



## Between Apathy and Anger: Challenges to the Union from the 2014 Elections to the EP in Member States

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### Abstract

Elections to the European Parliament have so far been characterised by low voter turnout and are viewed as 'second-order' elections compared to national ones. To counter this trend, the European Parliament last year adopted a resolution that encourages European political parties to nominate candidates for the next Commission President – early enough to ensure a lively pan-European campaign. It also calls on the European Council to first consider the winning party's candidate when proposing one for election to the EP. It was hoped that this would increase the visibility of and the public's interest in the EU, and highlight the EP's role in EU decision-making to make citizens feel that their vote can impact the policy direction of the next legislature. However, this report shows how various structural and national factors still constrain the way in which national and regional parties frame the election debates and impede the development of more 'European' election campaigns.

The analysis covers 11 of the 28 member states, namely Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK, which will elect 530 of the 751 MEPs. In most of these countries, support for and visibility of the European top candidates have been quite limited and EU issues are only brought to public debate by national leaders when they are relevant for domestic politics or can resonate well with their electorate. Otherwise, the debates focus on national issues. When the EU does feature more prominently in debates, it is with a strong pro- vs. anti-EU cleavage (i.e. in France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK). Although turnout is expected to be similar to previous years, this factor could be more successful at mobilising voters than the EP's initiative. This raises questions about whether such an initiative can ever succeed without a clear political programme behind the lead candidates, a common electoral law or stronger engagement of national parties.

According to most recent polls, the EPP will lose the most seats but will still end up ahead of the Socialists. The Liberals, Greens and Conservative & Democrats will at best maintain the same number of seats they now have in the Parliament, although some polls also predict losses for them. Right-wing eurosceptic parties and the European Left are expected to make the most gains. (Harder or softer) euroscepticism will be more evident than ever in the next EP. Increased radicalisation and fragmentation might complicate the adoption of decisions in a number of policy areas, and exacerbate the conflict between the national and European levels, heightening tensions among member states. But mainstream national and European parties cannot shirk the responsibility they have to conduct truly European elections and to develop a constructive discourse that will help to heal the rifts created by the crisis.

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# EU divisions laid bare by elections to the European Parliament

Sonia Piedrafita and Anne Lauenroth\*

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European Parliament elections are usually characterised by low voter turnout, which in most member states has been declining over time and is generally much lower than the participation rate in national elections. The majority of voters throughout Europe have little interest in EU affairs, lack knowledge about how the EU works and perceive European policymaking to be irrelevant and far removed from their daily lives. The fact that the political consequences of voting are unclear, i.e. voters cannot elect a national-type government at European level, further discourages them from voting.<sup>1</sup> In the end, the EP elections tend to be second-order elections mainly focused on national issues and used as an opportunity to protest against ruling and large parties.<sup>2</sup>

Against the background of the EP initiative to encourage European parties to nominate European lead candidates for this year's European elections, this report analyses whether a turning point in this pattern can be observed. It therefore looks at the election campaigns, the political context and polls in selected member states and assesses the likely consequences of the ballot for European policymaking in both member states and Brussels institutions. Although results can only be tentative at this stage, the analysis suggests that the protest vote this year will also concern the European Union. However, the fact that the EU itself has come to the forefront of public debate does not necessarily herald the 'Europeanisation' of the elections.

The report covers 11 of the 28 member states, namely, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. The country selection was made to take account of the main dividing lines between member states within the EU: North-South; euro area or not; richer or poorer; with a more Eurosceptic or more 'Euro-enthusiast' population. The selection also represents the founding countries and all the subsequent rounds of enlargement. Moreover, these 11 countries together provide over 70% of the 751 seats in contest in these elections; that is, 530 MEPs, representing both the larger and the smaller member states.

## This time is different

*"This time it's different"* is the slogan chosen by the European Parliament (EP) for these elections. In the hope of increasing voter turnout and bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers in Brussels, the EP adopted a resolution last year encouraging European political parties to nominate candidates for Commission President. This was supposed to happen early enough for parties to run a pan-European campaign focused on a party platform or political programme for the coming five-year term. The resolution also calls on the European Council to first consider for the position the candidate of the European political party that wins the most

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<sup>1</sup> S. Piedrafita and V. Renman (2014), "The 'Personalisation' of the European Elections: A half-hearted attempt to increase turnout and democratic legitimacy?", EPIN Paper No. 37, April.

<sup>2</sup> S. Hix, A. Noury and G. Roland (2007), *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

seats in the elections.<sup>3</sup> According to the resolution, “a lively political campaign in which political parties and their candidates compete for votes and seats on the basis of alternative programmes that address the European dimension of politics” would motivate citizens to go to the polls.<sup>4</sup> This is deemed necessary because voter turnout in the EP elections has fallen continuously from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2009 and, as Table 1 shows, is much lower than in national elections.

*Table 1. Voter turnout in European and national elections*

	<b>EP elections 2009</b>	<b>National parliamentary elections before June 2009</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>SK</b>	19,64	54,67	-35,03
<b>LT</b>	20,98	48,58	-27,60
<b>PL</b>	24,53	53,88	-29,35
<b>RO</b>	27,67	30,20	-2,53
<b>CZ</b>	28,20	64,47	-36,27
<b>SI</b>	28,33	63,10	-34,77
<b>UK</b>	34,70	61,30	-26,60
<b>HU</b>	36,31	64,39	-28,08
<b>NL</b>	36,75	80,40	-43,65
<b>PT</b>	36,78	65,02	-28,24
<b>BG</b>	38,99	55,80	-16,81
<b>FI</b>	40,30	67,90	-27,60
<b>FR</b>	40,63	60,42	-19,79
<b>DE</b>	43,30	77,70	-34,40
<b>EE</b>	43,90	61,00	-17,10
<b>ES</b>	44,90	75,32	-30,42
<b>SE</b>	45,53	81,99	-36,46
<b>AT</b>	45,97	78,80	-32,83
<b>EL</b>	52,61	74,15	-21,54
<b>LV</b>	53,70	60,98	-7,28
<b>IE</b>	58,64	67,03	-8,39
<b>CY</b>	59,40	89,00	-29,60
<b>DK</b>	59,54	86,59	-27,05
<b>IT</b>	65,05	80,47	-15,42
<b>MT</b>	78,79	93,30	-14,51
<b>BE</b>	90,39	91,30	-0,91
<b>LU</b>	90,75	91,70	-0,95

Source: European Commission and European Parliament, Post-electoral survey 2009, November 2009 ([www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/28\\_07/EB71.3\\_post-electoral\\_final\\_report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/28_07/EB71.3_post-electoral_final_report_EN.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> Article 9 TEU reads that “Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure”.

<sup>4</sup> *European Parliament Resolution on Improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014*, 12 June 2013 ([www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2013-0219&language=EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2013-0219&language=EN)).



Such a campaign has the potential to increase the visibility of and the public's interest in European politics, highlight the role of the EP in EU decision-making and improve the general sense that the vote can indeed impact the policy direction of the next legislature, thereby boosting participation. However, the implementation of the initiative has faced a number of challenges. Apart from uncertainties about who the European Council will finally propose as Commission president, the political manifestos of the main European political parties for these elections tend to be – yet again – a compendium of the party's ideology, and at best a statement of intentions, rather than a political programme explaining what the party's MEPs or its candidate for the position of Commission president would do in the next five years. Furthermore, there are not many substantial points of contention between the three main political parties (EPP, PES, ALDE). In contentious issues such as financial discipline, economic growth, bank regulation and Eurobonds, the positions are usually framed in very general terms and do not always translate well in the national debates.<sup>5</sup> In the end, the elaboration of the manifestos in the respective member states and the conception and conduct of the election campaigns is entirely up to the national and regional parties. They also decide on which European issues to pick up on and how to frame them in the public debate, including how much coverage to give to the top European candidates as part of their campaign strategies. This might prove problematic for the goal of achieving a more Europeanised campaign, since national parties often lack political and electoral incentives to talk more about the EU.

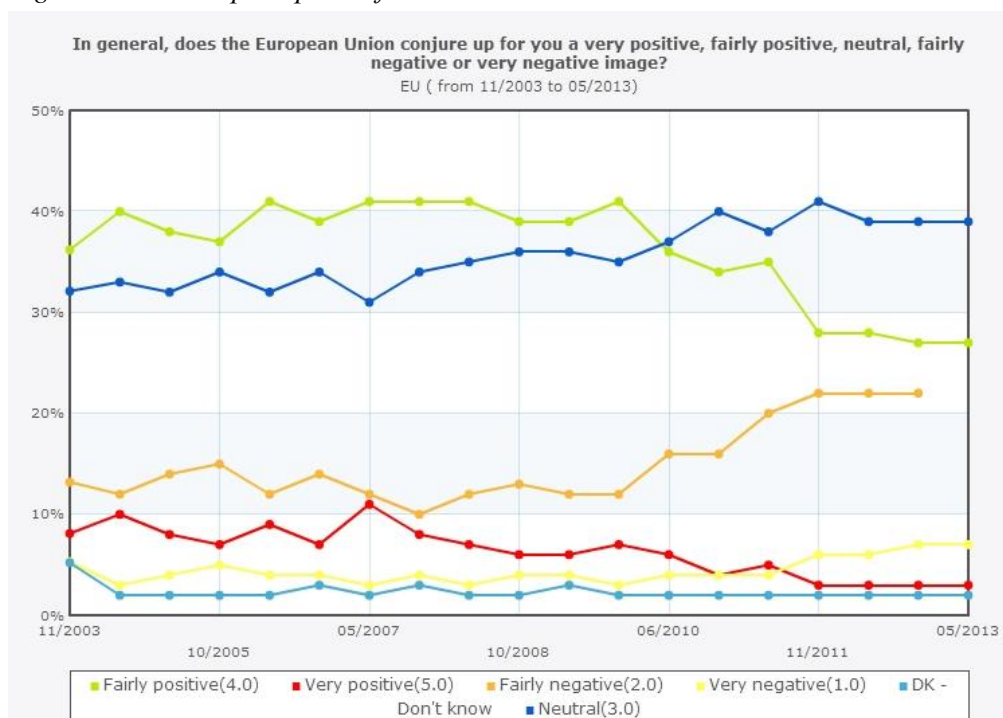
The socio-economic context in which these elections are taking place is also different because of the economic crisis. In some member states, high unemployment, stagnant or even negative economic growth and austerity measures have triggered citizens' dissatisfaction with how the crisis has been managed and the social costs it has entailed. In better-off member states, taxpayers appear to be dissatisfied with the financial burden generated by the bailouts. Figure 1 illustrates how the image of the EU has deteriorated among European citizens in recent years. According to a recent Pew Research Centre survey (spring 2014), a large majority of the respondents in the member states surveyed (namely, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK, which altogether will elect 442, that is, 60% of the 751 MEPs to the next EP) think that their voice does not count in the EU (71%) and that the EU does not understand their needs (65%) is intrusive (63%) and inefficient (57%). These sentiments are especially prominent in Mediterranean countries, where scores are even higher than in the UK.<sup>6</sup> Overall, only 36%, on average, support the EP, 34% the European Commission and 30% the ECB, although support for the EU in general is still high (52%). Over 70% of citizens surveyed in Italy, France and Greece think that their country's economy has been weakened by EU economic integration and negative attitudes towards immigrants have soared in these countries. It is against this backdrop that elections to the EP are taking place, which poses a number of challenges for the ballot itself and for EU integration and policymaking thereafter.

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<sup>5</sup> S. Piedrafita and V. Renman (2014), "The 'Personalisation' of the European Elections: A half-hearted attempt to increase turnout and democratic legitimacy?", EPIN Paper No. 37, April.

<sup>6</sup> *A fragile rebound for EU image on eve of European Parliament Elections*, Pew Research Centre, May 2014 ([www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/05/2014-05-12\\_Pew-Global-Attitudes-European-Union.pdf](http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/05/2014-05-12_Pew-Global-Attitudes-European-Union.pdf)).

Figure 1. Citizens' perception of the EU



Source: Eurobarometer ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)).

## An EU ballot framed by national (partisan) factors

In all the member states examined in this report the EP elections are being perceived as a test ahead of local and national elections or as a vote of confidence in the national government. Later in 2014, Romania is holding national presidential elections and there will be local elections in Poland. National or local elections are expected in Bulgaria, Poland, the UK, Finland and Spain in 2015. It therefore comes as no surprise that the EP elections in these countries are a barometer of the political situation and a reliable poll of the support for different parties. In Bulgaria and Italy, if the ruling parties do not do well in the EP elections, voices calling for fresh elections will grow louder. In Greece, PASOK has announced that it will step down from the coalition government if results are poor, which would leave the co-governing New Democracy of Prime Minister Samaras in a very weak position, especially if there is a good showing by Syriza. In France, the elections are also being seen as a vote of confidence in President Hollande, who has an all-time low public support rating. Marine Le Pen, Leader of the extreme right Front National, claimed that in the event of European electoral success she would request the dissolution of the French Parliament. All these circumstances determine the way in which national and regional parties are framing the election debates and make it difficult for truly European election campaigns to emerge.

### *The leading European candidates' campaign*

The initiative of the European political parties to nominate lead candidates for the position of Commission President has not really changed this context. Although its impact varies across member states, in general it is going practically unnoticed by the electorate; the majority of

whom do not know Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz or any of the other candidates.<sup>7</sup> Media coverage of their European campaigns and debates is not that significant and national leaders do not usually refer to them in their campaigns at national level.<sup>8</sup> This is especially the case in countries where there are strong anti-EU or eurosceptic parties such as France, the Netherlands and the UK. Mainstream parties in these countries avoid showing overt support to the lead European candidates – or as in the case of Labour in the UK, not at all – and prefer to stress the national character of the European elections. A clear public endorsement of any of the European top candidates is only noticeable in the case of some Socialist leaders such as Valenciano in Spain and Stanishev, the PES Chairman, in Bulgaria, as well as Gabriel, the leader of the German SPD. Bulgarian and Romanian politicians also show support for their respective European lead candidates because in both countries European parties are very popular; enjoying a better reputation than national ones.

Be that as it may, only in Germany are the two top European candidates really visible in the campaign, mainly because Martin Schulz is also the lead candidate of the German Social Democrat Party (SPD) and prefers Juncker as a contender to Merkel or the CDU's lead candidate, McAllister.<sup>9</sup> German public service broadcasting has also been extremely engaged in this year's European elections. A recent move by both French Socialist and Liberal national lead candidates to transfer their seats in the 22<sup>nd</sup> May national prime-time television debate on the European elections to the European lead candidates Schulz and Verhofstadt, respectively,<sup>10</sup> might change visibility in France, too. In Finland the EP initiative has also become known, but only because Olli Rehn is one of ALDE's lead candidates, albeit not for Commission president.<sup>11</sup> Apart from visits, Juncker and Schulz have not been very present in Finnish media. In the majority of the countries analysed, the political battles are – if at all – taking place among the national lead candidates or the party leaders themselves.

### ***European and national political manifestos***

The extent to which national parties across the political spectrum are echoing the campaign messages of the European party to which they belong differs across countries and parties. In general, European manifestos represent only the lowest common denominator of their member parties and remain rather vague. In general, national manifestos – if drafted at all – tend to be

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<sup>7</sup> According to a recent IPSOS poll only 40% of voters throughout Europe know Martin Schulz, 39% Jean-Claude Juncker and José Bové, 37% Guy Verhofstadt and 31% Ska Keller or Alexis Tsipras. See [www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=6491](http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=6491).

<sup>8</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> May key television debate between European lead candidates broadcast by the European Broadcasting Union, for example, will either not go on air in nearly half of EU member states (Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta and the Czech Republic; Sweden not live) or be relegated to the less popular specialised television channels or news networks. See D. Keating (2014), “Europe’s main broadcasters snub EU presidency debate”, [europeanvoice.com](http://europeanvoice.com), 2 May ([www.europeanvoice.com/article/2014/may/europe-s-main-broadcasters-snub-eu-presidency-debate/80752.aspx](http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2014/may/europe-s-main-broadcasters-snub-eu-presidency-debate/80752.aspx)).

<sup>9</sup> The rest of European lead candidates, however, are not visible or well supported in Germany. The German Liberal Party (FDP) is rather weak and is putting all its remaining resources into its national lead candidate Graf-Lambsdorff, while Verhofstadt – who speaks German – was denied access to the German television debates by ARD and ZDF. Keller, who is German, has potential but is too young, is not well-known and has faced internal competition from the more experienced Harms. Finally, Tsipras seems not to have little interest in campaigning or being visible in Germany.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Keating (2014), “Schulz asked to participate in national French TV debate”, [europeanvoice.com](http://europeanvoice.com), 13 May ([www.europeanvoice.com/article/2014/may/schulz-asked-to-participate-in-national-french-tv-debate/80870.aspx](http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2014/may/schulz-asked-to-participate-in-national-french-tv-debate/80870.aspx)).

<sup>11</sup> This is also true for Verhofstadt in Belgium and Benelux, Juncker in Luxemburg and Benelux and to a lesser extent for Bové in France and Tsipras in Greece.

done independently of the European ones, sometimes even beforehand. In Germany and the Netherlands national parties highlight their influence on the European manifesto, not vice versa. In some cases, they are longer, tackle different issues, or even present clear differences to the European parties' manifestos. Overall, a link between European and national manifesto elements and slogans is slightly more noticeable in the case of the Socialists, not only in Germany but also in other countries such as Bulgaria, France, Italy, Poland, Romania or Spain. The UK and Greece are the main exceptions to this pattern. Different national views can also be observed on debt mutualisation schemes in the Finnish SDP and on enlargement in the Dutch Labour Party. On both issues, the German SPD, which co-governs with the CDU in a grand coalition, recently softened its position.<sup>12</sup> The EPP's top candidate and manifesto have resonated much less with their national counterparts because the EPP is more heterogeneous and some EPP member parties were not very willing to nominate European lead candidates, only doing so reluctantly. Berlusconi's Forza Italia – by pursuing an ambivalent anti- and pro-EU campaign at the same time – openly challenges some of the EPP messages. Even when national manifestos refer to the EPP manifesto goals they are prioritised according to national interests. In Poland, for example, it is energy and Eastern policy, in the Netherlands social dumping and unfair competition. The French UMP is a special case since their lack of reference to the EPP candidate and manifesto was further fuelled by the defeat of its candidate Michel Barnier against Juncker as lead candidate. UMP politicians perceived that as another illustration of German dominance.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of ALDE, which also comprises very heterogeneous national party members, there are notable divergences towards increasing federalism. In Finland, for example, the Centre Party underlines its opposition to any federalist steps illustrating the EU as a union of independent member states. Another topic of discontent is agricultural policy. While ALDE wants to cut subsidies, the Finnish Centre Party underlines its national interest in maintaining them. In the Netherlands, the VVD, puts its focus on the consequences of EU membership for the Netherlands (VVD) and is somewhat distant to Verhofstadt's federalist demands. These are, on the other hand, endorsed by the second Dutch ALDE member D66. A similar strong endorsement of federalist ideas is supported by the Spanish regional parties of Catalonia and the Basque Country, but from a very different perspective more in line with their independence claims.

Neither the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists nor the Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy came up with a joint European manifesto or proposed a European lead candidate. In the case of the European Left, their political manifesto was only released on April 7<sup>th</sup>, although national parties' support for both its top candidate Tsipras and its political slogans is quite broad. The European Greens, like in previous elections, are keener on waging a real European campaign. Consequently, Green national parties either do not draft a national manifesto at all and campaign with the European one (Finland), or draft one that openly reflects the European one. One specific national viewpoint is the sceptical position on enlargement among the Dutch Greens.

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<sup>12</sup> They argue now that a political majority for eurobonds (or a debt redemption fund) is not feasible at the moment and that Turkish membership is not an issue for the next legislature, both due to domestic developments in Turkey and the EU's own lack of absorption capacity.

<sup>13</sup> The French national parties have a difficult relationship with their European families. For instance, the Socialists are ideologically divided about the EU. Consequently, together with the still strong narrative portraying the EU as a threat to French national sovereignty, this explains the low involvement in and recognition of European parties in France.

