

NOVE

2019 EU ELECTIONS

State of Play
18 JANUARY 2019

OVERVIEW

As we have entered election year, NOVE has produced this flash update regarding the state of play across the EU at this point in the electoral cycle. As per earlier indications, the overall dynamics of the European Parliament are still predicted to move away from the “traditional” parties and towards higher representation on what was once the fringes of European politics.

WHAT THE POLLS SAY

Figure 1: Projected seats of EP political groups

	EPP	S&D	ALDE	ECR	Greens /EFA	GUE/ NGL	EFDD	ENF	Others
Current EP (%)	218 (29%)	187 (25%)	68 (9%)	74 (10%)	52 (7%)	52 (7%)	43 (5.7%)	34 (4.5%)	23 (3%)
<u>Politico</u> (7 January)	177	133	70	51	46	55	45	60	68
<u>Der europäische Föderalist</u> (8 January)	181	130	90	58	49	57	14	63	63
<u>Poll of Polls</u> (January)	181	137	94	57	44	54	39	62	37
<u>% of seats after the elections</u> (TOTAL: 705)	25,1% - 25.7%	18.4% - 19.4%	9.9% - 13.3%	7.2% - 8.2%	6.2% - 6.9%	7.6% - 8.1%	2% - 6.4%	8.5% - 8.9%	5.2% - 9.6%

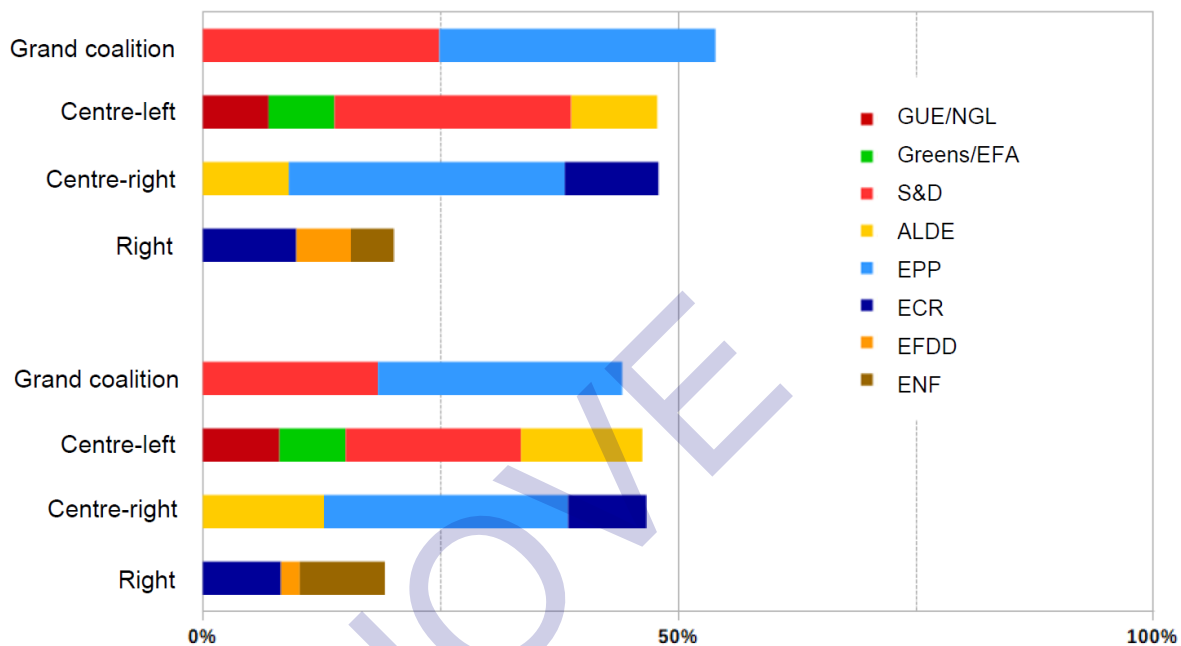
The numbers above are developed differently, and therefore provide different results. The Politico and Poll of Polls sources are based on an aggregate of a number of different datasets, whereas Der europäische Föderalist (deF) uses only the most recent survey data from each EU member state.

