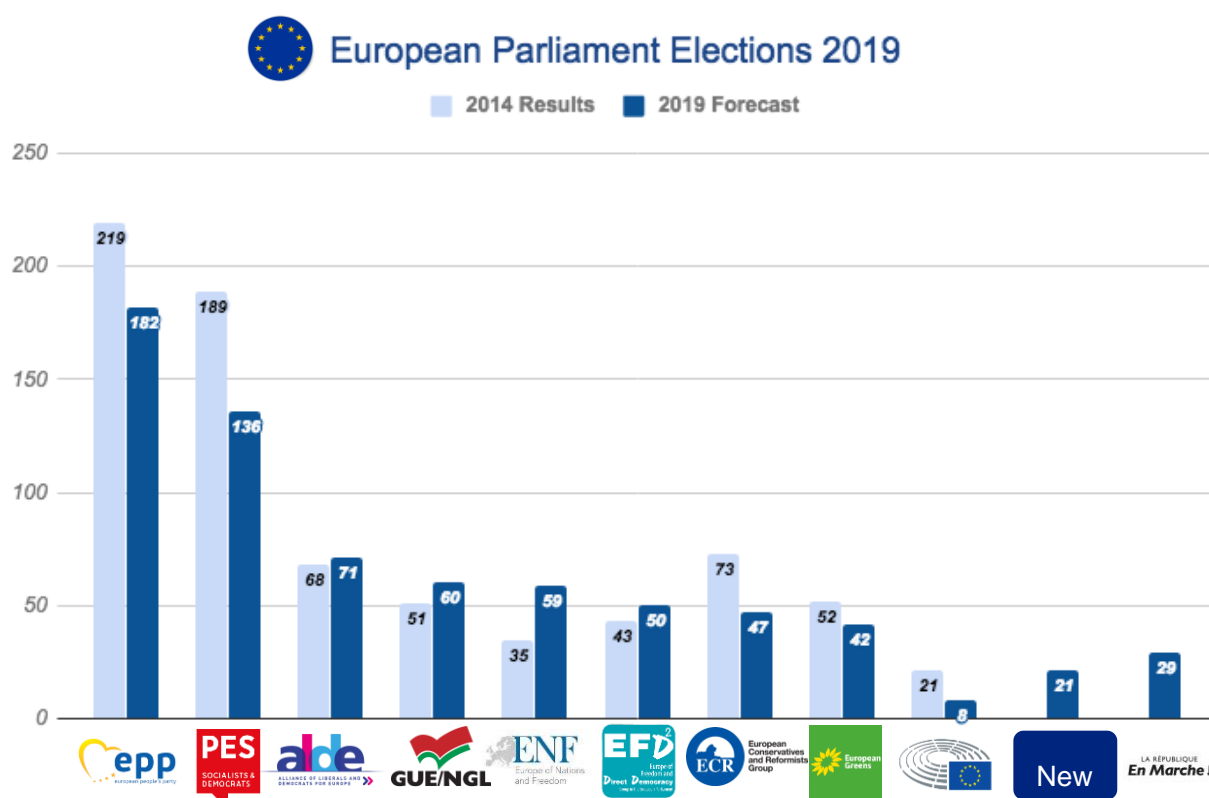


NEW IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- This month, we look at [aggregate polling data](#) to try and predict the composition of the new Parliament. In May 2019, while we'll see the entry of new parties and the strengthening of the [far right](#), the European People's Party and Party of European Socialists are predicted to retain their positions as first and second largest parties respectively.
- As the European party conferences draw nearer, the race for the Commission Presidency is well underway. The controversial [Spitzenkandidat](#) procedure continues to attract attention and controversy as parties and Member States voice their opposition to the process. Meanwhile, the European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists have each announced two candidates who will face each other at their respective conferences.
- Our Fipra Units in the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain provide us with their [insights](#) on their country's national politics leading up to next year's European elections.
- We also look at what the new Parliamentary composition might do to the appointment of [Rapporteurs](#), what the electoral [results](#) in Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and Poland mean for next year's Europe-wide vote, and give you the latest news on the next year's loose cannon: [the Macron Element](#).

POLLING ANALYSIS AND FORECAST

The 2019 European Parliament Elections are set to be defined by the entry of new parties and the rise of the populist radical right as a reaction to widespread voter discontent. However, current polls predict that they will be unable to topple established parties, which are likely to hold on to leading spots.