### ***The public debates***

For voters, the manifestos are of little relevance, however. Although the campaign is receiving growing media coverage compared to previous years, citizens are traditionally not interested in either the national or the European parties' manifestos but rather tend to vote according to fixed preferences or the political messages of the candidates. In general, national parties bring EU issues to the public debate when they are relevant to domestic politics and thus beneficial for their campaign strategy, otherwise EU issues do not feature prominently. Genuine European dossiers handled in the EP such as the EU's climate and energy policy, banking union, data protection and trade agreements do not resonate with voters, and therefore are not usually present in national election debates. Only Green parties, in France and Germany, for example, have voiced some criticism about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This year, however, political parties in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Poland and Romania are increasingly discussing European security and/or energy questions in view of recent developments in Ukraine. In Germany and Poland, politicians are furthermore reminding voters of the value of the EU as a provider of peace and security. In contrast, the accession to the euro area is not present in the public debate in countries such as Poland and Romania.

In general, when European issues feature in the debates, it is with a strong pro- vs. anti-EU cleavage that sometimes overshadows the traditional right-left.<sup>14</sup> The austerity measures and the perceived failure of the EU to protect its citizens are very present in the discourse of left-leaning parties in euro area members such as Spain and Italy. In the latter, Berlusconi's party strategy is also based on a general criticism about the interference of the EU (and Germany) in Italy. The North-South divide, the austerity measures and the interference of the EU, the Troika and ultimately Germany, in national politics is also very prominent in Greece. In France, both austerity and immigration are part of the public debate and the success of the Front National has accentuated critical attitudes towards the EU both in French society and political elites – as illustrated by the intra-partisan division line on Europe in the ruling Socialist Party. In countries such as the Netherlands and especially the UK, the debates revolve around EU powers and the country's membership. In all the cases above, the EU has become a topical issue but debates are not about specific EU policy options but rather framed in very general terms. In countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Spain, where anti-European voices are very limited, the right-left cleavage continues to be more relevant, but with a strong focus on domestic issues. Finland and Germany are somewhere in between. Being generally in favour of European integration but also having eurocritical parties, the public discourse in both countries rather centres on a 'more or less Europe' split, with some left-right elements.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Profile of the candidates***

Finally, although MEP candidates tend to have a stronger EU background than in the past, the selection normally follows national party considerations. While it can be in their interest to nominate people with EU knowledge or a cosmopolitan profile, national party leaders also look for candidates that are loyal to the party (leader) or nationally and regionally well-known. An overall feature in all countries covered by this report is that many current MEPs are running again in this election, although with important differences across parties and countries. While in Germany, Spain and the UK most of the lead candidates of mainstream parties have been MEPs in the past (except CDU's McAllister), in France both the UMP and the PS opted to appoint former ministers or other well-known national politicians as lead candidates. In some countries such as Greece, Italy and the Netherlands some parties decided to include in the lists candidates

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<sup>14</sup> Anti-EU positions comprise radical attitudes against the EU integration and membership in general and more moderate ones critical with the euro or other EU policies.

<sup>15</sup> In Finland the Finns Party has existed since 1995 but has recently increased its popular support, while in Germany the Alternative for Germany was only founded in 2013.

from outside the political establishment. Most prominently, in Italy, Beppe Grillo's 5 star movement even recruited its candidates online. Sometimes, other considerations are more important than having an EU background. For instance, Italian Prime Minister, Renzi, gave priority to female candidates as a message of renovation and modernity. On occasions, prominent national politicians from the government are selected but will most likely step down from their EP seat for someone else to continue their ministerial work.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, in Finland, for example, this year's European elections have attracted many high-profile candidates looking for opportunities in the European institutions. The main national parties in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania all managed to draft lists that include MEPs as well as former or current ministers. Across parties, the most remarkable feature is that eurosceptic parties tend to incorporate fewer candidates with a European profile – which can be seen with UKIP in the UK and Front National in France.

### **A low turnout and a more eurosceptic ballot**

Although there are no official polls about voter turnout in most countries, everything seems to indicate that participation might not improve. Some structural reasons support this argument, namely that the European electorate is simply not interested and does not perceive European elections as relevant.<sup>17</sup> However, several factors could still slightly boost participation. The radicalisation of the campaign in some member states due to the national political context (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and France) might attract some undecided voters to the ballot box. Expectations of a good showing by eurosceptic right-wing parties can also prompt euro enthusiasts to turn up so as to avoid a higher representation of these groups in the European Parliament. In a few member states, proportional representation, a single constituency and the lack of a legal threshold (e.g. Bulgaria and the Netherlands, but especially larger member states such as Germany or Spain that are electing many more MEPs) increase the opportunity for small parties to improve their results as compared to national elections. An active campaign by these parties might also have a slight impact on voter turnout.

The staging of local or regional elections on the same day might also boost participation in some member states, like the UK, Germany and some municipalities in Italy and Greece. Finally, it is widely noted in this report that the media coverage of these year's elections to the EP has improved considerably compared to previous years, which might also have a positive effect on the final voter turnout. The general impression is, however, that such an increase would be more related to the particular political context of some member states, growing radicalisation and increased discontent with the EU rather than being the result of having European candidates to the position of Commission president and an EU-wide campaign focused on EU issues. This initiative is well supported by European citizens but its capacity to mobilise voters still seems to be limited.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The poll predictions***

Recent polls suggest a close result on election day. The Socialists are improving on the 2009 result but have lost the lead position that previous polls gave them. Conversely, the EPP has pulled ahead, although they might lose over 50 seats compared to 2009. Liberals are expected to reappear as the third largest group in Parliament, despite the possibility of losing some seats. By country, conservatives are expected to do well, especially in Germany, Spain and Poland, while

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, in Bulgaria, the Socialist leader Stanishev heads the list but explicitly declared that he would not join the EP.

<sup>17</sup> See Ipsos (2014), The Majority of Citizens in 12 EU Countries are Not Interested in the Upcoming European Elections, 7 May ([www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=6491](http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=6491)).

<sup>18</sup> 57% of the respondents to the last Eurobarometer survey declared their support for the initiative.

Socialists are faring better in Italy and Romania. In France, the conservatives come second in the polls after the National Front. The latest polls suggest a tie between Conservatives and Socialists in Bulgaria, whereas in the Netherlands polls give the two liberal parties (the more pro-European D66 and the more euro-critical VVD) around 30% of the votes and 9 seats.

Table 2. Current and expected representation of political groups in the EP

	Current EP		PollWatch2014	Cicero EU 2014
	Jun 2009	May 2014	7 May	8 May
<b>EPP</b>	265	273	216	199
<b>S&amp;D</b>	184	196	205	196
<b>ALDE/ADLE</b>	84	83	63	83
<b>Greens/EFA</b>	55	57	41	50
<b>ECR</b>	54	57	39	39
<b>GUE-NGL</b>	35	35	49	54
<b>EFDA</b>	32	31	39	30
<b>NI</b>	27	33	99	100

Source: European Parliament,<sup>19</sup> PollWatch ([www.pollwatch2014.eu/#country](http://www.pollwatch2014.eu/#country)) and Cicero ([www.eutwentyfourteen.com](http://www.eutwentyfourteen.com)).

Polls also suggest that the European Greens and the ECR will fare worse than in previous elections. Some of these losses will go into the European Left, which is expected to improve its representation in Parliament considerably. Their Greek partner Syriza is leading the polls in this country. The Italian 5-star movement is second in the polls with over 24% of the vote and 19 seats, although it is still unclear which European political group they will join after the elections. In general, electoral gains will be capitalised by right-wing parties with a critical position towards the EU integration and currently non-attached to any political group. These and other parties that were members of the European Freedom of Democracy political group in the outgoing EP might win the elections in France, the Netherlands, the UK and Finland.

<sup>19</sup> Changes in the representation of the political groups between 2009 and 2014 are a response to a) the 2011 amendment to apply the Lisbon allocation, b) Croatia accession in 2013, c) Changes in individual affiliations.



Table 3. Projections for non-attached and EFD political groups

Non-attached members		
FR	Front national	22
CZ	Akce nespokojených občanů	7
NL	Partij voor de Vrijheid	5
HU	JOBBIK MAGYARORSZÁGÉRT MOZGALOM	5
AUS	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	4
GER	Piraten	2
GER	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	1
NL	50PLUS	1
BE	Vlaams Belang	1
CRO	Savez za Hrvatsku	1
SLO	Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka	1
SLO	List Verjamem	1
EFD Members		
UK	UKIP	23
IT	Lega Nord	4
DK	Dansk Folkeparti	4
FIN	Perussuomalaiset	3
LIT	Tvarka ir teisingumas	2
SLO	Slovenská národná strana	1
FR	Debout la République	1
GR	Anexartitoi Ellines	1

Source: Based on PollWatch2014 data ([www.pollwatch2014.eu/#country](http://www.pollwatch2014.eu/#country)).

### Consequences in member states and at European level

This outcome might affect not only the political landscape at national level but, in some cases, also member states' European policy in the near future. In countries such as France, Finland, Italy and the Netherlands, it might limit the government's room for manoeuvre in the EU and exacerbate the divisions that the crisis created. In the UK, a good showing by UKIP, unless balanced by a good performance of the more pro-European liberal and labour parties, might well lean the public and the political elites towards a more anti-European stance. In Poland, a good result by Law & Justice might give impetus to more critical voices of the EU while the Civic Platform would lose their privileged position within the EPP.<sup>20</sup> A victory for Syriza in Greece might not only push the current coalition government up against the wall but would also determine the European policy of this country in years to come. In other countries such as Bulgaria, Germany, Romania and Spain, the results of the elections to the European Parliament are unlikely to change the government's European policy in the short term.

For the next EP, this outcome could have consequences for both decision-making and policy-shaping. As Table 2 shows, the representation of the political groups in the outgoing EP allowed for the formation of centre-right and centre-left winning coalitions that did not necessarily have to include the two main groups in Parliament.<sup>21</sup> However, in the incoming EP, it may well be the case that the EPP can only form a winning coalition in cooperation with the S&D, and vice-versa. This would come at the expense of politics in the EP and rather low common-

<sup>20</sup> In the 7<sup>th</sup> EP, it was the third largest national delegation.

<sup>21</sup> See Anne Lauenroth (2014), "Public protests changed the game: The European Parliament and ACTA", in Daniela Kietz and Nicolai von Ondarza, *Strengthened, sidelined and caught in compromise. The 7<sup>th</sup> European Parliament from a German perspective*, SWP Working paper of the EU Integration Division 2014/1, SWP Berlin, May, pp. 25-29.



denominator agreements, which is likely to further discourage citizens from voting in future elections. A Grand Coalition in the EP would not work on the basis of a previous agreement for the whole legislative term, but it would have to be renegotiated for each decision and resolution, with the difficult task of dragging in all the national delegations that form the European political groups, potentially delaying the adoption of decisions. Those policy areas where intra- and inter-party divergences are greater might be more affected.<sup>22</sup> Policy-making in the EP might further be hampered if Le Pen and Wilders finally manage to form a second right euro-sceptic political group besides EFD.<sup>23</sup> These parties could be especially contentious in relation to the completion of a more business-friendly regulatory environment, a deeper economic and monetary union, the free movement of production factors and international trade agreements.

## Conclusion

Final turnout will be decided by a mix of apathy and anger on the part of the electorate. Despite the worthy goals of the European political parties' initiative to nominate lead candidates and promote an EU-wide campaign, various structural and political factors have limited its impact, raising questions about whether such an initiative can ever succeed without top European candidates campaigning on the basis of a clear political programme, stronger engagement of national parties, strengthened European political parties or a common electoral law. Ultimately, despite some promising but isolated signs of 'Europeanisation', the initiative has raised expectations that will be difficult to fulfil which, in the context of the current crisis, might exacerbate existing national and pro-anti EU division lines. The increased fragmentation and radicalisation of the next EP that polls suggest might complicate the adoption of decisions in a number of policy areas, and accentuate the conflict between the national and European levels and tensions among member states. In this context, mainstream national and European parties cannot shirk the responsibility they have to pursue truly European elections and develop a constructive discourse that helps to heal the rifts created by the crisis.

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<sup>22</sup> According to the voting patterns in the last legislature, European political groups were more divided internally and between them in relation to gender equality, agriculture and fisheries, and to a lesser extent environment, civil liberties issues, economic and monetary affairs. See VoteWatch Europe (2014), "End-of-term scorecard, part 2: The activity records of MEPs analysed by EP group and national party ([www.votewatch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/votewatch-europe-end-of-term-scorecard-part-2-groups-final.pdf](http://www.votewatch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/votewatch-europe-end-of-term-scorecard-part-2-groups-final.pdf)).

<sup>23</sup> Some parties that might join the new European Alliance for Freedom led by Le Pen (National Front) and Wilders (PVV) are the Sweden Democrats, the Austrian FPÖ and Belgium's Vlaams Belang. Lega Nord's MEPs could also join them and allow them for the 7th member state needed to form a political group. S. Piedrafita and V. Renman (2014), "Eurocepticism in the next European Parliament: A reason to worry?", *Interested in European Parliament Elections in Times of Crisis?*, Vol. 9 No. 1, February ([www.ceps.eu/content/interconomics-vol-49-no-1%20B7-januaryfebruary-2014](http://www.ceps.eu/content/interconomics-vol-49-no-1%20B7-januaryfebruary-2014)).

# Bulgaria: EP Elections a Rehearsal for Early National Elections

Antoinette Primatarova\*

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With the 2014 elections for the EP that will be held on May 25<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria is entering a prolonged election cycle. The next local elections are due in 2015 and the next presidential elections in 2016, so many parties see the EP elections as a rehearsal for the Bulgarian elections to follow. Moreover, the EP elections will be conducted within a very difficult political context: just two weeks after the general national elections in 2013, the incumbent government sparked massive protests and calls for their resignation and early re-elections.

The reason for this was the election of Delyan Peevski (a highly controversial MP, elected on the ballot of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms) as head of the State Agency for National Security (SANS). Peevski is widely perceived as a media tycoon, a symbol of the diminishing freedom of the Bulgarian media, and part of Bulgaria's oligarchy. Several of Bulgaria's NATO and EU partners openly regarded the very procedure of reforming SANS and appointing Peevski as its head as undermining trust in the country's commitment to combat corruption and organised crime; two problems that are at the core of the mechanism for post-accession monitoring of Bulgaria's progress. Due to the massive protests and international criticism, Peevski did offer his resignation within a few days but the incumbent government has suffered irreparable damage. No other Bulgarian government has lost public support so early in its mandate and on such a scale. In March 2014, according to Alpha Research<sup>24</sup> 55% of respondents gave the government a negative assessment and only 15% held a positive view of its work. The government is in a weak position, both domestically and internationally, also because it relies upon support from the ultranationalist party Ataka.

In summer 2013, demands were made to hold early elections in autumn 2013. Later on this shifted to holding early elections at the same time as the EP elections. In autumn 2013, representatives of the two parties in government put out statements to the effect that they would regard the EP elections as a test of whether they have enough support to stay in power, but without clearly defining what they would regard as success. Since Bulgaria has to elect 17 MEPs, the opposition and NGO representatives have suggested that if the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) together win fewer than nine seats in the new EP, the government will have to resign.<sup>25</sup>

In late January 2014, President Rosen Plevneliev came up with a proposal for a proper referendum at the same time as the EP elections. He suggested putting to a referendum three issues that were neglected in the controversial new Electoral Code (adopted in March 2014):

- part introduction of majority vote in the national elections;
- introduction of compulsory voting in elections and referenda; and
- introduction of electronic voting for elections and referenda.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://alpharesearch.bg/en/social\\_research/political\\_and\\_economic\\_monitoring/government.html](http://alpharesearch.bg/en/social_research/political_and_economic_monitoring/government.html)

<sup>25</sup> [www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ekonomika/bulgaria/2014/01/21/2224426\\_ivan\\_krustev\\_evropeiskite\\_izbori\\_triabva\\_da\\_reshat/](http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ekonomika/bulgaria/2014/01/21/2224426_ivan_krustev_evropeiskite_izbori_triabva_da_reshat/)

The ruling majority in Parliament did not support the proposal. Once it was clear that Parliament would not follow it, citizens started gathering signatures in support of the referendum. In the case of 500,000 signatures in favour of a referendum, Parliament has to organise one within three months. On March 10th, lists with more than 570,000 signatures were registered in Parliament, but the legislation provides for a validity check of the signatures, so it soon became evident that a referendum at the same time as the EP elections was not feasible.

The reluctance of the government to organise a referendum has further undermined citizens' trust in it and is one more reason for considering the EP elections as a vote on its staying in power. Public embarrassment over the government's reluctance to hold a referendum on the same date as the EP elections may result in a higher turnout than is normally registered.

### **The selection of MEP candidates: Strong EU background and personal merits versus domestic political considerations**

Bulgaria currently has 18 MEPs (in line with the transitional provisions after the Lisbon Treaty came into force), but will have 17 MEPs in the next European Parliament.

Out of the 18 current MEPs, 11 are running for re-election (five of them on different ballots from those of 2009) and up to nine stand a good chance of re-election. In addition to the former MEPs, in the next EP there will be one or two former Ministers of Foreign Affairs (altogether three are running). Bulgaria's first EU Commissioner Meglena Kuneva (2007-2010) is also among the candidates. This means that more than half of the Bulgarian MEPs will join the next European Parliament with a solid EU background.

This does not mean that domestic political considerations did not prevail in general.

In 2014 Bulgarian voters will have to choose one of 25 options. In total, 15 parties, 5 coalitions and 3 independent candidates are registered. Not all parties and coalitions have registered 17 candidates, and 315 candidates will compete for the 17 Bulgarian seats.

There is a general discontent in Bulgaria over the composition of election lists being decided upon by the narrow party leadership with voters therefore having no real choice. In this election, voters will for the first time have a realistic chance to introduce changes to the ordering of candidates (the threshold for reordering is 5%). Although the campaign hasn't started yet, the general expectation is that parties will not encourage voters to use this right.

The fact that the EP elections are expected to have serious implications for the future political landscape in Bulgaria has played a central role in the composition of the party lists. The relevant players tried to stick to EU merits as the decisive criterion for the top positions on the lists, but could not sustain this for all positions. Domestic priorities were naturally more relevant for nationalist-leaning parties and parties targeting protest voters.

Among the well-established players (GERB, BSP and MRF), it is the list of MRF that paid the highest tribute to domestic political considerations. Of the three outgoing MEPs, only one was included in the list (Filiz Hyusmenova), the rest of the candidates seem to have been selected on the basis of domestic political considerations. The second place for Delyan Peevski, the MP at the core of the above-mentioned 2013 protests and calls for resignation of the incumbent government, was widely perceived as an arrogant demonstration of power and neglect of public opinion. MRF explained the decision as democratic respect for the will of MRF voters.

GERB (Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria), the party with the highest number of MEPs in the present EP (6), considers the EP elections a rehearsal for early elections (eventually to take place in the autumn of 2014). Regardless of this domestic agenda for the EP elections, GERB did not go so far to make it a personal head-to-head contest with the leader of the Socialists; GERB's Chairman Boyko Borisov is not running in this election. GERB

demonstrates commitment to high EU credentials and continuity. The leader of the list is the former Minister of the Management of EU Funds Tomislav Dontchev, though he indicated that in the case of early national elections he would return to political activity in Bulgaria. Three of GERB's very active MEPs are next on the list (Andrey Kovatchev, Mariya Gabriel and Vladimir Urutchev).

BSP also has a strong domestic agenda. For the Socialists, the EP elections are a test of their ability to continue running the country. If the Socialist-led "Coalition for Bulgaria" comes second after GERB, pressure for early elections will grow. After some hesitation, Sergei Stanishev agreed to head the list but he explicitly declared that he would not join the European Parliament. He explained his leading position as a sign of his responsibility towards both the Bulgarian and the European Socialists (as PES President). Two of the former Socialist MEPs are on the list of "Coalition for Bulgaria": Ilyana Jotova in second and Evgeni Kirilov in seventh. The Socialist-led coalition has one further candidate with strong political and European credentials: Georgi Pirinski, former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1995-1996) and former Speaker of the Parliament (2005-2009). The Socialists have also included in their list representatives proposed by civil society organisations and by coalition partners.