As well as that, a difference in definition provides the differing results for the EFDD group – Politico sees the group growing slightly, largely as it includes Italy’s 5 Star Movement in the figures – by contrast, deF sees the group disappearing, as it does not include the latter in the figures. All datasets imply the group will disappear as it will not elect members in the requisite (7) number of countries.

Also, for ALDE, Politico’s smaller number is such because it does not include Emmanuel Macron’s La République en marche in the grouping, whereas the other two sources do.

The above projections can also be complemented with [recent analysis](#) by VoteWatch, which zooms out to look at the **overall left-right dynamic that will be seen in the next EP**. According to their January 2019 projections, the next election will for the first time produce an EP where a **“grand coalition” of the EPP and S&D groups will not be arithmetically possible**. Rather, the two parties would be dependent on the support of the liberal ALDE group. On the left, though the GUE/NGL will make gains (and according to VoteWatch, also the Greens), the losses by the S&D will see leftist MEPs make up only 35% of the Parliament. On the right (including the far-right), a coalition between the ECR, ENF and what is left of the EFDD group would become the second biggest group in the EP, though still lacking a majority.

Figure 2: EP coalition possibilities today (top) and projected post-2019 (bottom)



The graph above (produced by deF) confirms that **no “traditional” coalitions are likely to be possible in the next EP**. Rather, an ungainly coalition of EPP-S&D-ALDE currently seems like the most likely driver of legislation in the next EP.

However, how the left-centre-right interplay will work will depend largely on political group formation. Therefore, it makes sense to take a closer look at developments at political group level.

NEWS FROM SELECTED POLITICAL GROUPS

EPP

The EPP group will see the least change of any of the groups in the EP, remaining the largest group albeit with fewer seats. Regarding membership, a hot topic remains how to deal with the “illiberal” side of the group – particularly Hungary’s Fidesz. Indeed, this has been touted as one of the reasons that the party’s *Spitzekandidat* Manfred Weber may fail at gaining the top job of Commission President. Weber will already face an uphill battle being approved by the European Council. Member states remains sceptical about the Spitzenkandidat system, and there will be much more need to find a compromise between the EPP, PES, and ALDE than in 2014. The latter is also true for the European Parliament. Moreover, Weber’s lack of executive experience is likely to go against him. Weber is still by far the most likely current candidate for the role of next Commission President, but the Brussels bubble is already whispering about the possibility of Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier as an alternative candidate.

PES (S&D)

Barring a major upset, the S&D will remain the second biggest group in the Parliament, though its power will diminish significantly due to a major loss of seats, in particular in major member states such as France, and Italy. Furthermore, Brexit will see the loss of a large and influential delegation from the UK - note

that the EP legal service has [recently advised](#) that the UK would not need to hold EP elections even if the date of Brexit has been extended. The Spanish delegation is on track to become the largest national delegation in the group, altering the dynamic within the S&D away from the centre-left towards the more traditionally socialist south. This may, however, be offset by a collaborative approach between more centrist S&D MEPs from the Nordic countries. Nonetheless, it is likely to play a role in coalition-making once elections conclude – though it seems that this will not include major clout in naming members of the European Commission. With the withdrawal of Maroš Šefčovič from the race in November 2018, the group's Spitzenkandidat has been confirmed as Dutchman Frans Timmermans.

ALDE

The liberal group in the EP **was, until recently, seen as a major force for change due to the rise of Emmanuel Macron's La République en Marche (LREM). However**, first of all, it is **still unclear whether LREM will end up joining a post-2019 ALDE in the EP** or working towards its own group – so far, it has only committed to cooperation for the elections themselves. Furthermore, LREM's prospects have been hit hard by the onset of the *gilets jaunes* protest movement in France and elsewhere. The party also continues to refuse to name a Spitzenkandidat, and there is **no clear political aim**: Margrethe Vestager for Commission President? Mark Rutte for Council President? The Liberals as centrist partners to a Right-Left coalition, or as disruptors who will respond to the anti-establishment flavour of the elections by themselves shaking up the political scene? Furthermore, the sway at Council level enjoyed by ALDE in recent years will likely be badly hit this year (see last section), though these changes should not affect the naming of the “top jobs” such as Presidents of the Commission and the European Council.