Early estimates based on national election results and aggregate polling data ¹ paint a now-familiar picture. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) are set to suffer a decline of 37 seats for a new total of 182 and a far steeper loss of 53 seats is predicted for the Party of European Socialists (PES), leaving them with a new total of just 136. Nevertheless, despite the almost dooms-day rhetoric these predictions have elicited from the press, it is important to note that the EPP and PES are set to retain their positions as the largest factions in the European Parliament.

The traditional parties' current problems follow on the collapse of their traditional left and right member parties in France, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands and most notably, Germany. PES in particular is facing voter backlash after a tepid response from European centre-left governments to the austerity drive which followed the 2008 financial crisis. This has led voters to turn *en masse* to parties that are promising novel solutions, including Italy's Five Star Movement, France's En Marche, Spain's Podemos and the Czech Republic's Ano 2011.

¹ Aggregate polling data provided by Pollofpolls.eu who offer aggregated polling data for the EU Elections.

New Players

As large numbers of European citizens turn away from mainstream politics, new movements and parties which have in the past remained on the fringes of the political spectrum may secure enough seats to become influential voices in the new legislature.

ALDE and En Marche

French President Emmanuel Macron's 'En Marche' movement, which in 2017 swept the French presidential and legislative elections, looks on track secure up to 29 seats in the European Parliament. En Marche has yet to formally announce its intentions, but if the movement were to ally itself with the liberal centrist ALDE party it would boost that faction's numbers in the new Parliament from a projected 71 to 90 seats, becoming a powerful third force alongside the EPP and PES parties. However, as ALDE is most popular in small EU countries such as Denmark, Luxembourg and Estonia, its chances of overtaking the traditional parties remain slim.

Rise of the Far Right

Most polls suggest the far right will make large gains, in part because of the success of Italy's Lega party, which took de facto control of the country following the Italian elections in March 2018. The Europe for Nations and Freedoms Party (ENF), home to France's Marine Le Pen and her Rassemblement National, Austria's FPÖ and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom, may gain 24 new seats, which would secure it a significant 59 seats in the chamber.

Under this scenario, ENF would have enough MEPs to become a potentially destabilizing force in the Parliament as it pushes to restore the sovereignty of Member States and decrease the power of the EU's institutions. Its strength would be further enhanced if it can manage to successfully co-operate with other parties which have displayed varying levels of Euroscepticism and criticism of EU institution in the past. These might include the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR) and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), which together with ENF would make up for one-fifth of the new European Parliament. However, this assumes a strong showing from ECR and EFDD, which, with Brexit drawing ever closer, is far from certain at this early stage.




























Brexit Losers: New Composition of the European Parliament

When Britain leaves the European Union in March 2019, 73 seats European Parliament seats currently held by UK representatives will be left vacant. In response, the European Parliament divided these seats among Member States in January according to the chart on the following page.

End of the road for EFDD?

Brexit's impact on the future Parliament's composition is further enhanced by the reshuffle in political power as the ECR loses 18 of its UK Conservative MEPs and the EFDD loses 16 of its UKIP representatives. The EFDD in particular, currently mostly made up of Nigel Farage's UKIP MEPs and representatives from Italy's Five Star Movement, might be out of the race before it starts. The Five Star Five Movement recently announced that the party may create a new movement at the European level, and that if they see no enthusiasm for this from other European political forces they would be willing to join their coalition partner in the Italian national government, Lega Nord, in the ENF party at EU level.

Members of the European Parliament 705 (-46)

 DE 96	 EL 21	 IE 13 (+2)
 FR 79 (+5)	 HU 21	 HR 12 (+1)
 IT 76 (+3)	 PT 21	 LT 11
 ES 59 (+5)	 SE 21 (+1)	 LV 8
 PL 52 (+1)	 AU 19 (+1)	 SI 8
 RO 33 (+1)	 BG 17	 EE 7 (+1)
 NL 29 (+3)	 DK 14 (+1)	 CY 6
 BE 21	 SK 14 (+1)	 LX 6
 CZ 21	 FI 14 (+1)	 MT 6
 UK (-75)		

SPITZENKANDIDATEN

The Spitzenkandidaten process

The main parties' race to select their Spitzenkandidat is in full swing with nominations for party lead candidates coming from all ends of the political spectrum. Ultimately, it will be the heads of EU Member States who appoint the next President of the European Commission, but the European Parliament is pushing hard for continued adherence to the Spitzenkandidat process it introduced in the 2014 elections. This process sees the bloc's main political parties put forward candidates in an attempt to bring the top Commission appointment in line with the results of the European Parliament elections.