Stanishev is facing competition from GERB and negative public opinion, and also opposition within his own ranks. Internal tensions within the Socialist party resulted in the forming of a new political entity – the ABV Movement – based around Georgi Parvanov (President of Bulgaria from 2002-2012, elected twice on the Socialist ballot) and Ivailo Kalfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Stanishev-led government (2005-2009), the most active MEP elected in 2009 on the ballot of the Socialist-led coalition. Instead of running on the "Coalition for Bulgaria" ballot, Kalfin is now running as leader of the ABV Movement list. If elected into the EP, the ABV Movement intends to join the S&D Group.

The list of the Reformist Block (RB) also has candidates with strong EU backgrounds: at the top is former Commissioner Meglena Kuneva; and second is Svestoslav Malinov, an MEP elected in 2009 on the ballot of the "Blue Coalition". RB is a new centre-right coalition established in late 2013. The centre-right parties that failed to get elected in the 2013 general elections (very much because of votes being split between too many players) realised that they had to unite if they wanted to remain politically relevant. For RB, the EP elections are also a rehearsal for the next general elections in Bulgaria. Because of the complicated composition of the coalition, they had to accommodate party leaders from all members of the coalition. If elected into the EP, RB will join the EPP Group.

As regards the ultranationalist party Ataka (whose two MEPs elected in 2009 later left the party), it did not come as a surprise that an EU background was not what they were looking for. For the 2014 EP elections Ataka registered a list that consists of the whole leadership of the party. As an ultranationalist anti-Semitic party with strong homophobic and xenophobic rhetoric, Ataka is considered an uncomfortable supporter of the incumbent government. Ataka's contender with regard to the nationalist vote – the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) – goes into the elections with former Ataka MEP Slavi Binev ("Europe of Freedom and Democracy" Group) as leader of its list. The splitting of the nationalist vote between the two parties may result in both of them being left out of the next EP (according to Alpha Research's poll from late April, Ataka has support of 2.5% and NFSB 3%).<sup>26</sup>

In a more indirect way through the minor coalition partners, "Bulgaria without censorship" (BWC), a new populist party, will also compete for the nationalist vote. Non-transparent financing has raised serious doubts over BWC's links to Bulgarian oligarchs. The party Chairman, former journalist Nikolai Barekov, has changed his mind several times with regard to both his political affiliation (he has allegedly already been courted by all the main European

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<sup>26</sup> [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0414\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_AlphaResearch.pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0414_Public_Opinion_AlphaResearch.pdf)

political alliances) and his continued involvement in national politics. BWC is riding on people's discontent with poverty and corruption, but without using anti-EU rhetoric.

## **The European affiliation of the Bulgarian political parties**

The 18 Bulgarian MEPs in the 2009 EP are divided between the European political alliances as follows:

- European People's Party – 7
- Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – 5
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – 4
- Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group – 1

Ahead of the start of the campaign (on May 25th) only two parties have put programmes on their websites – BSP and the Greens.

### ***The European People's Party***

The European People's Party has four members in Bulgaria – **GERB**, **DSB** (Democrats for Strong Bulgaria), **SDS** (Union of Democratic Forces), and **DP** (Democratic Party). DSB and SDS are running in the 2014 elections as part of the **Reformist Block**.

**GERB's** electoral campaign will be officially launched on April 27th in the presence of Jean-Claude Juncker, EPP's candidate for President of the European Commission.

The slogan for GERB's campaign, "Bulgaria cannot afford to waste time", has been explained as implying that Bulgaria has to become a truly European country with some urgency, but it also has also a strong domestic connotation – Bulgaria is wasting precious time with the incumbent government.

**RB** aspires to be the genuine pro-European Bulgarian party. In contrast to left forces in the country, RB considers Bulgaria's EU membership an important geopolitical reorientation that has to be sustained. In the context of the Ukraine crisis and growing Russian assertiveness, RB considers energy security one of the most important issues and wants to see Bulgaria active in the establishment of a European Energy Union. RB's slogan, "Make a choice!" is intended as general encouragement to people to go and vote, but has also the implication of choosing the genuine pro-European line.

### ***The Party of European Socialists***

PES has two members in Bulgaria: **BSP**, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and the **Bulgarian Social Democrats**, a BSP partner within the "Coalition for Bulgaria".

BSP leader Sergei Stanishev has been President of the Party of the European Socialists since 2011, and this naturally impacts the BSP campaign. BSP electoral programme mirrors closely the PES Manifesto. BSP is going into the campaign with the slogan "For fair Bulgaria! For Social Europe!" The agenda covers the full spectrum of social promises: a dignified life in a society of fairness and solidarity; a European Social Union to complement the Economic and Monetary Union (including the introduction of a minimum wage in the individual member states); facilitation of economic growth and employment (re-industrialisation being a core concept); utilisation of the assets of the new digital world; protection of children and mothers; gender equality; an EU as a union of solidarity (implying active regional policy); environmental protection; sustainable financial governance without austerity; more democratic legitimacy through more powers for the European Parliament; and an EU acting as a global player promoting worldwide peace and prosperity.

BSP launched its campaign on April 25th in the presence of Martin Schulz, PES's candidate for President of the European Commission. Both Stanishev and Schulz referred to GERB's slogan but modified it to "Bulgaria cannot afford to waste time with GERB; Europe cannot afford to waste time with the EPP." In attacking GERB as EPP's henchman in Bulgaria and in blaming the EPP for the present situation of the EU and the growing disconnect of people with Europe, Stanishev is going even further than PES in general.

### ***The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe***

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has two members in Bulgaria:

- The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (3 MEPs in the 2009 EP)
- National Movement for Stability and Prosperity (2 MEPs in the 2009 EP), established in 2002 around the former Bulgarian King Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, but now with support of around 1%.

Regardless of efforts to function as a national party, MRF continues to have the image of an ethnic party. There are several Bulgarians in the leadership, but MRF voters come mostly from the Bulgarian minorities. Delyan Peevski's nomination as the number two on the MRF list is a clear sign, once again, that MRF is not relying upon liberal rhetoric and ideology in the domestic campaign. Rather than for ideological reasons, Peevski was allegedly nominated by the MRF grassroots because of confidence that he and MRF would facilitate easier access to EU funds in Bulgaria. MRF's slogan does not refer to any specific liberal values either: "MRF in Europe! Europe in Bulgaria!"

**The European Green Party** has one full member in Bulgaria: **the Greens**, founded in 2008 (for the 2014 EP elections there are two more green parties registered). The Greens, as a Member of the European Green Party, have put on their website the European Green manifesto and a short Bulgarian manifesto for the elections in Bulgaria. The Greens' list includes only civil society representatives that have been active in various areas. Although green policies seem to attract young Bulgarians, voting for green parties remains at low levels.

**The Party of the European Left** has one Bulgarian member: **the Bulgarian Left**. Established in 2009 by former BSP members, the Bulgarian Left accuses the Socialists of having drifted to the right and betraying the social cause of the genuine left. Polls do not list the Bulgarian Left among the probable winners of any seats in the European Parliament.

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Although the bigger European political alliances are under-represented in the documents of most Bulgarian parties ahead of the start of the campaign for the 2014 EP elections, the Bulgarian general public is well aware of the existence of EPP, PES and ALDE. The reason is broad media coverage of attempts by the main Bulgarian political parties to take every possible opportunity to export domestic problems to the European arena and to use and abuse the European political families as arbiters of their conflicts. EPP, PES and ALDE seem quite willing to accept this role and to give unconditional support to their Bulgarian partners, without going into details or considering the impact of their interventions on wider public opinion. Depending upon circumstances, they tend to overplay or to underplay the importance of EP resolutions that directly or indirectly concern Bulgaria and to abstain from criticising their Bulgarian sister parties on an objective basis. This trend has the potential to undermine trust in the European parties.

## Left/ right split and centre/ periphery issues to dominate the campaign

The candidates have not positioned themselves in a clear way ahead of the campaign. In an attempt to outline some questions he expects to be discussed in the campaign, President Plevneliev made an official statement at its start:<sup>27</sup>

“The Bulgarian people have a right to hear clearly the position of each candidate. There are many specific issues on the European agenda. They provide each participant, no matter whether it is a party or an independent candidate, with the opportunity to outline their positions and differences and decide on whether they are for or against the membership in the eurozone and the banking union, or whether are they for or against the strengthening of political integration, the establishment of an energy union, and on how to strike the balance between the principles of the free market and solidarity. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is a danger of the European Union splitting up into a centre and periphery, of countries in the eurozone and those outside the zone of a common currency. For more or less integration, for enlargement or encapsulation of the Union, for more or less Europe – these are general questions on which Bulgaria cannot remain silent.”

President Plevneliev raises several other issues that can and will be discussed during the campaign – employment, education, business environment, etc. – which he wants to see linked to Bulgaria’s 2020 National Program for Development. In an indirect way he is hinting at the overselling strategy of the Socialists: “We should promise only what we can fulfil.” It is important to note that he pays special attention to the challenges posed by the Ukraine crisis and gives the warning that Bulgaria should not “sit silently and play the role of somebody’s Trojan horse”.

Issues that have been broadly discussed in the Bulgarian media, not only ahead of the EP elections but since Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, include Bulgaria’s accession to the Schengen area and the free movement of people in general (e.g. campaigns against alleged Bulgarian “welfare tourism” in the UK and Germany); EU monitoring of the unfinished reform of the Bulgarian judiciary; use and abuse of EU funds; compliance with Natura 2000 requirements; costs and benefits of joining the eurozone and the Banking Union; and the shaping of a common European energy security policy. Naturally, these issues will be at the core of the campaign for the elections to the EP.

Since the main contenders in the elections are certainly GERB and BSP, the left/right cleavage will dominate the debate. However, the Ukraine crisis has the potential to shape a geopolitical cleavage around debates over reducing the EU’s energy dependence and stricter measures against Russia. The Bulgarian Socialists insist on the viability of the South Stream gas pipeline, in conflict with the position of the European Commission and the recent resolution of the European Parliament on Russian pressure on Eastern Partnership countries and, in particular, the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine.<sup>28</sup> The Socialists try to present it as a PES/ EPP cleavage, but it will be difficult to sustain this simplification of the positions on South Stream.

Given the strong pro-European attitudes in Bulgaria, the pro/anti-EU cleavage will play a rather marginal role.

<sup>27</sup> [www.president.bg/news1890/izyavlenie-na-prezidenta-rozen-plevneliev-po-povod-nachaloto-na-predizbornata-kampaniya-za-izbor-na-chlenove-na-evropeyskiya-parlament-ot-republika-balgariya.html&lang=en](http://www.president.bg/news1890/izyavlenie-na-prezidenta-rozen-plevneliev-po-povod-nachaloto-na-predizbornata-kampaniya-za-izbor-na-chlenove-na-evropeyskiya-parlament-ot-republika-balgariya.html&lang=en)

<sup>28</sup> [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2014-0436&language=EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2014-0436&language=EN)



## Results to be determined by voter turnout

Regardless of the division of the 17 seats between the individual Bulgarian parties and coalitions, it is highly probable that within the next European Parliament they will be again divided between the EPP, S&D and ALDE Group. The probability of members of any other group or non-attached members winning seats is rather low.

After 2007 and 2009, Bulgaria is now conducting EP elections for the third time. For the first and the second elections, the turnout was lower than in national elections – 28.6 % in 2007 and 37% in 2009 (compared with 60.2% in the 2009 general elections and 51.3 % in the 2013 general elections) Polling agencies don't discuss turnout explicitly in their 2014 forecasts (according to the Exacta poll from early April, two-thirds of Bulgarians do not attach any personal importance to the European elections and do not intend to vote);<sup>29</sup> they concentrate instead on discussing how many players have a chance to succeed. Higher turnout in the present elections can be eventually expected because of:

- the role of the elections as a possible trigger for early national elections and a rehearsal for these elections; and
- debates around energy security in the context of the Ukraine crisis and tensions with Russia.

There is no doubt that GERB (an EPP member), the Socialist-led Coalition for Bulgaria (an S&D member) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (an ALDE member) will be well represented in the next European Parliament. According to Exacta Research from early April 2014, 22.5% of those polled declared they would vote for GERB, 18.9% for Coalition for Bulgaria and 6% for MRF. Alpha Research from late April shows somewhat different numbers: 17.6 % for GERB, 15.9% for Coalition for Bulgaria and 6.2% for MRF.<sup>30</sup>

Forecasts in terms of seats are difficult because of uncertainty over how many votes will get lost and how their division among the winners will impact the final result. In 2007, 16.7% of the votes (23% in 2009) were cast for candidates that did not win a seat. According to Alpha Research, a very high turnout could result in only the three big players winning seats in the EP; lower turnout could result in up to seven parties entering the EP (including one of the nationalist parties).

The current issues of high relevance for the political landscape in Bulgaria are:

- whether the two parties in government, BSP and MRF, will be able to claim victory; and
- whether there will be any further parties and coalitions (beyond GERB, BSP and MRF) represented.

In Bulgaria there is no legal threshold for entering the European Parliament, but a natural one of 5.88% due to the number of MEPs (this translated into a constituency of around 107,000 voters with the lower turnout in 2007, and around 150,000 ones with the higher turnout in the 2009 EP elections). According to different polls, three coalitions have at present support of around 5% and thus have a chance of entering the EP (according to Alpha Research in late April: 4.9% for BWC, 4.5% for RB and 4.5% for the ABV movement). All three are new political entities with the involvement of well-known personalities:

1. the Reformist Block (with former Commissioner Kuneva as leader of its list);
2. the ABV Movement (with former Minister of Foreign Affairs and MEP Ivailo Kalfin as leader of its list);
3. Bulgaria Without Censorship (with former journalist Barekov as leader of its list).

<sup>29</sup> [www.focus-fen.net/news/2014/04/18/333487/exacta-research-group-presents-results-from-bulgaria-poll-concerning-eu-elections-roundup.html](http://www.focus-fen.net/news/2014/04/18/333487/exacta-research-group-presents-results-from-bulgaria-poll-concerning-eu-elections-roundup.html)

<sup>30</sup> [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0414\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_AlphaResearch.pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0414_Public_Opinion_AlphaResearch.pdf)



For the three new players the stakes are high. Failing to get candidates elected as MEPs would more or less mean that these political projects are not viable.

## Conclusion

The “This time it’s different” initiative of the European Parliament to turn the 2014 elections into virtually a direct election of the President of the Commission has so far had no real impact on the run-up to the elections in Bulgaria. The presence of Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker at the start of the Coalition for Bulgaria and the GERB campaigns in Bulgaria were presented by the media much more as European support for the respective Bulgarian parties than as a European campaign by the two top candidates to enlist Bulgarian support. The placing of controversial MP Delyan Peevski in second place on the MRF list will probably discourage Guy Verhofstadt from coming to Bulgaria, if he intended to do so. As regards the European Left and the European Greens, the non-existent chances of attracting Bulgarian members from their sister parties into the next EP will probably discourage them from campaigning in Bulgaria, too.

Given the complex decision-making in the EU, of which the European Parliament is only a part, a rather low profile on European promises that cannot be fulfilled by the EP without support of the Council of Ministers (the national governments) is not necessarily a bad thing. The European Parliament’s rhetoric has been always several steps ahead of real integration and it is doubtful whether creating high expectations is the right remedy for the growing lack of trust in European institutions. Bulgarians have a much higher level of trust in European institutions than in their domestic ones. Destroying their trust in EU institutions through irresponsible promises in the EP elections campaign would have more serious consequences than a campaign with a bleak EU outlook.

Regardless of the media’s and NGOs’ attempts to use the EP elections as an opportunity to better inform citizens on the EU and on Bulgaria’s position within it, the general perception of the May 2014 EP elections will remain largely that of a rehearsal for changing the Bulgarian political landscape, whether through governmental changes or early elections.

Sixty-seven percent of Bulgarians do not believe the country could face the future better outside of the EU,<sup>31</sup> so regardless of any eventual political changes as a direct or indirect result of the EP elections, prospective Bulgarian governments will be eager to be part of the EU mainstream. A common concern of both the centre-left and the centre-right in Bulgaria is, and will continue to be, any drifting into the periphery of an EU divided along eurozone/non-eurozone lines.

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<sup>31</sup> Eurobarometer (2013), Standard Eurobarometer 80, Autumn ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_first_en.pdf)).

# Big Names, little European Debate – An Overview of the EP Elections in Finland

Tuomas Iso-Markku\*

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In Finland, the 2014 European Parliament election will take place in a very different political setting from the 2009 election. The unfolding of the eurozone crisis has had a significant impact on Finnish politics, markedly increasing the salience of European issues in the domestic political contest. The Finnish parliamentary election of 2011 was largely fought over the management of the eurozone crisis and led to the emergence of the eurosceptic Finns Party as a major political force. Using highly EU-critical rhetoric and campaigning against the provision of rescue loans to struggling eurozone economies, the Finns Party was able to construct the election debate around the pro-/anti-EU cleavage that had thus far played a negligible role in Finnish politics.

The enduring success of the Finns Party has forced all Finnish parties to carefully consider, and in some cases adjust, their views on specific EU policies and the European integration process at large.<sup>32</sup> However, with the exception of the Finns Party, all the parties represented in the Finnish parliament (*eduskunta*) remain essentially pro-European. At the face of the continuing pro-European consensus among the Finnish parties, even the Finns Party has recently started to soften its euroscepticism, trying to present itself primarily as an EU-critical reform party.

Despite the fact that EU issues do not currently polarise Finland's political landscape to the extent to which they did shortly before and after the 2011 national election, this year's European Parliament elections are still considered very important. Never before have EP elections attracted such high-profile candidates in Finland. However, well-known candidates alone will not guarantee that the electoral campaign will actually be about EU or European issues. Instead, the proximity of the next national parliamentary election means that the domestic party contest will inevitably cast its shadow over the EP election. In addition, Finland's candidate-centred electoral system is not conducive to issue-based electoral campaigns. As a result, very little substantial debate about European affairs has so far taken place. On the other hand, the campaigns start very late in Finland. Thus, the last weeks ahead of the election may witness more lively discussions.

## In the shadow of the domestic party contest

The 2014 EP elections do not directly coincide with any other national or local elections in Finland. However, the next national parliamentary election is scheduled to take place less than a year after the EP elections, in April 2015. The national electoral context will thus unavoidably influence this year's electoral battle. Indeed, the upcoming national election is already very present in the media, directing much of the public attention to domestic issues.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of the Finnish political landscape after the 2011 election, see J. Jokela and K. Korhonen (2012), "A Eurosceptic big bang: Finland's EU policy in hindsight of the 2011 elections", FIIA Briefing Paper No. 106, Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

<sup>33</sup> For the same observation, see the interview with Professor Tapio Raunio in Tiina Kokko (2014), "Professori: EU-vaalit uhkaavat jäädä kotimaan politiikan varjoon", *YLE Uutiset*, 14 April ([http://yle.fi/uutiset/professori\\_eu-vaalit\\_uhkaavat\\_jaada\\_kotimaan\\_politiikan\\_varjoon/7189393](http://yle.fi/uutiset/professori_eu-vaalit_uhkaavat_jaada_kotimaan_politiikan_varjoon/7189393)).

The reason for the early start of the national electoral battle lies in the difficulties experienced by Finland's current government coalition. The government, led by Jyrki Katainen of the National Coalition Party, has hit a lengthy rough patch, facing criticism from outside as well as from within. The government suffered a major blow in March when the Left Alliance, one of the smaller government parties, decided to abandon the coalition after a disagreement over planned cuts to child support. The Green League, another of the government's junior members, has also toyed with the idea of an early exit. The opposition, by contrast, is doing well. National opinion polls suggest that the Centre Party has overtaken the National Coalition Party as Finland's most popular party.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of the 2015 national parliamentary election has been further underlined by the decision of the eurosceptic Finns Party's chairman, Timo Soini, not to run in this year's EP elections. Instead of fulfilling his European ambitions, Soini, the single most popular candidate in the 2009 EP election, declared that he will concentrate on domestic issues and aim to lead the Finns Party into the next Finnish government.