EFDD

The EFDD group is faced with almost certain extinction in its current form, due to the loss of its UK MEPs, its abandonment over the past number of years by a number of far-right MEPs (who have largely ended up with the ENF group), and most recently, [reports](#) that the most important member party – Italy's 5-Star Movement – is aiming to form its own political grouping, conducting outreach to Poland's Kukiz, Croatia's Human Shield, and Finland's Liike Nyt. 5SM is also competing with rightist elements to secure a partnerships with the French *gilets jaunes* movement, which may put forward candidates for election. Nonetheless, even if these plans are successful, the new grouping would not have sufficient member state coverage (at least 7 must be represented) to form an EP political group. A compound group (like the GUE/NGL or Greens/EFA) could be considered – though with whom is not clear. Another option may be to join with whatever version of the ECR group emerges from the elections.

ECR

The ECR group will see some serious changes in the next EP – again with Brexit playing a huge role. The presence and dominance of the UK Conservative Party has always softened the more radical edges of this grouping, but post-Brexit, the leading party may instead be Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) party or Matteo Salvini's Lega from Italy (which is reported to be seeking a change of affiliation, being currently a member of ENF). Indeed, recently these two parties have been seen coming together with a view to forming a partnership to offset the Franco-German dominance of EU affairs – and Salvini also [seems](#) to be courting the attention of Hungary's Fidesz. They are also [believed](#) to be talking to the *gilets jaunes* in France – though Marine le Pen has also [attempted](#) to harness the energy of this group. **The ECR may also try to include more parties which currently sit in the ENF group**, which currently brings together the most extreme and “hard Eurosceptic” parties on the EU's right. However, this could run into difficulties over the very issue of “hard” (i.e. leave the EU) and “soft” (i.e. reform towards more intergovernmentalism) Eurosceptics. For example, France's National Rally (formerly the Front National) and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are hard Eurosceptics, and unlikely to see eye-to-eye with reform-minded elements in parties such as PiS, Lega, or Austria's FPÖ. Thus, it is possible that we will see the soft Eurosceptics join an expanded ECR, and the harder Eurosceptics remain in a rump ENF with Europe's most extreme right-wing parties. In this scenario, the combined forces of the right – stripped of its most politically toxic members – could become a powerful voice in the next EP. However, it is unlikely they would hold the legislative pen, as they should not receive enough votes for a majority, and it is [highly unlikely](#) the EPP (the only distant possibility for a lead party in a coalition) would agree to a deal.

With elections being held on 23-26 May, the current European Parliament will officially wind down on 18 April with a final plenary session. Thereafter, there are some important dates to bear in mind:

- **June** is dedicated to political group meetings, and will see the formation of the various groupings within the Parliament.
- **20-21 June**: European Council meeting – likely date for EU Member States to name Commission President.
- **3 July**: 1st EP plenary session
- **July-September**: formation of EP Committees
- **Late September – October**: EP hearings of nominated Commissioners
- **November**: New Commission takes office.

The following are milestones to bear in mind at the national level, as they will have an effect on the power dynamics within the Council in particular:

- **16 and 30 March**: Slovak Presidential election (current Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič may run)
- **23 March**: PES conference and publication of manifesto
- **14 April**: Finnish parliamentary elections (ALDE is likely to lose a Council seat here, to either the EPP or PES)
- **26 May**: Belgian Federal elections (another likely loss of a Council seat for ALDE)
- **By 17 June 2019**, Denmark will hold a general election – here, ALDE is likely to lose to PES, but the party of current Commissioner Margrethe Vestager is likely to do well. This could help the latter's chances at a nomination for Commission President as a liberal compromise.

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