Top candidates in the EPP

In the lead-up to the EPP Conference on 8 November, two centre-right candidates have officially announced their candidacy: Manfred Weber (CDU, Germany) and Alexander Stubb (Kokoomus, Finland). The latter will run his campaign on a platform dedicated to the “Next Generation of Europe”, focusing on nine main points, among them the defense of European values, leadership of the digital revolution, climate change, and more effective management of migration.

While Stubb presents himself as younger, new face for the centre-right, this might be a race in name only. Manfred Weber has already received the support of eight heads of state, among them Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and is the favourite to win. Weber’s party however, the Bavarian CSU, took a hard defeat at the ballot box at the 14 October regional elections, so it remains to be seen whether this will affect his position as favourite in the party.

Top candidates in the PES

On the Social Democratic front two sitting Commissioners have recently announced their candidacy. Vice-president and Commissioner for Better Regulation Frans Timmermans announced his candidacy for the S&D lead candidate in mid-October. Timmermans is a member of the Dutch Social democratic PvdA, and his chances will suffer from that party’s stinging loss in the Netherlands’ national elections last year.

Maroš Šefčovič, Slovak Commission vice-president for the Energy Union, announced his bid last month with a promise to bridge the gap between East and West. The PES Spitzenkandidat will be announced at the party’s conference in Lisbon on 7-8 December, however there are rumours that Šefčovič is already considering stepping down from the race.

Top candidates in the far-right

The rise of the far right in the 2019 Parliamentary Elections has raised the possibility that in countries such as Italy and France, Eurosceptic parties emerge as their country’s most influential voice at EU level. Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Lega Nord Leader Matteo Salvini and the leader of France’s Rassemblement National, Marine Le Pen, launched their election campaign in early October, promising to bring about a ‘common-sense revolution’ that would empower the EU’s nation-states.

Salvini has also recently expressed his intention to run for the position of ENF Spitzenkandidat. While his claims of running the Commission might be taken seriously by his fellow party supporters, Salvini has little chance of becoming the Commission’s next President as his political group is not strong enough.

ALDE and the opposition to the process

The European Parliament’s third grouping ALDE is amongst the parties who fervently oppose the Spitzenkandidat process. Commissioner Margarethe Vestager and Party Leader Guy Verhofstadt have spoken against the process as it favours the largest parties and effectively limits the post of Commission President to mainstream parties. Furthermore, the majority of the EU28, including French President Emmanuel Macron as well as the leaders of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia have voiced opposition to the process.



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Social Democrats to name Justice Minister as lead EU Elections candidate in surprise move

The German Federal Minister of Justice and Consumer Protection, Katarina Barley, will likely give up her influential role in Merkel's cabinet to become the Social Democrats' SPD (S&D) lead candidate for the European elections taking place in May 2019.

She will be officially nominated at the SPD's party convention in December. This is a surprising move, which will force the longstanding Member of the European Parliament Udo Bullmann, who only took up the position of group leader of the European Socialist & Democrats Alliance in the European Parliament earlier this year, into the second row.

Barley, who served as the SPD's Secretary-General from June 2017 until March 2018, belongs to the left wing of the SPD. As Minister of Justice, she positioned herself as a supporter of strict data protection and consumer rights in the digital sphere, sharply criticising US IT companies earlier this year following the Cambridge Analytica scandal. It is not yet clear who will follow her as German Justice Minister.



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National elections fallout overshadows European Parliament Elections

It is fair to say that the first league of leading Spanish policymakers does not yet have the European elections on their radar. The new government under the Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, voted into office only in June 2018, is currently focused on maintaining its winning streak ahead of the municipal and regional elections which coincide with those of the European Parliament, as well as avoiding an early national election. Meanwhile, the new opposition leader of the centre-right People's Party (PP), Pablo Casado, who is replacing former prime-minister Rajoy, is fully pre-occupied with the reorganization and reform of his party following their defeat at the ballot box a couple of months ago.

However, the second league of Spanish politicians is taking the initiative and setting up positions ahead of the elections. Most notably, current PP spokesman in the European Parliament, Esteban González Pons, aims to take over the EPP presidency from Commission President hopeful Manfred Weber (Germany).

On the left, Spanish MP Pablo Bustinduy is likely to head the European elections list of the extreme left anti-establishment party, Podemos, building on his role as the party's Secretary of International Relations and Foreign Affairs spokesman in the Spanish Parliament. Podemos is a leading player within a leftist electoral alliance called "list of unity and consensus", which will also include Esther Sanz, party leader and social worker, Marco Candela, current Spanish MP representing the Madrid region and Patricia Caro, a psychologist specialized in studies on sexual discrimination and the Romani people.