Alongside the intensifying national electoral debate, the coming weeks will also see an internal competition for the leadership posts of Finland's two biggest government parties, the National Coalition Party and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The SDP's chairperson, Jutta Urpilainen, presently acts as Minister of Finance and is one of the key members of the current government. However, the SDP has fared badly in the polls and as a result, Urpilainen was challenged by trade unionist Antti Rinne to fight for her post as party leader. Jyrki Katainen, for his part, surprised most observers in early April by announcing that he will step down as Prime Minister and chairman of the National Coalition Party in June. This instantly started speculation about his successor as party leader and Prime Minister, with the next chairperson set to govern Finland for the remaining months of the current legislative term. The leadership battles within both the SDP and the National Coalition Party have received broad media coverage in the past weeks, keeping the spotlight on domestic politics.

### **Unprecedentedly strong candidate lists**

Despite the approaching national parliamentary election, most Finnish parties have been able to put forward very impressive candidate lists for the EP elections. A number of nationally well-known candidates – some with extensive EU-related experience – are standing for election. The quality of the lists reflects both the growing awareness of the EP's role in European decision-making and the increasing importance of the EU dimension in the domestic political contest.

For the first time since Finland's accession to the EU, three government ministers are even running for a seat in the EP. Some commentators have interpreted this as a further sign of the present government's weakness: ministers prefer to leave for Brussels rather than to face a disappointed electorate in the 2015 parliamentary election. However, in particular the two ministers of the National Coalition Party standing for election are also clearly motivated by the prospect of attaining a senior position within the EU's institutional set-up. The National Coalition Party is allowed to nominate the next Finnish Commissioner and by announcing their candidacy, Alexander Stubb (current Minister for Europe and Foreign Trade) and Henna Virkkunen (current Minister for Public Administration and Local Government) thus automatically entered the race for the post.

However, the situation within the National Coalition Party has become more complicated after Prime Minister Katainen publicised his resignation and subsequently expressed a strong interest in continuing his career in Brussels. Katainen is now the clear favourite to become Finland's

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<sup>34</sup> Pekka Kinnunen (2014), "Kataisen lähtöilmoitus katkaisi kokoomuksen nousun", *YLE Uutiset*, 30 April ([http://yle.fi/uutiset/kataisen\\_lahtoilmoitus\\_katkaisi\\_kokoomuksen\\_nousun/7215069](http://yle.fi/uutiset/kataisen_lahtoilmoitus_katkaisi_kokoomuksen_nousun/7215069)).

next Commissioner. Some see Katainen as destined for an even higher post. Before Jean-Claude Juncker was appointed as the lead candidate of the European People's Party (EPP), Katainen was repeatedly mentioned in the media as one of the possible alternatives. Even in the last weeks, Katainen's name has come up as a potential compromise solution if the member states are unwilling to nominate Juncker or the Socialists' Martin Schulz as the next Commission president.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, EP candidate Alexander Stubb is now considered one of the hottest contenders to succeed Katainen as the leader of the National Coalition Party and Prime Minister. Stubb has already announced that he would reject his potential seat in the EP if he is chosen as the new party chairman.

The third government minister to run in the 2014 EP elections alongside Stubb and Virkkunen is Päivi Räsänen, the leader of the Christian Democrats and currently Minister of Interior. Räsänen's nomination came rather late and can be seen as a reaction to the other parties' success in attracting prominent candidates for their lists. In addition, recent polls have suggested that the Christian Democrats are in danger of losing their only seat in the EP, which has further highlighted the need for a top-level candidate.<sup>36</sup> Apart from Stubb, Virkkunen and Räsänen, the Left Alliance's Merja Kyllönen was also a minister at the time she was nominated as her party's EP candidate. However, she lost her minister title after the Left Alliance switched to the opposition at the end of March.

A further high-profile name among the Finnish EP candidates is Finland's current Commissioner, Olli Rehn, who represents the Centre Party. Serving as Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Euro, Rehn has been one of the principal architects of the EU's response to the eurozone crisis. In view of the heated debates over the management of the crisis in Finland, Rehn's nomination as an EP candidate represents a controversial move, especially since his own party has been very critical of some of the rescue policies. It is particularly noteworthy that one of the Centre Party's other top candidates, veteran politician and former foreign minister Paavo Väyrynen, has clearly distanced himself from Rehn.<sup>37</sup>

While the above-mentioned candidates have received a major part of the media attention so far, there are also other notable candidates on the lists of the Finnish parties. Most importantly, 11 of Finland's 13 current MEPs are standing for re-election. In addition, there are close to 40 members of the Finnish parliament on the various party lists. Above all, the Finns Party has tried to attract MPs to run in the EP election, as the decision of chairman Soini to stay on the domestic stage has left a vacuum in the party's list. Currently, the top candidates of the party are MEP Sampo Terho and MP Jussi Halla-aho. The latter is popular among voters, but also represents the Finns Party's anti-immigration wing, which has frequently clashed with chairman Soini in the past.

Apart from the prominence and EU-related experience of the candidates, geography has clearly been an important criterion in the candidate selection process. Although Finland forms a single constituency in the EP elections, Finnish parties generally try to nominate candidates from different parts of the country. This tendency is explained also by the fact that regional party organs typically play an important role in the candidate selection, even though the final decision is mostly taken by one of the national party organs.

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<sup>35</sup> Juhana Rossi (2014), "Katainen's entry mixes up race for top EU jobs after the elections", *Wall Street Journal*, 11 April (<http://blogs.wsj.com/brussels/2014/04/11/katainens-entry-mixes-up-race-for-top-eu-jobs-after-elections/>).

<sup>36</sup> Pekka Kinnunen (2013), "Keskustan eurovaalikannatus romahti", *YLE Uutiset*, 20 April.

<sup>37</sup> Olli Pohjanpalo (2014), "Paavo Väyrynen kääntäisi EU:n suunnan", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 February.

## Candidate-centred elections

Finding well-known candidates is crucial in Finland, as Finnish EP elections tend to be very candidate-centred.<sup>38</sup> The Finnish electoral system is based on open party lists, which automatically shifts some of the focus from the parties to the candidates. The views of the Finnish electorate also testify to the central role of the candidates. According to a survey published in 2013, over a third of the Finnish electorate vote for a candidate rather than for a party in EP elections, while a further 30% say they consider both the candidate and the party to be equally important for their voting decision. Only 25% of the electorate vote primarily for a party.<sup>39</sup> It is thus important for the candidates to raise their personal profile, whereas the party often plays a subordinate role. The candidate-centred nature of the Finnish EP elections is exemplified by the current situation within the Centre Party, with Paavo Väyrynen openly challenging fellow party member Olli Rehn.

Candidates also play a significant part in funding the election campaigns, as parties have a limited amount of funds available for campaign work. This is particularly true of the 2014 EP elections, as many of the biggest parties have decided to cut their campaign budgets drastically. The Centre Party, for example, has announced that it will invest only €300,000 in its campaign as opposed to the €800,000 the party spent on the EP elections in 2009. The National Coalition Party, for its part, will reduce its budget from €800,000 to €500,000, and the Green League will cut its spending from an estimated €220,000 to €110,000, thus having the smallest budget of all the Finnish parliamentary parties. The Social Democratic Party (€500,000), the Swedish People's Party (€500,000), the Left Alliance (€330,000) and the Christian Democrats (€130,000) all plan to invest approximately the same amount of money as they did five years ago. The only party to significantly increase its spending is the Finns Party, which will multiply its previous budget and is now planning to invest altogether €500,000.<sup>40</sup>

Overall, the figures mirror the success of the parties in the last national election. The rapid rise of the Finns Party means that the party now has more funds available, whereas the three traditional big parties – the National Coalition Party, the SDP and the Centre Party – will have to manage with smaller budgets. Nevertheless, some of the well-known and well-networked candidates will most likely raise significant sums for their campaign work. For example, Alexander Stubb of the National Coalition Party has already announced that his personal campaign budget will exceed the €100,000 mark.<sup>41</sup>

## Differing roles for the European lead candidates

The relationships of the Finnish parties to the lead candidates of their European party groups differ substantially. However, the idea of nominating European lead candidates as such has received a considerable amount of visibility in Finland. This is mainly due to the fact that Olli

<sup>38</sup> T. Raunio (2009), "The European Parliament Election in Finland", European Parliament Election Briefing No. 26, European Parties Elections and Referendums Network.

<sup>39</sup> Jussi Salokorpi (2013), "Ehdokas ohittaa puolueet eurovaaleissa", *YLE Uutiset*, 12 November ([http://yle.fi/uutiset/ehdokas\\_ohittaa\\_puolueet\\_eurovaaleissa/6929875](http://yle.fi/uutiset/ehdokas_ohittaa_puolueet_eurovaaleissa/6929875)).

<sup>40</sup> The numbers are derived from Liisa Karvinen (2014), "Moni puolue säästää eurovaalikisassa, PS tuplaa budjetin", *YLE Uutiset*, 14 April ([http://yle.fi/uutiset/moni\\_puolue\\_saastaa\\_eurovaalikisassa\\_ps\\_tuplaa\\_budjetin/7082625](http://yle.fi/uutiset/moni_puolue_saastaa_eurovaalikisassa_ps_tuplaa_budjetin/7082625)). Slightly differing figures have been presented in Janne Toivonen (2014), "Puolueet piheinä eurovaaleihin – vain perussuomalaisten vaalikassa kasvanut", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 3 May ([www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Puolueet+pihein%C3%A4+eurovaaleihin++vain+perussuomalaisten+vaalikassa+kasvanut/a1399014205348](http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Puolueet+pihein%C3%A4+eurovaaleihin++vain+perussuomalaisten+vaalikassa+kasvanut/a1399014205348)).

<sup>41</sup> See Toivonen, op.cit.

Rehn is one of the ALDE group's two lead candidates, even if Rehn – unlike the other lead candidate Guy Verhofstad – is not campaigning for the Commission presidency. The rumours about Jyrki Katainen being one of the possible lead candidates of the EPP have also been taken note of in Finland.

While at least part of the Finnish electorate should thus be aware of the fact that there are European lead candidates, the lead candidates themselves have not been very present in the Finnish media. In mid-April, Finland's leading daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* tested half-jokingly whether Finnish MPs are able to identify the lead candidates. Of the five MPs who were interviewed, four managed to identify Schulz, Juncker and Verhofstad, but no-one succeeded in naming the European United Left's lead candidate Alexis Tsipras or the Greens' Ska Keller, even if some recognised the former.<sup>42</sup>

Both Schulz and Juncker have, however, visited Finland ahead of the EP elections. Schulz made his trip in his role as President of the EP, although he also met with SDP leader Urpilainen during his visit. Juncker, on the other hand, came exclusively to boost the campaign of the National Coalition Party. Party leader Katainen used the occasion to express his wish that Juncker be elected as the next Commission President. Juncker, for his part, said that he would like to see Katainen obtain a senior post in the EU.<sup>43</sup>

The situation within the Centre Party is more complex. While the party's EP candidate Olli Rehn is ALDE's second lead candidate, Paavo Väyrynen, Rehn's contender within the Centre party, has criticised both Rehn and the ALDE group as a whole. In the past, Väyrynen has suggested that the Centre Party should leave ALDE altogether and form a new, less federalist party group. More recently, he proposed that the Finns Party should join ALDE in order for EU-critical forces to gain a strong foothold within the group.<sup>44</sup>

As for the Finns Party, it is currently unclear which party group the party will join after the EP elections. Chairman Soini and the party's sole MEP Sampo Terho have so far been dismissive of the invitations to join the possible new far-right bloc initiated by Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen. Instead, the party has talked about the possibility of a merger between their current group, Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD), and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). The Finns Party is clearly unwilling to be associated with Wilders and Le Pen, instead frequently highlighting its close relationship to the UK Independence Party and the Danish National Party.

## How much Europe?

As argued above, the Finnish EU debate is currently less polarised than right before and after the 2011 national parliamentary election, which took place at the height of the eurozone crisis and concentrated primarily on the bailout loans to struggling eurozone economies. Instead of debating EU issues, the Finnish parties have recently turned their focus increasingly to domestic matters. This development is related to the difficulties that the Finnish economy is currently experiencing, but also to the upcoming national parliamentary election.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Pipsa Palttala (2014), "Kansanedustajat eivät tunne kaikkia EU-vaalien kärkiehdokkaita", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 April.

<sup>43</sup> Heli Suominen (2014), "Juncker lupaili Kataiselle merkittävää EU-virkkaa", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17 April.

<sup>44</sup> Olli Pohjanpalo (2014), "Paavo Väyrynen kääntäisi EU:n suunnan" *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 February; Johannes Kotkavirta (2014), "Rehn yllättyi Väyrysen ehdotuksesta – 'Tuskin valmis tanssiinkutsuun'", *Iltä-Sanomat*, 28 January.

<sup>45</sup> See Juha Jokela (2014), "Despite the Rise of the True Finns in 2011, Finland continues to be a pro-European member state", *EUROPP – European Politics and Policy*, London School of Economics, 29



The shift towards domestic issues has compelled the Finns Party to broaden its political profile. At the same time, the party is seriously aiming for government after the 2015 national election, which requires it to move closer to the other parties, particularly on the EU dimension. Accordingly, the party has recently worded its messages more carefully. For example, despite criticising the single currency, the Finns Party does not demand that Finland leaves the eurozone, instead stating simply that the party is not committed to the euro.<sup>46</sup>

In part, the willingness of the Finns Party to adopt a less obtrusive approach also has to do with the fact that the other parties have learnt to respond to the party's attacks, demanding that it presents concrete alternatives to the policies it vociferously opposes.<sup>47</sup> For the above-mentioned reasons, EU debates in Finland have recently revolved around a 'more/less Europe' cleavage rather than around the more radical pro-/anti-EU cleavage. At the same time, the traditional left/right divide also plays a role, although less so, since parties from both sides of the political spectrum have sat in the same government for the last four years.

The nature of the more/less EU cleavage becomes apparent when looking at the election manifesto of the Finns Party, which starts by stating that the party wants less but a better EU. In line with the party's recent, more cautious approach, the manifesto portrays the Finns Party as a constructive EU-critical force and reformer rather than as a eurosceptic protest party. The manifesto demands that Finland prepares itself for the dissolution of the eurozone, adding, however, that the Finns Party does not actively promote such a development. The text also emphasises that the Finns Party opposes the bailing out of weaker eurozone economies as well as all related policy measures and mechanisms, including the European Stability Mechanism, the two-pack and the six-pack.

As far as institutional matters are concerned, the Finns Party expresses its support for David Cameron's proposal of a thorough reform of the EU's treaties. This step should then be followed by a referendum on Finnish EU membership. The Finns Party also welcomes the initiative of the Dutch government to roll back the powers of the EU in certain policy areas. Issues related to social policy and migration in particular are, according to the party, best dealt with nationally. The only policy area in which the party openly wishes for more EU would be in the fight against tax havens. The Finns Party also opposes any federalist developments, explicitly mentioning Prime Minister Katainen's recent idea of a "fair, middle-of-the-road integration", which the party criticises as a road leading to a federalist Europe. The Finns Party's election manifesto does not give any indication of which political group the party might align itself with in the EP after the elections. Instead, the manifesto seems to leave the door open for both moderate EU critics and eurosceptic hardliners.

Like the Finns Party, the Centre Party also underlines in its manifesto that it opposes federalist steps and wants the EU to remain a union of independent member states. This is a question that has often distinguished the Centre Party from the other members of its European party group, ALDE. Another problematic area is traditionally agricultural policy. The election manifesto of ALDE demands a reduction of agricultural subsidies and rejects a re-nationalisation of the subsidies system. The Centre Party, by contrast, has been very concerned about the future of Finland's agricultural subsidies. Consequently, the Centre Party's election manifesto underlines that Finland needs to defend its national interests, particularly in agricultural policy.

Despite the differences, the Centre Party and ALDE also have many common campaign themes, both calling for a better division of labour between the different administrative levels, more support to small and medium-sized enterprises, the completion of the single market, a stronger

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September (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/09/24/despite-the-rise-of-the-true-finns-in-2011-finland-continues-to-be-a-pro-european-eu-member-state/>).

<sup>46</sup> Miska Rantanen (2013), "Eurovaalikeskustelusta puuttui roihu", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 1 July.

<sup>47</sup> See Jokela, op.cit.

foreign and security policy, a greener economy, solid public finances and the implementation of the banking union. However, as for the two last-mentioned goals, the Centre Party adds some reservations, stating that every member state must be liable for its own debt and rejecting the idea of building a transnational deposit insurance system as part of the banking union. Many of ALDE's core themes are also mentioned in the Swedish People's Party's election manifesto.

The central campaign themes of the Social Democratic Party are more resonant with the traditional left/right cleavage than with questions related to the scope of European integration. All in all, there is a very significant degree of overlap between the manifesto of the SDP and the manifesto of the Party of European Socialists. Providing decent jobs to Europeans is the single most important goal put forward in both manifestos, followed by issues such as the fight against tax evasion, the introduction of a financial transaction tax, strengthening of the social rights of EU citizens, protection of nature and eradication of racism, sexism and homophobia. As its own national campaign theme, the SDP highlights the importance of the EU's Northern dimension, which in the party's view covers both Arctic issues and cooperation with Russia. In a slight contrast to its European counterpart, the SDP – like the Central Party – explicitly states in its manifesto that each member state is liable for its own debt. This reflects the cautious attitudes in Finland towards debt mutualisation schemes.

Of the four big Finnish parties, the National Coalition Party is the only one not to have published a traditional election manifesto. Instead, the party put out a very short election statement, which contains some policy goals that are also mentioned in the EPP's manifesto. These include completing the single market and especially the digital single market, enhancing cooperation in the European defence sector, enforcing the common rules for responsible budgeting and strengthening cooperation to fight organised crime and protect the EU's external borders. The EPP's key topics – the single market, strict rules for economic governance, internal security and enhanced defence cooperation – are also central elements in the Christian Democrats' manifesto. However, unlike the National Coalition Party or the EPP, the Christian Democrats also try to place themselves on the more/less Europe axis, defining the Christian Democratic way as being somewhere between a federal Europe and an EU exit.

The three main priorities of the Left Alliance are to strengthen the democratic control of EU decision-making, to create jobs and to achieve a more ecologically sustainable economy. In addition, the Left Alliance, like the Social Democratic Party, underlines the importance of the EU's social dimension. Finally, the Green League is the only Finnish parliamentary party that has not published a manifesto of its own, instead having a common manifesto together with the other European green parties. The manifesto places particular weight on a wide variety of social and environmental issues as well as on democratising EU governance.

So far, very little substantial debate over any of the topics on the agenda of either the Finnish parties or their European political groups has taken place. On the one hand, this is related to the fact that the campaigns are only gradually beginning in Finland, with May being the principal campaigning month. On the other hand, the absence of issue-based debate also has to do with the candidate-centred electoral system of Finland in which parties – let alone the European party groups – do not play a central role. Nevertheless, for example the crisis in Ukraine and its implications for European foreign and security policy are a potential campaign issue, as the crisis has already spawned a debate about the cornerstones of Finnish security policy.

### **Higher turnout, changes in the composition of the Finnish EP delegations**

As indicated above, the candidate lists of the Finnish parties are stronger than they have been in any previous EP elections. Some of the Finnish candidates are also competing for top positions within the EU, which makes the EP elections more interesting from the Finnish point of view. This is why there are good reasons to believe that the turnout of the 2014 election will top the



40.3% achieved in 2009, even if much of the focus is currently on domestic politics. However, no reliable projections of the expected voter turnout have so far been made.

As for the results, it seems that the National Coalition Party, which has recently been trailing the Centre Party in domestic polls, is likely to win its second EP elections in a row. Although the government of party leader Jyrki Katainen has been going through a very rough period, the voting patterns in EP elections differ somewhat from those in the national parliamentary elections. Most importantly, the National Coalition Party has some of the most prominent candidates on its list. In addition, the party has successfully managed to turn the spotlight on itself just ahead of the elections – above all due to Katainen’s recent decision to step down as Prime Minister and pursue a career in Europe. The National Coalition Party can also be reasonably confident of its ability to mobilise its core voters.<sup>48</sup> Not only is the party likely to keep its three seats in the EP, it is fighting hard for a fourth one.