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Political personnel changes ahead of the European Parliament elections

Malik Azmani is the new leader on the list of the Liberal Conservatives VVD (ALDE). While VVD politicians traditionally emphasise the importance of the Single Market and favour intergovernmental cooperation, Azmani surprised observers in a recent interview by choosing to instead highlight the need for strong EU leadership on security issues.

Long-standing MEP Bas Eikhout will be the frontrunner of the Dutch Greens (Greens/EFA) in the European Parliament elections.

The Christian Democrats CDA (EPP) have appointed long-standing MEP Esther de Lange to lead their party's list for the European Elections. De Lange has held a seat in the European Parliament since 2007. She is the current leader of her delegation and also an EPP Vice Chair.

Meanwhile, Sophia in 't Veld MEP has emerged victorious from the Liberal Democrats D66 (ALDE) internal leadership elections to select the party's front-runner for the European elections, beating her MEP colleague Marietje Schaake. Schaake had previously announced that she would only run for re-election if voted as her party's front runner. Other D66 candidates can be elected until 21 January 2019.

Current European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans confirmed on 10 October that he will be both the front runner of the country's Social Democrats PvdA (S&D) and the European Socialist party (PES) Spitzenkandidat for the elections. Paul Tang, who was until then the PvdA's likely front runner, withdrew his candidacy but confirmed his ambition to become a MEP representing the PvdA.

Finally, current MEPs Hans van Baalen (VVD/ ALDE), Gert-Jan Gerbrandy (D66/ ALDE) and Lambert Van Nistelrooij (CDA/EPP) have confirmed that they will not seek re-election.

Insights from recent elections

October saw national, local and regional elections held in several EU member states and their results provide interesting insights for the upcoming European Elections. Bavarian citizens went to the polls, Belgium and Poland held local elections and voters in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg headed to the ballots to choose a new government.

Aside from being held at different levels, these four elections share strong common elements in the defeat of historically well-established right and left political parties. In contrast, the Green parties in Belgium, Bavaria and Luxembourg all reached historical high levels of support, shaking up ruling coalitions in their respective constituencies. In Poland, although the conservative Law and Justice party achieved first place in the elections their support plummeted and their future in next year's Parliamentary elections is now in doubt against a backdrop of continuing tensions with the European Union on rule of law breaches.

The outcome of these elections foreshadows what promises to be an interesting run-up to the 2019 European elections. Based on the symbolic value of the EU ballots, often considered second-tier elections, citizens might be tempted to act on their frustration at the expenses of historical left and right political parties.

Furthermore, the outcome of some of these elections might also hamper the efforts of some Spitzenkandidaten. Manfred Weber's candidacy for the European Commission presidency in particular might be weakened by his CSU party's stinging losses in Bavaria.

Macron Element

The French President is feeding speculations of an alliance with the ALDE group in the European Parliament after he met with the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in October. Rumours has it that both head of states have reached a tentative agreement on uniting their forces ahead of the next EU elections, in a bid to challenge the well-established S&D and EPP political groups.

The heads of state will campaign together under a single platform which in turn would be officialized based on the election outcome. The objective is to gather enough progressive political parties to form the second-largest group in the European Parliament behind the EPP.

Still, this agreement is not good omen for current ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt. Macron's vision of a new progressive Europe does not match Verhofstadt's profile and he is seen by the French President as a figure of the old world. The former Belgian prime minister may well find himself sidelined just as his party is set to achieve historic levels of influence in the next European Parliament.

Unfinished business

The European Parliament is working full-speed to complete as many reports and trilogues as possible before the next political cycle. The new Parliament will pick up legislation which was been voted on, but measures still in committees will lapse. However, the Parliament president and group leaders may decide, on a file-by-file basis, to continue work on legislation which was in committee.

Appointments of Rapporteurs

It is likely that next year's European Elections will see a disproportionately large share of first-time MEPs entering the Parliament. If this materialises, the pool of Parliamentarians with experience in the EU legislative process and who can therefore be drawn upon to fill the role of Rapporteur on key files may shrink dramatically. This would in turn impact the nature of the Parliament's Reports, as MEPs who may not have been considered for Rapporteur on sensitive files in the past could find themselves appointed due the scarcity in experienced hands.

More about Rapporteurs

Rapporteurs guide legislation through committees and the legislative process and are chosen through a complex system largely based on the power of parties in committees. While rapporteurs are required to reflect the common committee position on a file, they benefit from holding valuable information and expertise, and their autonomy provides them with consequent room for maneuver during interinstitutional negotiations. It remains to be seen whether the Parliament might not want to reform this system ahead of the election to ensure that experienced parliamentarians remain the diver seat of influential committees.