The competition for second place will most likely be battled out between the Centre Party and the Finns Party. Having both Commissioner Olli Rehn and the highly EU-critical Paavo Väyrynen on their list, the Centre Party’s position appears challenging. On the one hand, the party can attract voters from different sections of the electorate. On the other hand, the polarity could also harm the party, as voters trying to make a clear statement might turn elsewhere. Furthermore, an important factor in the Centre Party’s recent rise has been the personal popularity of party leader Juha Sipilä. However, with two strong and antagonistic top candidates taking the centre stage, Sipilä will inevitably be pushed somewhat to the background. Nevertheless, it seems the Centre Party will be able to maintain its three seats.

While Timo Soini’s decision to stay in domestic politics was a big blow to the Finns Party’s EP elections campaign, the chairman is likely to be a visible figure ahead of the election. The big question concerning the Finns Party is whether the party can mobilise its supporters on election day. If it succeeds in doing so, it is likely to gain a second seat in the EP, possibly even a third one. In any case, the party will significantly improve on the 9.8% it achieved in 2009.

Despite having a very solid candidate list, the Social Democratic Party is suffering somewhat from the lack of a clear top candidate. Also, the ongoing leadership battle within the party will not make it easier for the SDP to orientate itself towards the EP elections, even though the duel will have been decided by then. However, the polls suggest that the SDP will retain both of its current seats in the EP.<sup>49</sup>

Heidi Hautala’s candidacy means that the Green League has a clear top candidate who is very popular among the party’s supporters. The party is thus likely to achieve a better result than it did in the 2011 national elections. However, that will most probably not be enough for the party to keep both of its current seats. The Left Alliance, on the other hand, looks to be making a return to the European Parliament. As for the Swedish People’s Party and the Christian Democrats, both seem destined to lose their seats in the EP.

## **Outlook: On the road to the national election in 2015**

Despite the fact that the salience of EU issues and, concomitantly, the importance of the EP elections has clearly grown in Finland, this year’s EP elections are unlikely to have a major impact on Finnish EU policy as a whole. The composition of Finland’s 13-strong MEP group will change of course, with the Finns Party set to gain at least one additional seat, possibly even two. However, this does not represent a dramatic break from the present situation in the Finnish

<sup>48</sup> Pekka Kinnunen (2014), “Keskustan eurovaalikannatus romahti”, *YLE Uutiset*, 20 March. The National Coalition Party is by far the most popular party among those respondents who say they are going to vote for sure.

<sup>49</sup> See Kinnunen, *op.cit.*

political landscape. Instead, the EP elections will cement the current power relations among the Finnish parties, as the Finns Party has unarguably established itself as one of Finland's four major political players.

Despite the Finns Party's continuous success, the past two years have shown that the party is not able to permanently influence Finnish EU debates to the extent to which it did in the beginning of the legislative term. Instead, the party has had to come to terms with the fact that the vast majority of both the Finnish electorate and the Finnish parties are supportive of the EU and the euro. The upcoming EP election is not going to change this fundamental setting. Nevertheless, the Finns Party's own influence and visibility within the EP could increase significantly, depending on whether the eurosceptic and EU-critical forces are able to combine forces.

A very interesting question regarding Finland's EU policy is whether any of the Finnish top candidates are able to assume a senior position within the EU after the election. This could have a major influence on the Finnish EU debate. Nevertheless, the real determinant of Finland's future EU policy will be the national election of April 2015. Should a dramatically different government constellation emerge as a result of the election, this would unquestionably have an impact on Finland's approach within and towards the EU.

# Increased Populism and Euroscepticism: The EU Elections in France

Selma Bendjaballah\*

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European elections have traditionally failed to create an ‘electoral connection’ between the citizens and politics in the European Parliament), in particular, and in the European Union, more generally. France is no exception to this rule. Since 1979, voter turnout has been decreasing from 60.7% of the electorate in 1979 to 40.6% in 2009.

## Predicted voter turnout and results: Abstention and ‘protest vote’

For the upcoming European elections, less than 40% of the French electorate intend to go to the polls.<sup>50</sup> This is more or less the same percentage as last time in 2009, where 40.6% showed up to vote.

The main reason cited by the French to explain their abstention is a disinterest in European affairs. In 2009, 50% of them said that the European elections “are not interesting” at all.<sup>51</sup> The second reason lies in a strong anger harboured against the French government led by President François Hollande, provoking what is known as a ‘sanction vote’. Some 50% of French voters say they won’t go to the polls because they reject the policies of the socialist government. 71% intend to use the European elections to ‘punish’ the French President and his government,<sup>52</sup> which is 20 points higher than in 2009.

Therefore, French voters do not use European Parliament elections to express their preferences about European issues, but rather their views on national politics. National parties and voters treat European elections as ‘second-order’ contests in the national electoral cycles.<sup>53</sup> However, this ‘sanction vote’ is not only addressed to the French President and his government. As shown by recent polls, 59% of French citizens intend to use the 2014 elections to express discontent with the way the European Union is led, which is 8 points higher than in 2009. Among the main criticisms levelled at EU political leaders is their inability to solve the eurozone crisis and its social consequences (the rise of unemployment and loss of purchasing power).<sup>54</sup>

In detail, the pre-electoral polls anticipate the increasing popularity of the extreme right-wing parties – see the table below. The Front National would receive 23% of the votes. It would then become the first political force in the country. The UMP, the moderate right-wing party, follows close behind with 22.5% of the votes. In third place comes the Socialist Party, the party of the President and his government, with 19.5%. Far behind come the centrist party UDI/Modem with 10% and finally the Green party and the extreme left-wing party Front de Gauche, both with 8% of the votes.

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<sup>50</sup> See results of survey conducted by IFOP, 10 April 2014 ([www.ifop.com](http://www.ifop.com)).

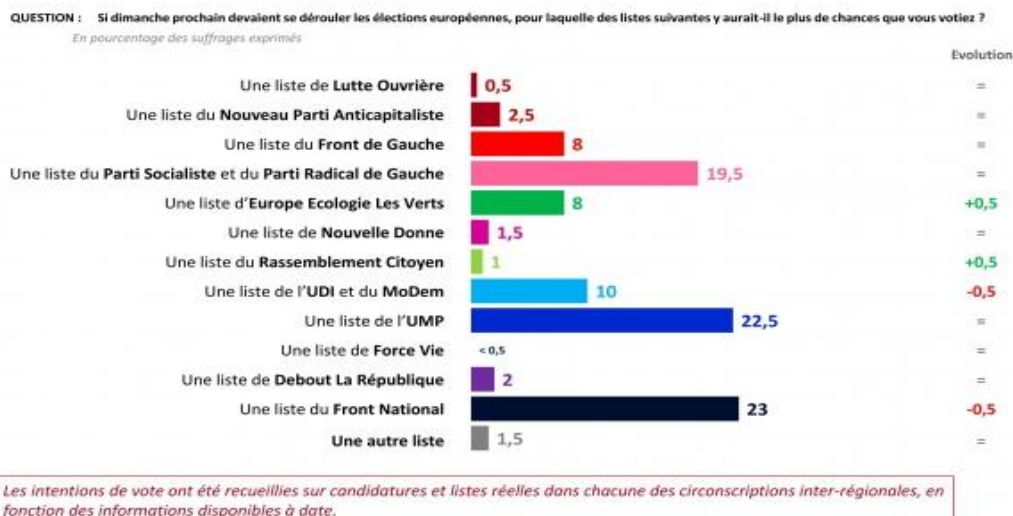
<sup>51</sup> [www.fondapol.org/fileadmin/upload/pdf/documents/Enquete\\_Elections\\_Europeennes\\_Resultats\\_Complets.pdf](http://www.fondapol.org/fileadmin/upload/pdf/documents/Enquete_Elections_Europeennes_Resultats_Complets.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> See survey conducted by TNS Sofres-Sopra for *RTL and Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 April 2014.

<sup>53</sup> K. Reif and H. Schmitt (1980), “Nine second order national elections. A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results”, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol.8, No. 1, pp. 3-44.

<sup>54</sup> See survey conducted by TNS Sofres-Sopra for *RTL and Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 April 2014.

### L'intention de vote aux élections européennes



Source: IFOP, 10 April 2014.

In order to better understand these statistics and the obstinate abstention, let us go back to the main structural components of the European ballots in France.

### An EU campaign delayed by key municipal elections for the French government

The European election campaigns started particularly late, due to three main reasons. First, municipal elections were held last March, in which the current Government had a great deal at stake. Indeed, these elections were the first to be held since the presidential and legislative elections in 2012. The municipal ballot was then the first real 'test' for the government in a difficult economic and social environment, attracting widespread attention from media and parties. European issues traditionally debated in France – such as the weak place granted to citizens in the EU, the Commission's contested role in domestic budgetary affairs or the competition between France and Germany for EU leadership – have not fared well in this heavy schedule of national elections.

Second, national parties (especially the UMP and the Socialist Party) have taken their time in selecting definitive listings. Intra-party disputes over the constitution of the listings slowed down the process, for instance in the Front de Gauche, where leaders competed for the 'best constituencies'. Late changes to the listings have also affected the Socialist Party. Following its harsh defeat in the March 2014 municipal elections, the Party removed Harlem Désir as its First Secretary and head of list in Ile de France. It took a while to replace him.

Third, no other election in France, whether national or local, is held jointly with the European elections. Although parallel elections can theoretically divert the debates from European issues to purely local or national matters, it seems that holding two or three elections on the same day could lead to a more energetic campaign and could help increase voter turnout.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> C. Belot and F. Greffet (2005), "Une Europe en quête d'électeurs. Retour sur différentes lectures de l'abstention aux élections européennes à l'occasion du scrutin de juin 2004", in Pascal Delwit and Philippe Poirier (eds), *Parlement puissant, électeurs absents?*, Bruxelles: éditions de l'ULB, pp. 179-203.

## A 'domestic' campaign for candidate selection and media coverage

EU issues have been debated by political leaders through the lens of French internal problems. Several criteria reflect this domestic bias. First, the criteria applied by the French political parties in selecting the candidates show that appointments respond more to domestic than European politics. Most of candidates have been chosen according national criteria and not according to their EU background. The UMP for instance has picked up candidates who were defeated in the 2012 national legislative elections in order to give them a 'second try'. Only four EPP-ED incumbents are heads of lists for the EU elections. In three (South-West, East and South-East) out of the eight French constituencies, former ministers are heads of lists, as EPP-ED incumbents are only ranked second. The UMP then picked up candidates with experience in national politics and are extremely well known by the French people, but who lack any direct experience in EU politics and the EU institutions.

In the Front National, two out of eight heads of lists – Marine and Jean Marie Le Pen – have already served as MEPs. The other selected FN candidates were picked up for their success in the last round of municipal elections. Besides, internal party struggles have determined to a great extent the selection of candidates. In the UMP, Henri Guaino, former political Counsellor of President Nicolas Sarkozy, supported by Laurent Wauquiez, former Minister, and 40 MPs, officially said he won't support his colleague A. Lamassoure, head of list in Ile-de-France and MEP since 1999. In the Socialist Party, the former unionist Edouard Martin, who led the movement that opposed the closure of the ArcelorMittal plant in Florange in 2009, is head of list in the East constituency. The unionist was appointed in preference to Catherine Trautmann, who has been an MEP since 2004. The 'ideological war' within the Socialist Party over the European issue between an extreme wing and a moderate pro-European wing reached its climax here.

Second, the party campaigns cover mainly domestic topics. This is especially obvious for parties in opposition, which take the European elections as an opportunity to challenge the government. At the launch of the UMP Party's campaign on April 24<sup>th</sup>, the current President Jean-François Copé observed that "the European elections are the second opportunity to push François Hollande to change his policy". Jean-Luc Mélenchon, head of the Front de Gauche list in South-West, called on French voters to punish François Hollande and his government. Olivier Besancenot, head of the extreme left-wing party NPA, claimed that these European elections pave the way for a popular opposition to President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls.

The cleavage between the government and the opposition does not work here. The majority party, the Socialist Party, challenged by a persistent popular discontent, has to focus more on the national economic and social difficulties than on European issues such as the role of the EU in Ukraine or the reform of the procedure for nominating the European Commission President, following the Treaty of Lisbon. Obviously, there is some kind of linkage with the European dimension in the current economic debate. The French 'Responsibility Pact' is indeed supposed to meet the EU Stability and Growth Pact. Thus, the EU is not absent from the debate, but the political leaders and French political elites insist instead on focusing the debate on the planned reform of national institutions, such as the French civil service or the Social Security system.

Besides facing the difficulties of securing a sufficient parliamentary majority, the newly designated government of Manuel Valls is compelled to manage intra-party dissension and to find compromises. In this context, Europe is not the priority. Finally, the Socialist Party has always had ambivalent feelings towards Europe, as shown by the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Therefore, if Socialist French leaders are unable or unwilling to talk about Europe, it is also because they do not want to risk exacerbating their internal disagreements.

In contrast, the Green/EELV Party and the centrist UDI/Modem list appear a bit more Europe-oriented. For instance, the Green Party's eight leaders of the lists have been known since 14

December 2013. Moreover, the topics covered by the French heads of lists focus mainly on EU topics such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Since launching its campaign in August 2013, the UDI/Modem list also concentrates on Europe, by calling for federalism for the EU.

Third, intra-party and national issues have been largely covered by the media, both print and televised. The French Green/EELV attracted more attention for its controversial unwillingness to be part of the new Government than for its position on EU issues. This decision taken by the Executive Board was strongly opposed by many Green MPs, and affected the priority accorded to EU topics. The political retirement of the former president of the UDI Jean Louis Borloo has also impacted the EU campaign of the centrist party. More generally, the topics covered are truly domestic: the highly criticised ‘Responsibility Pact’ of President Hollande, which is even contested by his own colleagues of the Socialist parliamentary majority; the rise of unemployment; the successive buyouts of French companies (Alstom, Fagor...); Sunday business hours; and a special minimum wage for young people. Even when political debates on the EU were to be hosted by television stations, partisan national considerations were set forth by French party leaders. For instance, a debate between Martin Schulz and Marine Le Pen was cancelled, because the President of the Front National, Marine Le Pen, claimed the EU campaign was above all a “French one” and that she did not have “to discuss [such matters] with a foreigner”.<sup>56</sup>

The key debate of the EU campaign between the candidates for the European Commission Presidency (Martin Schulz, Jean Claude Juncker, Guy Verhofstadt, Alexis Tsipras and José Bové/Ska Keller) on 15 May 2014 won’t be broadcast on French public television. Whereas this climax of the EU campaign will be broadcast by TV channels in 20 member states, France will be one of the few that decline to do so.<sup>57</sup>

More generally, when it comes to talk about European elections, television reports or debates cover topics that are cause for national concern, e.g. the contested implementation of austerity package imposed by the Commission,<sup>58</sup> or the integration of Roma people into French society.

Finally, most French parties use EU elections to meet domestic goals. This is most obvious for the Front National. The extreme right wing party intends to follow up on its successful municipal election. The president Marine Le Pen claimed that in the event of success in EU elections, she would request the dissolution of the National Assembly. Regarding the Socialist Party, a success in EU elections seems necessary to restore confidence. Having left the government majority last March, the EELV/Greens may wish to use the European elections to rebuild their identity and presence in the national political sphere.

### **Varied levels of party involvement**

Lastly, the French EU campaign has been characterised by a very low involvement of political parties. First, as seen above, the resources and time that political elites from different parties devote to the European election campaigns are limited, except for the UDI/Modem and the Greens/EELV. The Greens/EELV held a common meeting with the other European Greens’ heads of lists to launch the campaign last December. The UDI/Modem also set up a workshop devoted to EU issues last summer.

<sup>56</sup> [www.atlantico.fr/pepites/europeennes-2014-marine-pen-refuse-debat-avec-martin-schulz-france-2-cede-1038186.html](http://www.atlantico.fr/pepites/europeennes-2014-marine-pen-refuse-debat-avec-martin-schulz-france-2-cede-1038186.html).

<sup>57</sup> [www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/04/30/france-televisions-ou-le-deni-de-democratie-europeenne\\_4409502\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/04/30/france-televisions-ou-le-deni-de-democratie-europeenne_4409502_3232.html)

<sup>58</sup> See remarks by the French Minister of Economy Arnaud Montebourg ([www.liberation.fr/economie/2013/11/13/l-austerite-responsable-de-la-crise-en-europe-pour-montebourg\\_946563](http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2013/11/13/l-austerite-responsable-de-la-crise-en-europe-pour-montebourg_946563)).

Second, the party elites don't actively support their candidates. For instance, the President of the UMP Jean François Copé belatedly supported the heads of lists collectively at a press conference on April 24<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of most of his last visits was to support candidates for the municipal elections. Regarding the head of list in the South-East, Vincent Peillon was dismissed from his ministerial portfolio after the defeat of the Socialist party in the municipal elections. This 'punishment' may weaken the position of the former Minister of Education in his own constituency.

The involvement of French national parties in supporting the EU candidates is a bit more complex... The UMP President Jean François Copé, who actively supported the candidacy of Michel Barnier, is finding it hard to now endorse Jean Claude Juncker, supported by Angela Merkel. French UMP members have the feeling that their vote is driven primarily by Germany.<sup>59</sup> Left-wing parties seem to be a bit more involved. For instance, Martin Schulz launched his campaign in Paris with the support of many prominent figures in the Socialist Party. Many national leaders such as the Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira or the former MEP Pierre Moscovici attended the meeting. However, one should recall that there are still strong disagreements between Martin Schulz on the one hand and Jean Christophe Cambadélis and many other French Socialists on the other hand on the necessity to reform the Maastricht criteria.<sup>60</sup> Hence, strong internal cleavages persist and Martin Schulz' support has become highly controversial.

Third, manifestos of EU parties are unequally included by French national parties. On the homepage of the UMP website, for instance, there is no link to the EPP-ED manifesto. Obviously, this is also the case for the Front National, whose members sit as 'non-attached' MEPs. Interestingly, Marine le Pen expressed her wish last November to build up a 'Eurosceptic group', with the support of Geert Wilders from the Netherlands. Following the refusal of UKIP members to join this coalition, however, this project seems to have been put on hold. In contrast, the left-wing parties are giving a bit more space to EU affairs: the Socialist Party and the Greens/EELV websites have posted their EU parties' manifestos for free downloading. Regarding the extreme left-wing Front de Gauche party, its website's homepage is entirely dedicated to EU elections in French constituencies. The issues commonly defended by all the EU extreme left-wing parties, such as the opposition to austerity packages, the rise of unemployment in the EU or the need for a more substantial citizens' participation in the EU decision-making process, are also presented. However, this publicised unity should not lead us to forget the persistence of strong internal disagreements. One of the founding members of the French Front de gauche and former leader of the LCR (Communist Revolutionary League) Christian Picquet resigned his membership on 1 May 2014. According to him, the selection of EU candidates did not make enough room for him, his colleagues and their anti-EU ideological argumentation.<sup>61</sup>

How to explain this low level of involvement? First, parties may fear the internal debates that EU elections may engender and their consequences. Indeed, since many parties are ideologically divided about the EU, it may be worth grasping the European issue for members who wish to challenge the leadership of their parties and/or show themselves off to advantage as potential candidates for the leadership.<sup>62</sup> The Front de Gauche's internal crisis, summed up above, is one

<sup>59</sup> [www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/Jean-Claude-Juncker-sera-le-chef-de-file-de-la-droite-europeenne-2014-03-08-1117023](http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/Jean-Claude-Juncker-sera-le-chef-de-file-de-la-droite-europeenne-2014-03-08-1117023)

<sup>60</sup> [www.euractiv.fr/sections/elections-2014/martin-schulz-lance-sa-campagne-paris-301651](http://www.euractiv.fr/sections/elections-2014/martin-schulz-lance-sa-campagne-paris-301651).

<sup>61</sup> [www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/04/30/le-front-de-gauche-fragilise-par-des-tensions-internes\\_4409536\\_4350146.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/04/30/le-front-de-gauche-fragilise-par-des-tensions-internes_4409536_4350146.html)

<sup>62</sup> C. Parsons (2007), "Puzzling out the EU role in national politics", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 7, pp. 1135-1149. See also O. Rozenberg (2009), "L'influence du Parlement européen et l'indifférence de ses électeurs : une corrélation fallacieuse?", *Politique européenne*, No. 28, pp. 7-36.



illustration. Second, most of the time, European elections weaken the ruling parties. Therefore, parties are not pushed to mobilise their voters. This is especially the case for the government parties. In contrast, the opposition parties tend to nationalise European elections. Indeed, a defeat of the majority may be of great benefit to them. Lastly, focusing on the EU could mean that national parties would not be capable of handling national issues. Therefore, national parties see the EU through the lens of France and/or do not talk about the EU, in order to avoid having to acknowledge that they are not able to implement policies at home.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the EU history of France could be evoked. Indeed, since the De Gaulle Presidency, France has always had complicated relationships with the EU. The EU was often miscast as a threat to national sovereignty. In May 2013, President Hollande claimed that the European Commission must not dictate what France has to do.<sup>64</sup>

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To conclude, even if the EU has been a bit more present in the national debate, mainly through the interventions of Martin Schulz, party campaigns and selection of candidates still follow intra-party considerations. Intra-party and national issues have been largely covered by the media, both written and televised. Parties were more talked about for their internal disputes than for their position on EU issues. Finally, the abstention rate will certainly be as high as before.

Nevertheless, reforming the electoral system used in France could have a significant effect on the rise of abstention. In particular, the size of electoral districts and the characteristics of ballots could be explored. Theoretically, the electoral system used in France seems rather well designed since the size of each district is small, but the ballot structure used is closed. Opening the ballot could have a significant effect on the relationship between candidates and citizens, by forcing the former to campaign directly to the latter and enabling citizens to use EU elections to reward (or punish) candidates for their performance.<sup>65</sup> Besides, the choice of eight big constituencies implemented in 2004 was not able to create a close link between citizens and candidates. Building smaller constituencies is worth trying.

The major difference with the previous European elections is that this time the Front National could meet its 'day of glory'. All in all, if the Front National wins, France may lose a part of its symbolic influence within the EU institutions. However, these elections probably won't influence France's future European policy, for instance in the Council of Ministers. They also probably won't affect considerably the political balances within the EP. However, the political consequences will be surely harsher for the Socialist government. If the defeat of the Socialist Party is confirmed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, the government may go through difficult times in the national political debate. And the EU would surely move further down in priority from its first concerns.

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<sup>63</sup> O. Rozenberg (2009), "L'influence du Parlement européen et l'indifférence de ses électeurs : une corrélation fallacieuse?", *Politique européenne*, No. 28, pp. 7-36.

<sup>64</sup> [www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2013/05/29/97002-20130529FILWWW00563-la-commission-n-a-pas-a-nous-dicter-ce-que-nous-avons-a-faire-hollande.php](http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2013/05/29/97002-20130529FILWWW00563-la-commission-n-a-pas-a-nous-dicter-ce-que-nous-avons-a-faire-hollande.php).

<sup>65</sup> S. Hix and S. Hagemann (2009), "Could changing the electoral rules fix European parliament elections?", *Politique européenne*, No. 28, pp. 37-52.



# Germany: The Shadow of the Grand Coalition and a Populist *Zeitgeist*

Anne Lauenroth\*

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Expectations for the eighth European elections in Germany since 1979, taking place on May 25<sup>th</sup>, are limited: traditionally, German voters do not perceive European elections as being as important as national ones. Turnout rates fell from 65.7% in 1979 to 43.3% in 2009. A major factor is that voters so far have not been able to elect a government at the European level. Consequently, they use European elections to express an opinion on the performance of the national governing parties.<sup>66</sup> Voters also perceive European Parliament (EP) decisions linked mainly to the internal market as not important enough to their daily lives and still predominantly decide based on issues under national competence related to the labour market, tax and social security systems.

However, there are two elements that make the 2014 European elections in Germany somewhat different. First, the very sensitive political context of the economic crisis and the crisis in Ukraine has put the EU, and thus 'European' issues, on the radar of German voters. Also, the fact that the 2014 European elections in Germany are taking place *after* the national elections (in September 2013) – and not before as in 2009 – at least leaves an opportunity to also debate European issues. On the other hand, the simultaneous local elections in ten German regions might divert voters' attention to local rather than 'European' issues. Second, an increase in voter turnout is being promoted by the personalisation strategy of the European and German Social Democrats around its *Spitzenkandidat* (lead candidate) Martin Schulz and some initiatives from the media, civil society and the Green Party. Furthermore, the abolition of the threshold by the German Constitutional Court on February 26<sup>th</sup> and the fact that Germany as a whole functions as a single constituency means that more than just the usual suspects of the 25 different parties that were validated for the European elections have a chance to send candidates to the EP.<sup>67</sup> Together with the parallel local elections, this might mobilise more voters to go to the polls.

In any case, the outcome of this year's European elections will not have a great impact on Germany's European policy until at least 2017. Until then, the policy is set by the grand coalition's agreement of 17 December 2013.

## The campaigns: More of the same

The campaigns of the different German political parties for the 2014 European elections so far do not differ that much from those of 2009, at least when one compares the budget and tools. Also, the mainstream national political parties are not as engaged as they could be, except for the co-governing Social Democratic Party (SPD) and their ambitious candidate Martin Schulz. As regards topics and candidates, the co-governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU), SPD

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<sup>66</sup> See O. Niedermayer (2014), "Die Parteien vor der Europawahl", Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Dossier Europawahlen ([www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/europawahl/180798/die-parteien-vor-der-europawahl](http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/europawahl/180798/die-parteien-vor-der-europawahl)).

<sup>67</sup> The parties expected to enter the EP are a) those already sitting in the EP such as the CDU, the CSU, the SPD, Die Linke, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and the FDP; b) new parties such as AfD, Die Piraten, and Frei Wähler; c) extremist parties such as Die Republikaner, the NPD and Pro NRW; d) single policy parties such as Tierschutzpartei, Familienpartei, the ÖDP; and e) a satire party called Die Partei.

and the now extra-parliamentary Free Democratic Party (FDP) are waging a more personalised campaign with strong roles for party leader Angela Merkel, the German *Spitzenkandidaten* Schulz and Alexander Graf-Lambdorff, respectively. The Left and Green opposition parties (Die Linke and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) predominantly campaign with content, even hiding their German *Spitzenkandidaten*, who are both MEPs. There are differences in the various formats used (posters, party election broadcasts and television debates). All the mainstream German parties campaign with rather Europe-friendly messages, highlighting the EU as a peace project and coming out in favour of further strengthening and stabilising the euro. For the amplified eurosceptic *Zeitgeist*, there is the usual reference to the need to enhance subsidiarity, beefed up with commentaries about the Commission's overregulation – buzz words being ‘toilet flush’, ‘olive oil cans’ and ‘shower head’.

On the other side, there are both the Bavarian sister party of the CDU, the Christian Social Union (CSU), as well as a new anti-euro movement called Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). While the CSU, unlike the AfD, is against Germany leaving the euro, both parties compete using more eurosceptic terminology that puts Bavaria and Germany, respectively, first. The differences between the mainstream parties are limited and centred on the candidate-to-candidate battle between the German and European *Spitzenkandidat* Martin Schulz (SPD) and the European *Spitzenkandidat* Jean-Claude Juncker (CDU/European People's Party EPP). While the lack of clear differences is obvious for the governing grand coalition parties the CDU and the SPD also the Green and to a lesser extent left opposition parties let miss clear alternatives. Rather, in order to mobilise people simply to vote at all, the mainstream German political parties all focus on their own electorate and their own core topics – most of which are not 'European' issues, but issues of national competence (the labour market, the pension system, taxes).<sup>68</sup>

### **CDU: All on Merkel, no experiments, continuity**

Due to overall support rates of 40%, the CDU is pursuing a European election campaign that focuses on its popular party leader and German chancellor, Angela Merkel. Having been very successful in the German national elections in September 2013, the CDU does not want to change what worked before. The *Spitzenkandidat*, however, is David McAllister, a former (and defeated) leader of the German Land Niedersachsen, but with no European experience. A German-Scot, he will co-conduct 18 election events together with Merkel, feature on a second wave of election posters, and participate in the television debate with all German *Spitzenkandidaten* on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. While Merkel and the first wave of campaign efforts (posters, party election broadcast, events) aim to mobilise people to vote, the second wave with McAllister is supposed to attract the so called ‘easyjet generation’, too. The European *Spitzenkandidat*, Jean-Claude Juncker, who gave a speech at the CDU's European party convention, will take part in two debates on German television with Martin Schulz (SPD) and two events in Germany. Aside from that, he will not be present on any posters.<sup>69</sup> While supporting Juncker both in Dublin at the EPP's European election convention and in Berlin, the CDU and Merkel want to keep all options open as regards the nomination of the president of the European Commission. As in 2009, the CDU will spend €10 million on its 2014 European election campaign (compared to €20 million for their national campaign in 2013). There is also continuity in terms of content. The CDU's manifesto emphasises the successes of the existing reform policy and instruments, and that these need to be continued and used in order to increase

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<sup>68</sup> While all German parties were strongly involved in formulating their European families' joint electoral manifestos, they also have own national manifestos in order to better target the national audience. In any case, one does not see any large contradictions between national and European manifestos, partly because the latter are based on more vague language.

<sup>69</sup> Juncker will also not be presented on any poster in its home country, Luxembourg, due to the surveillance scandal he was involved in.

the competitiveness of the EU. In addition, the Ukraine crisis, in the view of the CDU, illustrates the value of the EU as a peace project.

### **CSU: Challenging the populist AfD with more populism**

The sister party of the CDU in the German parliament and government, the CSU, has adopted a more populist approach towards the European elections, following a good old tradition. The Bavarian party is pursuing a two-fold strategy. On the one hand, the CSU *Spitzenkandidat* Markus Ferber, an MEP since 1994, is the candidate who represents the hard worker in the EP and should attract the Bavarians, who are clearly pro-European. Peter Gauweiler, on the other hand, is a well known eurosceptic who was promoted by CSU leader Horst Seehofer to CSU party deputy leader to attract the eurosceptic electorate and to oppose the populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Bavaria. Accordingly, the CSU's election programme, called '*Europaplan*', is a short 15-pager that – while acknowledging the peace function of the EU – stresses rather populist issues: amongst others, the reinforcement of the subsidiarity principle and the control of (Romanian and Bulgarian) “welfare immigration”. Regarding the subsidiarity principle, the CSU is even calling for a new “competence court” that would verify if the Commission oversteps any national red lines. As for “welfare immigration”, for the Bavarian local elections in March 2014 the CSU already used the slogan “those who commit [social security] fraud will be [kicked] out” in a demand for stricter immigration rules. While the prominence of Bavarian populism in European elections is nothing new, it is further stressed by the existence of the AfD and the fact that this is the sixth election in a row in Bavaria since September 2013. While these tactics might succeed in more voter mobilisation, they will not change anything in terms of practical policymaking, which is bound by the coalition agreement.

### **SPD: All on Schulz versus Juncker**

Martin Schulz versus Jean-Claude Juncker it is. The co-governing SPD is pursuing a purely personalised campaign around its *Spitzenkandidat* Schulz. As the current president of the EP and a long-serving MEP, Schulz is both the European and German *Spitzenkandidat* for the Party of European Socialists (PES) and SPD, respectively. The party's campaign tactics centre around the duel between Schulz and the EPP *Spitzenkandidat* Juncker,<sup>70</sup> – and not the CDU *Spitzenkandidat* McAllister. This is also reflected in the two debates that will take place on German television between Schulz and Juncker on May, 8<sup>th</sup> and May, 20<sup>th</sup>, with only one television debate scheduled between all the German *Spitzenkandidaten* on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. For their campaign, the SPD is also investing a slightly higher budget than in 2009 (€10.3 million compared to €9 million). In parallel to his Europe-wide campaign, Schulz will hold electoral events at least once in each German *Land*. Content-wise Schulz promises change: he wants to make Europe different, from the bottom to the top, thereby covering the (social, tax and gender) justice question; these are clear SPD electorate issues. The famous criticism of austerity that the PES – of which the SPD is the German member – is promoting so prominently is less pronounced in Germany. This is due to the fact that the SPD is in the grand coalition government, but also because voters in Germany are not directly affected by any measures and because Merkel, who represents this policy, is so popular. Consequently, in focussing on core SPD issues, the party hopes for a higher turnout and, with it, better results for itself.

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<sup>70</sup> See *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2014), “SPD bekämpft den falschen Gegner”, 27 March ([www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/martin-schulz-bei-der-europawahl-spd-bekaempft-den-falschen-gegner-1.1923329](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/martin-schulz-bei-der-europawahl-spd-bekaempft-den-falschen-gegner-1.1923329)).

### ***Die Linke: Against Merkel***

Die Linke, Germany's biggest opposition party, is pursuing a campaign against “Merkel's policy of a cold heart”, as they call it. Their strategy is not too different from 2009.<sup>71</sup> Their *Spitzenkandidat* is Gabriele Zimmer, an MEP since 2004. With €3.3 million Die Linke has only a slightly lower budget than in 2009 (€3.5 million). Their campaign is centred around 15 core demands, among which are a call for minimum wages and minimum pensions, more referenda and a stop to arms exports and corporate donations. Their European *Spitzenkandidat* Alexis Tsipras has not been to Berlin so far; though he was invited by Die Linke to launch its European election campaign, but cancelled last minute. Tsipras has apparently also been cautious with some of the German press after he walked out of an interview with an *FAZ* correspondent in July 2013. On the other hand, he gave a recent interview as *Spitzenkandidat* to *Die Zeit* and is expected to come to the next (non-Europe related) party convention of Die Linke scheduled for May, 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>. All in all, however, Tsipras is not present in the German campaign, or only in his criticism of Merkel's austerity policy which is a common theme between the European and German Left.

### ***Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: Green topics are European topics***

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, the other current opposition party in the German parliament, is pursuing a clear European campaign, as it did in 2004 and 2009. This is due to the fact that traditional “green” topics are European ones. Consequently, the German Greens are focusing their campaign on climate policy, refugee protection and civil rights (with regards to both data security and consumer protection), as well as on the eradication of tax heavens and the fight against youth unemployment. Their budget is only slightly higher than in 2009 (€1,6 to €1,4 million). The Greens have two *Spitzenkandidaten*, one female leading the list, Rebecca Harms, MEP since 2004, and one male, Sven Giegold, MEP since 2009. One of the European *Spitzenkandidaten*, Franziska Keller – a young MEP since 2009 and a German herself who surprisingly won in the European Green Party's primary experiment – lost against Harms at the German Greens' party convention and is number three on the German electoral list. While Keller is participating in joint election events with Harms in Germany, she and her male counterpart, José Bové, are not really present in the German campaign. An interesting tool that the Greens have used in their online campaigns since the national elections in 2013 is digital storytelling<sup>72</sup>– videos of up to two minutes in which, for example, Giegold explains why the EU-US trade agreement is a danger to democracy or Harms why not only just Germany should phase out nuclear energy.

### ***FDP: Making the most of less***

The main goal of Germany's liberal party, the FDP — which was surprisingly voted out of the Bundestag in the 2013 national elections — is to achieve a reasonably good result in the European elections. With a budget only half that of 2009 (€750.000 compared to €1.5 million), the FDP is pursuing a clearly personalised campaign around its *Spitzenkandidat* Alexander Graf Lambsdorff. An MEP since 2004, his name and family relationship with Otto Graf Lambsdorff, a popular former German minister, may also attract voters. Their campaign emphasises the FDP's support for the European market economy, the continuation of a stability-oriented euro policy and privacy protection as a strong opponent of large-scale surveillance measures. Guy Verhofstadt, the European *Spitzenkandidat*, has so far not been present in Germany but at least gave one recent long interview in the German newspaper *Die Welt*. Interestingly, ARD and ZDF rejected Verhofstadt's demand to be included in one of the television debates between Schulz

<sup>71</sup> See the Die Linke website <http://www.die-linke.de/wahlen/europawahlen-2014/wahlstrategie/>.

<sup>72</sup> See S. Schmidtsdorf (2014), “Mit digitalem storytelling die Menschen berühren und begeistern” ([www.wahl.de/blog/140415/mit-digitalem-storytelling-die-menschen-beruehren-und-begeistern](http://www.wahl.de/blog/140415/mit-digitalem-storytelling-die-menschen-beruehren-und-begeistern)).

and Juncker as the third legitimate political force in Europe. The broadcaster argued that a three-person-format would not work.

### ***AfD: Managing internal divisions, ambiguous goals for Europe***

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is a new party that was founded in 2013 on the central argument that the euro has failed and needs to be abolished. Their *Spitzenkandidat* is Bernd Lucke, a professor of economics who left the CDU with complaints against the latter's rescue policy measures. While the AfD came only close to the 5% threshold in the last national elections in 2013, it will in all probability enter the EP. This is not completely guaranteed, since the party suffers from heavy political infighting between the different groups inside the party.<sup>73</sup> This is reflected in both the party's attempt to expand its issue portfolio beyond the euro (to family, education, and Islam) and in its European manifesto. The main demands of the AfD at the European level are the controlled abolishment of the euro, a stronger role for Germany in Europe, a stricter immigration policy, opposition to any gender mainstreaming or female quotas, and referenda before each new accession. In the EP, party leader Lucke is striving for a coalition with the UK Conservative Party in the current European Conservative and Reformist (ECR) group.

### **Media debate: The search for drama**

The analysis of the public media discourse around the European elections in the German quality press<sup>74</sup> to date supports most of the campaign patterns, but also reveals some further interesting features.

*First*, the discourse centres mainly on classic national issues such as the labour market or social policy, immigration and the rights of minorities. At the CDU European party convention, for example, there was a discussion on the grand coalition's decision to introduce a pension scheme from the age of 63 (instead of 67). Young conservatives in particular criticised this decision and interestingly highlighted that this move would contradict Germany's demand for reforms in other European countries. On immigration, the CSU and the AfD are competing over demands for stricter rules. In contrast, the CDU and the SPD are rather cautious regarding the issue, since they know about latent public immigration concerns as presented by the opinion polls. Only the Greens are arguing for refugees from a human rights perspective. One issue being heavily debated between the FDP and the Greens on the one side, and the AfD on the other, is the (tax and adoption) rights of homosexuals – with the former being in favour and the latter being against.

When European issues are discussed, the first is 'EU bureaucracy'. While politicians of all parties nourish the powerful image of the EU as a "bureaucratic monster", journalists are increasingly presenting facts exposing the myth of overregulation. For example, they have shown that the infamous 'cucumber directive' was not an idea of bored Commissioners, but the result of UNECE recommendations as well as interest groups (including a German one) from the retail sector who aimed for harmonised norms. Similarly, the latest popular examples of "EU overregulation" with regards to norms for "toilet flushes" and "shower heads" are the unsurprising results of the 2009 Eco-design directive that was decided by European governments (including Germany) and the European Parliament in order to reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions.

<sup>73</sup> See S. Maas (2014), "Eurokritische Partei ohne klare Richtung" ([www.deutschlandfunk.de/alternative-fuer-deutschland-eurokritische-partei-ohne.720.de.html?dram:article\\_id=275634](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/alternative-fuer-deutschland-eurokritische-partei-ohne.720.de.html?dram:article_id=275634)).

<sup>74</sup> For the analysis I used the daily European press review that our institute, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) produces.

The second European issue that features prominently in the debates is the euro, although the debate has calmed down. If at all, the conservatives and the FDP stress the importance of continuing the policy of consolidation and stability, while the SPD, the Greens and Die Linke highlight the other side of the coin, investment into growth. Schulz, for example, supported French President François Hollande in his wish to extend again the deadline for complying with the Maastricht 3% deficit criteria to beyond 2015, and encouraged a general debate about the criteria themselves. In the end, however, all mainstream parties have a common goal: the stability of the euro as well as the development of the eurozone and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The means, on the other hand, are disputed. While, for example, the CDU and the FDP are against the “communitarisation of debt”, as they call it, the Greens and Die Linke favour eurobonds and a debt redemption fund. Schulz and the SPD argue that at the moment, there are no political majorities to implement such tools.

An increasingly prominent issue under debate is the Ukraine crisis, though not necessarily as a campaign topic. Nevertheless, all mainstream parties have highlighted the EU’s role as a peace project and a unified actor towards Russia. Whether this will motivate more people to vote is questionable. Finally, some journalists have stressed the importance of the EP and presented it as a power-house that can influence policy.

*Second*, there is no real left-right split, only a battle between candidates (i.e. between Schulz and Juncker). The 'personalisation' strategy is also partly sustained by commentaries from journalists. In a long “verbal dispute” in the weekly paper *Der Spiegel* it became clear that there is not much difference in substance between the two candidates. Instead, the candidates have tried to point out personal differences. Schulz, for example, presented Juncker as a “man of the executive”, while Schulz is a “man of the people”. Juncker, in return, accused Schulz of being “provocative” and portrayed himself as “consensual”. Schulz tried to denounce the austerity measures of the Troika and the IMF in Greece, which was directly countered by Juncker with reference to Socialist-led governments in the Eurogroup that had accepted or even demanded the measures. Also, Juncker clearly states that he will not leave social issues and social policy to the Left. The absence of a left-right split was further fuelled by the German opposition itself. At the beginning of the campaign, they had nothing better to do than fight amongst themselves. In an internally contested move, some Greens presented a poster in the middle of the Crimea crisis against the Left politician Sarah Wagenknecht with the slogan: “This is new: For the first time *Die Linke* favours foreign deployment”. This strategy was dismissed by the majority of the Greens, however, and the focus is now back on core Green Party issues.

*Third*, while the German media debate is overwhelmingly pro-European, anti-European elements on immigration and Brussels' bureaucracy are prominently nourished by the CSU and the AfD. These are interesting for the media since they bring some 'drama' to the otherwise 'boring' and thus not profitable, debates around the European elections. There are four different ways that mainstream German parties deal with the populist movement, AfD. The first is being pursued by the governing coalition of the CDU and the SPD: ignoring the AfD. Not everyone in the CDU is happy with this approach, since politicians from the German regions, in particular, fear a good showing by the AfD in this year’s elections in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg. A contrasting approach is being pursued by the CSU: overtaking the AfD with even more populist rhetoric. Some CDU politicians, especially at the European level, are worried that this will not be limited to just Bavaria, but might influence the German public discourse as a whole. Finally, there are efforts to confront the AfD in both television and newspaper debates. Among the most popular was a television debate between Manuel Sarrazin, the European policy spokesperson from the Greens, and Bernd Lucke, AfD leader, and moderated by Michel Friedman. The moderator insisted on one of his questions that referred to alleged racist statements by the AfD's number four on the EP list, Beatrix von Storch. Lucke did not want to answer, so he left the studio.

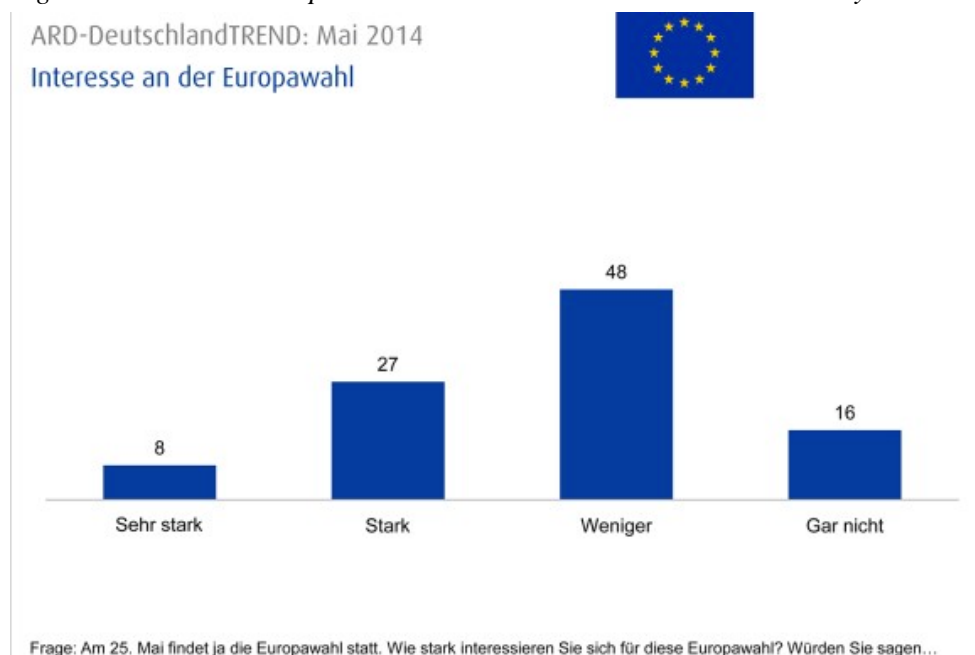


The German media – especially the public-service broadcasting television stations ARD and ZDF – has improved its coverage of the election campaign this year. Before election day on May 25<sup>th</sup>, four television debates are being organised:<sup>75</sup> on May 8<sup>th</sup>, ZDF will presents a first television debate between Schulz and Juncker at prime time; on May 15<sup>th</sup>, Phoenix, a division of ARD and ZDF, will present the debate at 21:00 between all the European *Spitzenkandidaten*; on May, 20<sup>th</sup> at 21:00 in its *Wahlarena* (electoral arena), ARD will show the second duel between Schulz and Juncker, which involves questions by the audience; and finally on May 22<sup>nd</sup> ZDF will organise a prime-time debate between all German *Spitzenkandidaten*. In addition, there are several shorter or longer features available dealing with the German electoral campaigns as well as the functioning of the European Parliament and the EU as a whole. The ZDF furthermore has also started an initiative called “ZDF-Faktencheck” (*ZDF fact check*) that verifies the statements of German politicians during the election campaigns. However, whether these efforts will result in a higher turnout remains questionable.

### Polls: No big surprises expected

According to the latest *ARD-Deutschlandtrend* for May 2014, only 35% of respondents are highly interested in the polls. A majority of 64% is less or not at all interested.

Figure 2. Interest in European elections. ARD-Deutschland TREND May 2014



However, in the April results from *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen* (research group on elections), the contrast was even bigger (28% vs. 72%). This might indicate a slight upwards trend. If one assumes that some of the people who are ‘less interested’ will still vote, the turnout could be slightly higher than the low figure of 43.3% in 2009.

As regards the election results, recent polls predict – compared to 2009 – the governing CDU and SPD both winning in terms of percentages (for seats, see below). The numbers reflect approximately the results of the national elections in 2013. Die Linke and the Greens both show numbers similar to their results in 2009. The FDP, on the other hand, will be the big loser

<sup>75</sup> See the overview at <http://www.spd-europa.de/themen-schwerpunkte/tv-duelle-zur-europawahl-1598>.



compared to the overheated numbers of 2009. Among the other parties the AfD will be the big winner, while some other smaller parties will probably enter the EP with at least one seat, due to the abolition of the threshold.

Institute	Date	CDU/ CSU	SPD	Greens	FDP	Linke	AfD	Others
<a href="#">Infratest dimap</a>	30.04.2014	39 %	27 %	9 %	4 %	8 %	6 %	7 %
INSA	25.04.2014	36 %	28 %	11 %	4 %	9 %	7 %	<i>n.a.</i>
<a href="#">Forschungsgruppe Wahlen</a>	11.04.2014	39 %	27 %	11 %	3 %	8 %	6 %	6 %
Infratest dimap	03.04.2014	40 %	28 %	9 %	3 %	7 %	6 %	7 %
<a href="#">Forschungsgruppe Wahlen</a>	28.03.2014	39 %	26 %	12 %	3 %	8 %	6 %	6 %
Forschungsgruppe Wahlen	14.03.2014	38 %	26 %	11 %	4 %	8 %	6 %	7 %
INSA	09.03.2014	38 %	26 %	9,5 %	3 %	8,5 %	7,5 %	<i>n.a.</i>
Infratest dimap	06.03.2014	40 %	26 %	11 %	4 %	7 %	5 %	7 %
Forschungsgruppe Wahlen	21.02.2014	40 %	24 %	12 %	4 %	8 %	6 %	6 %
INSA	14.02.2014	39 %	25 %	10 %	3 %	10 %	8 %	<i>n.a.</i>
Infratest dimap	06.02.2014	38 %	29 %	10 %	4 %	8 %	6 %	5 %
<a href="#">Emnid</a>	26.01.2014	42 %	26 %	10 %	3 %	8 %	7 %	4 %
<b>European elections 2009</b>	<b>7 June 2009</b>	<b>37,9 %</b>	<b>20,8 %</b>	<b>12,1 %</b>	<b>11,0 %</b>	<b>7,5 %</b>	<b><i>n.a.</i></b>	<b>10,8 %</b>

Since the overall seat allocation for Germany has been downgraded to 96 (from 99), the percentages in the table represent approximately the number of EP seats the parties will win. Based on the April 30<sup>th</sup> poll, for the ruling CDU/CSU that would mean an actual loss of 3 seats (from 42 to 39), while the ruling SPD would gain 4 seats (from 23 to 27). The leading opposition party, Die Linke, would maintain their 8 seats while the other opposition party, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, would lose 5 seats (from 14 to 9) and the (extra-parliamentary) FDP would lose 8 seats (from 12 to 4). The new anti-euro party, AfD, would enter the EP with 6 seats.

## Conclusion

The support for the European *Spitzenkandidaten* from national parties can serve as a good benchmark when it comes to assessing whether the 2014 European election campaigns in Germany are different from previous ones. With the exception of Martin Schulz, who happens to be both the German and European *Spitzenkandidat* (Social Democratic), none of the *Spitzenkandidaten* is particularly present in the campaigns of the national parties. This is not surprising, since none of them is that well known as a national politician. The fact that Juncker (Conservative) will be slightly more present in the German debate due to the two television debates he will conduct with Martin Schulz has more to do with the SPD's campaign strategy that actively promotes it than with the limited support of the CDU/CSU. In contrast, for

Verhofstadt (Liberals), Keller/Bové (Greens) and Tsipras (Left), there are additional reasons why they do not figure prominently in the German campaigns. The FDP is rather weak and is putting all its remaining resources into Graf-Lambsdorff, while Verhofstadt – who speaks German – was denied access to the German television debates by ARD and ZDF. Keller – who is German – has potential but is too young, is not well-known and faced internal competition from the more experienced Harms. Finally, Tsipras seems not to have that much interest in campaigning or being visible in Germany.

As for the media debates, the context of the grand coalition limits the left-right split. To the extent that it does exist, the split is promoted somewhat by Die Linke in its criticism of Merkel. The personalised SPD campaign strategy instead diverts attention to the personal duel between Schulz and Juncker. Content-wise, the split is between a huge pro-European camp and the populist CSU and AfD. At the same time, all the major German parties nurture the image of the EU as a bureaucratic entity while criticising European “overregulation” that some of them decided upon when they were in government. Overall, most of the issues discussed in the German media are not necessarily linked to the European elections, but rather reflect domestic discourses. For example, the Ukraine crisis is used by political parties and journalists mainly as a reminder of the value of the EU as a peace project, but not necessarily as a reason to debate the deficiencies of the CFSP, or what a common European energy market and policy might look like. Also, the NSA scandal could be used to highlight the debate about data protection and data infrastructure at the European level. According to Mathias Jung, who leads the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen*, however, this would not work since the German public is not very interested in anything at the moment – much less in such European issues.<sup>76</sup>

Whether the turnout will prove to be at least slightly above the record lows of 43.3% and 43% in 2009 and 2004, respectively, (compared to 60% in 1994 and 71.5% for national elections in 2013), is, from that perspective of low voter interest at least, questionable. On the other hand, the political context, the parallel local elections, the mobilisation of the smaller parties after the abolition of the threshold and the active engagement of the SPD candidate and some media could provide a last-minute boost.

In the end, the European elections will have been an opportunity to experiment with some new ideas, but will not impact the practical day-to-day European policy-making of the German grand coalition parties in the Brussels institutions. Still, the populist rhetoric of the governing CSU in particular and the general populist *Zeitgeist* should not be underestimated or further fuelled by political parties of all sides with EU bashing that ignores the facts. It should be continuously confronted after the elections with public debates on how to solve the various European challenges in an interconnected world. Otherwise, an increasingly eurosceptic German public might not be willing to support the policy measures that might be necessary to repair some of the divisions in Europe that the crisis has accentuated.

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<sup>76</sup> See D. Rzepka (2014), “Forscher: Der Europawahl fehlen die Themen” ([www.heute.de/forschungsgruppe-wahlen-prognostiziert-sinkende-wahlbeteiligung-bei-europawahl-32960986.html](http://www.heute.de/forschungsgruppe-wahlen-prognostiziert-sinkende-wahlbeteiligung-bei-europawahl-32960986.html)).

# Fragmented and Polarised: Greece Ahead of European Elections 2014

Filippa Chatzistavrou and Sofia Michalaki\*

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The 2014 European elections coincide with the Greek local elections, the first attempt to re-enter the markets for the Greek coalition government, as well as, according to the government “the end of the memoranda era”. The number of seats allocated to Greece declined from 22 to 21 as a result of the [2013 reapportionment of seats in the European Parliament](#).<sup>77</sup> Eight parties across the political spectrum struggle to attract voters who are puzzled, disenchanted, and even detached from the traditional political establishment.

## Political parties springing up in a mutable and fragile Greek state

The Greek local, regional and European elections are being held in a very fragile and mutable political context.<sup>78</sup> The coalition government likes to talk up how it has achieved its budget targets, while the country sees sharp economic and social change that drags down its economy. **Nearly 60% of young Greeks up to the age of 24 are unemployed** and 65,000 SMEs are threatened with closure.

Eurostat recently confirmed a primary budget surplus of €1.5 billion (0.8% of GDP) for 2013 while the debt reached 175.1% of GDP and the deficit 12.7%. In the last quarter of 2013 Greece showed the third largest increase of debt in the EU, a sign of stagnation. According to the Greek government, the budget surplus is a sign of the progress Greece has made to fix its finances. The European Commission confirmed once again that the Greek debt is “viable” without saying more about the opening of negotiations on debt settlement with [eurozone](#) governments that are now holding more than 80% of Greece's €319 billion public debt. The Greek primary surplus in 2013 has been calculated by excluding debt costs and other one-off spending and revenue items.<sup>79</sup> This means that this worthy achievement does not ensure Greece's financial sustainability and economic viability since it doesn't give any room for manoeuvre to the Greek government to meet its payment obligations. In other words, it gives no autonomy to the Greek government in relation to financial markets, or its creditors in the case of discussions on debt relief.

However, this 2013 primary budget surplus boosted targeted spending on specific groups, i.e. low-income pensioners and law enforcement officials. This strategic pre-electoral transfer to

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<sup>77</sup> The EP currently has 766 MEPs (754 + 12 for Croatia which joined in 2013). After the 2014 elections, this will be reduced to 751 MEPs (Article 14(2) TEU). See also the Resolution of 13 March 2013 on the composition of the European Parliament with a view to the 2014 elections.

<sup>78</sup> The European elections will be held on 25 May 2014 and the local elections will be held on 18 and 25 May 2014.

<sup>79</sup> For the European System of Accounts (ESA) there is no formal definition for the primary balance. Usually it is calculated according to the commonly accepted definition that excludes debt servicing costs (including arrears in the public and private sector). The special agreement between the Greek government and Troika on the calculation of Greek budget excludes other one-off spending and revenues, such as aid to recapitalise Greek banks or profit returns to Athens by European central banks made on Greek government bond holdings.

mobilise voters has been overshadowed by the revelation of the secret relationship between the former government *general secretary* Panayiotis Baltakos – the longtime close adviser and friend of Greece’s Prime Minister Antonis Samaras – and members of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. Samaras’ embrace of national conservatism allowed some previously marginalised fringe groups (ultra-right and pro-junta people) within the party to return to the fore.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Golden Dawn uses its terrorist and extremist activities to revive the 1950s model of the far right. The same phenomenon is being observed in Germany, Hungary, and Ukraine, while the majority of far right leaders in Europe try to normalise their parties.<sup>81</sup>

**Greece’s hasty exit to the markets took place a few days after the Baltakos case was revealed.** This can be read as a new starting point for the Greek economy, but analysts also note that the move is addressed to the Greeks themselves. Greece remains without any production specialisation, having lost about one quarter of its production force (and one third of its industrial production). Actually Greece did not need any additional emergency funding, since European creditors and the IMF are meeting the country’s financing needs, as agreed until May 2015. Certain hedge funds expressed great interest in the weaker eurozone countries, since buying spoiled debt can be a particularly profitable activity for adventurous investors.

It is within this context that the Greek government put forward some last-minute changes regarding the system for the European elections that considerably alters the nature of political competition. The candidates are elected on the basis of *preference* votes - with a maximum of four preferences per voter – instead of the traditional closed list. The number of candidates has been increased from 21 to 42, which is the upper limit prescribed by recently introduced Greek legislation.<sup>82</sup> According to the government, the aim of doubling their numbers is to provide voters with a greater choice of candidates, thus making voting results more representative. The ceiling of election expenses for each MEP candidate, which is the rate applicable for MP candidates in the largest constituency in the country (B' Athens), is fixed at 135,000 euros. In fact, these changes will help the best-known and wealthiest candidates to be elected, since those who enjoy money and recognition have the means to plan a successful electoral campaign. The national territory forms a single electoral constituency for the European elections and Greece sets up a threshold of 3% for the allocation of seats in the European elections.<sup>83</sup> Greece will get 21 out of the 751 seats in the new European Parliament. Members of the government and elected MPs cannot stand for election if they have not resigned from office.

In this context of harsh competition, political parties are devoting a lot of resources and time to the campaign. New Democracy (ND, EPP), which has been transformed into a national liberal and conservative party since Samaras’ election, moved consciously from claiming space in the centre in order to recapture the unity of the fragmented right, without success. In fact, ND continues to lose out to more right-wing parties such as Independent Greeks (ANEL) and the far

<sup>80</sup> In a recent interview, Panayiotis Baltakos underlined that the real challenge now is ‘the re-union of the Right’. The former government secretary spoke about “strength in unity” as the only way to form an anti-left bloc. He recalled that the percentages for all three parties together, New Democracy, Independent Greeks, and Golden Dawn, had reached 46% in 2012 national elections. He stated “If we unite, will we govern for 50 years. Otherwise the Left will govern”. The interview was published in *Real News*, 13.4.2014 (in Greek).

<sup>81</sup> E. Dinas, V. Georgiadou, I. Konstantinidis and L. Rori (2013), “From dusk to dawn: Local party organization and party success of right-wing extremism”, *Party Politics*, 1 December, pp. 13-14.

<sup>82</sup> Law 4255/2014 FEK (Official Journal of the Greek Government), 89/11.04.2014, Elections of members of the European Parliament, Art. 1§1 and 3§3a.

<sup>83</sup> The German Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, in a decision released in February 26 2014, ruled unconstitutional the 3% threshold of votes required hitherto in Germany to allow a party to enter Parliament. At the next European elections in May, the German parliament will therefore be designated by a purely proportional system.

right-neo-Nazi Golden Dawn that have a strong appeal to voters. ANEL is a radical right-wing, anti-austerity, anti-memoranda political party encompassing nationalistic, anti-European and anti-immigrant populist elements.<sup>84</sup> (It is affiliated with the European political group European Conservatives and Reformists, ECR.) ANEL leader Panos Kammenos founded the party after being expelled from New Democracy when he voted against the coalition government in a vote of confidence in 2012. Ten former ND MPs, namely Elena Kountoura, Christos Zois (in the meanwhile he formed its own party), Kostas Markopoulos, Dimitris Stamatis, Spiros Galinos, Mika Iatridou, Maria Kollia-Tsarouha, Panayiotis Melas and Michalis Giannakis joined the party. Moreover, the shift of ND **towards the far right** legitimated the extremist rhetoric of Golden Dawn. Golden Dawn had no MEPs in the last EP since the party made its first appearance in the Hellenic Parliament in the 2012 parliamentary elections. The far right nationalist element in Greek politics was represented by two LAOS<sup>85</sup> MEPs in the last EP.

Golden Dawn encountered the risk of being banned from participating in the elections because of the ongoing investigations into its alleged criminal activities and the fact that its leader Nikos Michaloliakos, along with Deputy Head Christos Pappas and several other MPs, remains in custody, awaiting a trial on charges of running and participating in a criminal organisation. The party had already found an alternative solution as 200 supporters registered a new political party named 'National Dawn' in the beginning of February 2014. The Supreme Court released its decision on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May approving the participation of Golden Dawn in the elections.<sup>86</sup>

The two main political formations declaring a centre-left identity, such as PASOK and DIM.AR (Democratic Left, a *pro-EU* moderate leftist party – split from Synaspismos, the major component of SYRIZA – and former government coalition party) do not seem to appeal to voters. They have failed to cover substantially the gap created in the centre of the political spectrum, thus raising concerns in Brussels EU circles. A new political formation called 'Olive Tree - Democratic Alignment' has been established as an attempt to unite the fragmented centre-left. In view of its declining popularity, PASOK (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, S&D) became the leading force behind Olive Tree, by annexing the 'Initiative of 58' and making clear that it was the vehicle for rehabilitating PASOK. In February 2014, the centre-left elite 'Initiative of 58' abandoned the Olive Tree scheme disappointed with PASOK's behaviour regarding the selection of MEPs candidates. This created a major rift in PASOK. It is noted that the launch of Olive Tree has triggered reactions within the domestic social-democrat spectrum, including high profile abstentions during the platform's

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<sup>84</sup> The term 'anti-European' refers to a partisan position opposed to European integration per se. The term 'euroscepticism' refers to a critical stance that can take various forms, towards the handling of EU policies. *Populism* takes *left-wing*, *right-wing*, and even *centrist* forms, as well as forms of politics that bring together groups and individuals of diverse partisan views.

Populism is a term that is used everywhere, sometimes indiscriminately, in political discourse but it has various forms (right-wing market populism, neo-liberal patrimonial populism, anti-European populism etc.). Interesting papers on the issue are among others: Ar. Doxiadis and M., Matsaganis (2012), "[National populism and xenophobia in Greece](http://www.opendemocracy.net)" ([www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)), 27.11.2013; S. Vasilopoulou, D. Halikiopoulou and T. Exadaktylos (2014), "Greece in Crisis: Austerity, Populism and the Politics of Blame", *JCMS* 52, pp. 388-402; and S. Verney (2014), "Broken and Can't Be Fixed": The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Greek Party System", *The International Spectator* 49:1, pp. 18-35.

<sup>85</sup> LAOS (member of the political group of Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) in the last EP) is a [Greek radical right-wing populist](#) political party founded and led by former ND MP [Georgios Karatzafaris](#) in 2000.

<sup>86</sup> The Supreme Court, which is not a Constitutional Court, as a quasi-administrative and not judicial body checks whether the conditions of participation of the party in the elections are respected according to the art.29 of the Greek Constitution. There is a tacit agreement between members of the political elite that the Constitution does not provide explicitly for the possibility of outlawing a political party which advocates the subversion of democracy.

inaugural conference on the 8-9 March. More specifically, former PM George Papandreou and the Democratic Left (DIM.AR) party refused to take part in the forum. Papandreou suggested that the current PASOK leadership has not defended the party's reformist legacy of the 2009-2011 period, while the former PASOK leader also criticised Olive Tree as an attempt by PASOK and its current leader Evangelos Venizelos to end its existence as a party. Along with PASOK, former PASOK MP Andreas Loverdos' political formation '[Agreement for the New Greece](#)' and former Minister of the State Ilias Mosialos' citizens' movement '[Dynamic Greece](#)', established as separate political entities, became prominent components of the Olive Tree alliance.

DIM.AR is flirting both with the European political group of S&D and the reformist component of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, GUE/NGL. The party does not seem to appeal to voters, especially since it provided support as a former coalition member to hard austerity policies launched by the Samaras government. However, its leader Fotis Kouvelis announced the autonomous participation of the party in the upcoming elections, launching the 'Progressive Cooperation' label without making clear which parties will join this new platform. DIM.AR takes a moderate position with regards to the memorandum that states that Greece could fulfil its requirements while avoiding the harsher elements of austerity. The party favours gradual disengagement from the bailout terms, while remaining in the eurozone.

The European political group GUE/NGL recognised the electoral success and potentiality of Alexis Tsipras, and selected him to lead their European campaign. SYRIZA became a unitary political party in the summer of 2013. Alexis Tsipras's candidacy for the Commission's Presidency encapsulates the battle between two rival plans for the future of Europe: "the plan for a Europe of banks and multinational companies, of neoliberal and austerity policies, the Europe of Merkel and Schulz"<sup>87</sup> and the plan of the European Left for the peoples of Europe as cited in SYRIZA European elections manifesto.

In this context, the emergence of a self-proclaimed anti-elite umbrella party 'The River' changed the balance of power. The founder and leader of this new arrangement, Stavros Theodorakis, is a well-known and handsome TV journalist. He indicated that the party's credo is to address the deficit of real-life experience in politics, while renouncing any ties with the current political establishment. This is a good example of the politics of personality. A party with a rather nebulous decision-making system and moderate political positions, is suddenly placed in the middle of political spectrum. Theodorakis stresses that the party is a small enterprise compared to the old established political forces. It has no political past or affiliations, and no ideological commitments to either left or right. For the moment, there is no clear image of the composition of the team advising Stavros Theodorakis. The River's platform positions and the National Action Plan of the party will be developed at its first party Conference, which will take place after the EP elections during June 2014. In the meanwhile, Theodorakis has met socialists, liberals, and greens for exploratory discussions in the EP, while also trying to win support from the centre-left and left as much as possible. The final decision will be taken on the day of elections. Theodorakis has already adopted an aggressive attitude towards SYRIZA. It is said that the party's aim is to attract voters from all over the political spectrum and especially from DIM.AR and SYRIZA.

Ecologist Greens' MEP (Greens-EFA) and prominent member Nikos Chrysogelos stated on 4 February 2014 that he will not be standing for the party in May's EU elections, a development indicating an intra-party split. Nikos Chrysogelos has formed a new initiative of active citizens for a social green list in the European elections called 'Greens'. He attributed his decision to

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<sup>87</sup> SYRIZA European elections 2014 Manifesto, 25.04.2014 ([www.syriza.gr/article/id/55945/DIAKHRYKSH-GIA-TIS-EYRWEKLOGES-2014.html#.U2ithFds5fw](http://www.syriza.gr/article/id/55945/DIAKHRYKSH-GIA-TIS-EYRWEKLOGES-2014.html#.U2ithFds5fw))  
SYRIZA European Elections 2014 Manifesto (in Greek)).



quit to the fact that the party had become trapped in a cycle of introspection when a minority of members overturned the decisions of the majority regarding opening up to society.

### **Conflict strategies in a tight electoral race**

Along with the trend towards higher political fragmentation, the growing bipolarization between ND and SYRIZA reinforces electoral conflict strategies taking place across all parts of the political spectrum.

#### ***a. Parties in the parliamentary space***

Recent changes in European election voting methods, allowing direct preference votes for individual candidates, have made it difficult for parties to compile their lists, especially since a sitting MP cannot be a candidate in the European elections. In general terms, **the** EP election candidates across political parties lack experience in European matters. In fact, there is a renewal of political personnel without any strong background in European affairs. More experienced candidates are also included, notably a few re-candidacies of former MEPs and several new candidacies of technocrats and academics who have good knowledge of EU affairs. Among the major political parties, SYRIZA is putting up the candidates most experienced in EU affairs, followed by ND, the Greek Communist party KKE, and Olive Tree.

‘Stable steps ahead’ is New Democracy’s (ND) chosen motto for the European election campaign. The party positions itself as the guardian of stability that guides Greece within the EU towards the end of the crisis, in contrast with the irresponsible and contradictory voices of SYRIZA. Prime Minister Samaras repeatedly accuses the leading opposition party of working to destabilise Greece, arguing against the “prophets of doom, those who want to see Greece leaving the EU and NATO”<sup>88</sup> and condemning the ‘populist rhetoric of extreme parties’ among whom Samaras includes SYRIZA as well as Golden Dawn. Along with PASOK, ND promotes the ‘theory of two extremes’ in order to consolidate the coalition government’s position as the sole guardian of political stability, thus attempting to delegitimise SYRIZA as an alternative political option. The party insists that what is at stake in these elections is not the party, but the future of all Greeks. The communication strategy is based on mediating the ‘Greek success story of Europe’, focusing on achievements such as primary surplus, social dividends, and of course the re-entry to the markets.

Samaras opts for non-politically-affiliated persons with a media profile along with prominent former LAOS’ members and well-known ND politicians with a strong appeal to local societies. Among the candidates is Rodi Kratsa, the only serving ND MEP included to the list, and Thodoris Zagorakis, the former footballer who captained the triumphant Greek side in the 2004 European Championship. The former leader of ND MEPs Marietta Giannakou announced a few weeks ago that she does not intend to run in the 2014 European elections because she disagrees with the way the party handles certain issues regarding the European elections voting procedure. Giannakou was in favour of the former electoral system that was unexpectedly abolished in mid February.<sup>89</sup> As a matter of fact, the choice of several candidates underlines the neo-conservative turn Samaras has adopted. The candidacy of the editor-in-chief of the magazine of the Church of Greece, and the former LAOS members, speak volumes.

Golden Dawn, along with an ultranationalist and racist ideology, embraces economic national-protectionist and anti-immigrant ideas. It opposes Greece’s participation in the Eurozone and the EU, and stresses the link between national independence and a national currency. Among the

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<sup>88</sup> Samaras’ speech in the framework of the presentation of ND list of candidates, Divani Caravel Hotel, 15.04.2014.

<sup>89</sup> *Idem*, Law 4255/2014 FEK (Official Journal of the Greek Government), 89/11.04.2014, Art. 4§1d.



candidates is Lambros Fountoulis, father of the murdered George, one of the two young men killed in the attack at the offices of Golden Dawn.

ANEL's motto is 'No to the Europe of banks, yes to the Europe of peoples'. ANEL's leader Panos Kammenos attempts to dissociate Independent Greeks from the fringe parties, whose only goal according to Kammenos is "armed standoff, violence and blood". Moreover he argues that they are maintained by those who place themselves as buffers. Independent Greeks opposes the integration of EU into a federal entity. ANEL focuses on the rejection of the loan agreements between Greece, the EU, and the IMF and argues that Greece fell victim to an international conspiracy. Kammenos has repeatedly called for an independent standing committee to clear up the events that led to Greece's economic crisis. The Independent Greeks campaign pledges to protect and Greece's national sovereignty and to pursue a claim against Germany for war reparations as well as to cancel the memorandum. The party has announced that they will start working to create a patriotic Democratic Front, the aim of which would be to save Greece from the neo-liberal avalanche.

Of the total 42 ANEL candidates, 15 were selected by an *ad hoc* lottery system through which 580 hopeful candidates expressed their interest to be included in ANEL's list for the European elections. The most prominent names on the list are Professor Kostas Zouraris (who has formed the patriotic party 'Inflamed Greece' ('Pyrifikafstos Ellada') and Zoe Georganta, a former ELSTAT employ who made charges against the ELSTAT president for augmenting the deficit. The 27 candidates were selected for their educational background and their knowledge, as the party underlined. Their geographical distribution was also a factor taken into consideration.

Olive Tree's goal is to help Greece to become self-sufficient again, an equal EU member state and member of the eurozone, while criticising the EU's betrayal of its vision and decline into what they see as a mire of blackmail, punishment, and nationalistic conservatism. The financial crisis revealed the EU's and eurozone's imperfect architecture. However, this new political formation will struggle to change Europe from the inside. The conservative anti-reform forces, coupled with populism and irrational anti-Europeanism form a threat to the EU. Olive Tree clarifies in its political manifesto<sup>90</sup> that it shares the same values as the European Socialists and Democrats and that it co-exists and fights side by side with them. However, as strange as it may seem, it also stipulates that Olive Tree does not identify itself with S&D. The candidacies of ex PASOK MEPs and former MPs are supplemented by candidates who were not actively involved in politics. PASOK's current General Secretary and young prominent politician Nikos Androulakis and Kyriakos Pierrakakis, member of the Political Office of the party, are among the leading candidates of the Olive Tree followed by MEP Sylvana Rapti.

The challenge for DIM.AR is the design of a more effective and inclusive economic policy for the eurozone. It attempts to offer a 'third way' since, according to the official party position, "the other two poles are not moving in the right direction". DIM.AR has succeeded in enlisting among others former PASOK Minister Haris Kastanidis and independent MEP Marilena Koppa who recently resigned from PASOK. DIM.AR's European plan focuses on economic governance, democratic legitimacy, and deficit issues. The party proposes the replacement of the Stability and Growth Pact with a more flexible pact, the adoption of an expansionary economic policy to address debt and unemployment, as well as issuing European bonds (and special growth bonds). European democracy and solidarity will be achieved by enhancing the role of the European Parliament. Among DIM.AR MEP candidates are Dimitris Chatzisokratis, Head of DIM.AR's economic policy department and former SYRIZA member, and Andreas Papadopoulos, former DIM.AR spokesman.

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<sup>90</sup> Olive Tree Political Manifesto, 8.03.2014 ([www.elia-dimokratikiparataxi.gr/%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%81%CF%85%CE%BE%CE%B7](http://www.elia-dimokratikiparataxi.gr/%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%81%CF%85%CE%BE%CE%B7)).

The SYRIZA party's European manifesto combines a pro-European line with a radical leftist and anti-capitalist stance on integration, since it rejects the reactionary evolution of the EU. SYRIZA embraces the EU, nevertheless the party envisages a very different Europe, which will be geared towards the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. In line with SYRIZA's condemnatory discourse against 'Merkelism' and 'Brussels and Frankfurt's directorate', which some suggest reveals a tendency towards nationalism, the European elections are being portrayed as a referendum against the memoranda, the Troika, and inhumane austerity. It is their view that the German hegemony and the neoliberal consensus of Christian democrats, Social democrats, and liberals consists of redistributing power to a few, and terror to many. Currently, according to SYRIZA rhetoric, the EU transfers resources from the periphery member states (debt colonies) to the rich member states at the centre, which the party condemns. Big ideas born in Europe are marginalised, and austerity has opened the way to fascism, racism, and regression. While commitments to the economic and social cohesion of the European states have been forgotten, disparities between member states, and between citizens within each state, have widened. The aim is to overthrow the current neoliberal architecture of the euro and to promote a new compulsory charter of fundamental rights for all member states.

The party is committed to keeping the country in the eurozone and the European Union, but is prepared to open up the discussion by using its veto power, or threatening to use it, at the level of the European Council so that, at long last, European leaders will be forced to address the problems they have been ignoring for years: a re-think of the 'Greek Programme' on the basis of an eventual suspension of policies demanded by the Troika.<sup>91</sup> According to SYRIZA, the change in policy, by putting the social needs of European populations first, is feasible. The ultimate EU priorities should be addressing the humanitarian crisis, the annulment of memoranda, meeting social needs, income and wealth redistribution, and expanding social and collective rights. The party promotes a radical agenda for social and economic change, still quite vague, which emphasises solidarity, growth, and social justice as the antidote to the financial crisis. This agenda includes a major shift in the tax base, the re-introduction of a decent minimum wage, and more funding for social security and public health provisions. A European conference on debt could be the first step to real change according to SYRIZA.

SYRIZA seems to have difficulty finding prominent candidates who might have an impact on the electorate. The fragmentation due to SYRIZA's multiple components, since the party incorporates a number of tendencies that find it difficult to co-exist, is a complicating factor in the run-up to the elections. The eminent economist Yanis Varoufakis was dropped from the party ticket because of his ambivalent attitude and opposition from the more radical 'Left Platform' contingent of the party. For this faction and its leader MP Panayiotis Lafazanis extra-party candidates such as Yanis Varoufakis or the former PASOK MEP Kriton Arsenis are not welcome, since their left-wing credentials are in question. In the case of the Professor Costas Lapavistas of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the rejection came from the leadership of the party, because of his staunch support for the country's return to a national currency. The 'Left Platform' faction of the party cast an invalid blank vote in the adoption of SYRIZA European elections manifesto because its amendment to a plan for the exit from the euro had been rejected.

The arguments of the far left (SYRIZA's Left Platform faction, ANTARSYA, Plan B,<sup>92</sup> etc.) in favour of a national currency are of a different nature from those of the right-wing, conservative

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<sup>91</sup> There is a tension between the various groups that make up the confederacy of SYRIZA about how tough the line should be, and some of them have not fully accepted the leadership's commitment to keeping Greece in Europe's monetary union.

<sup>92</sup> ANTARSYA is an extra-parliamentary coalition of ten far-left political formations as well as independent militants involved in different left-wing currents. Based on local assemblies at city (neighbourhood) level, and with a central coordination committee in Athens, ANTARSYA uses strong anti-capitalist rhetoric and has been characterised as a 'Drachma party', as it opposes the participation of

and nationalist parties.<sup>93</sup> In the case of the left, the focus is on the noxious effects of economic globalisation undermining national economic and social systems.<sup>94</sup> It's rather a defensive economic argument of how to handle the crisis and the dynamics of global domination. The right tends to focus on a national conception of the currency as a symbol of sovereignty and identity. SYRIZA's eurosceptic discourse refers critically to austerity politics and memoranda resulting in a "loss of dignity", without however questioning the role of European institutions or Greece's membership in the EU.

Among the party's list of Euro-candidates, are Manolis Glezos, a [left-wing](#) politician and writer, known worldwide for his participation in the [World War II resistance](#), Yiannis Milios, responsible for SYRIZA economic policy, and several university professors.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE), opposed to the Maastricht Treaty, maintains an anti-European stance supporting disengagement from the European Union. KKE is a member of GUE/NGL but not affiliated with either political entity. It distances itself from the other parties of the left, especially SYRIZA. The Communist Party is trying to scare voters away from other so called revolutionary parties, opposing the 'Euro-monodrome' concept. The Communist party has ruled out the possibility of a coalition with other left-wing parties. It retains a very devout organisational basis and its rhetoric entails the shifting of the political debate to economic matters. It stresses that EU decisions and the memoranda were signed by centre-right and centre-left governments, including governments affiliated to the European United Left. The EU has absolutely nothing to offer to Greeks (and Europeans), not even in promoting the solution of national questions like the Cyprus issue. Following the unexpected death of MEP Babis Aggourakis, the most prominent candidates of KKE are MEP George Toussas, Louiza Razou, member of the Central Committee of the party and writer Ersi Ritsou, daughter of the great Greek poet and left-wing activist Yiannis Ritsos.

### ***b. Parties in extra-parliamentary space***

The manifesto of the uniformly pro-European party 'The River' concludes by stating in a very conformist way the five priorities for Greece: fisheries, Greek products, migration, regional development, and tourism. FYROM's permanent name and the Cyprus question are the high-priority issues of national interest. Raising the matter of German wartime compensations is a populist attempt to attract voters.

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Greece in the eurozone and favours a return to the national currency. ANTARSYA insists on a combative approach that will lead not only to immediate relief from austerity but also to radical social change.

A new far-left party with a very rudimentary organisational structure and small influence on the wider masses, called 'Plan B', has been formed by Alekos Alavanos, former President of Synaspismos and former parliamentary leader of SYRIZA.

<sup>93</sup> Locating pro-national currency parties within the Greek political space isn't an easy task. The economic anti-liberal attitude does not equal economic nationalism (i.e. restrictive policies on movement of labour, capital and goods, and strong national currency) or other nationalisms.

The centre-right patriotic socialist party named 'Drachma, Greek Democratic Movement' – similar to Beppe Grillo's movement – in cooperation with other patriotic populist parties like the 'Greek Social Movement', the 'Panhellenic progressive movement' and the 'Patriotic Social Movement', proposed to form an alliance called 'DRACHMA' for the European elections, along with the party Plan B and another ultra-populist and ethnocentric party named EPAM. However, Alavanos has decided to participate in the elections independently.

<sup>94</sup> Nationalist positions are consistent with the feeling of superiority that stress the primary value of national (cultural, ethnic, or racial) identity. The left's vision of the nation as an economic-socio-political entity with specific historical origins and development is mainly related to the right's vision of ethnic self-determination.

According to Stavros Theodorakis, the divide in Europe now is not right-left, but north-south. Taking advantage of the political turmoil in the centre-left, the party aims to attract vacillating voters from both the left and the right by not stating its positions clearly or positioning itself within the political spectrum. Party ‘positions’ are either statements of ‘common sense’ or unsound technical measures. Everyone is welcome in Theodorakis’s political enterprise.

The strategy of the party fosters ideological inclusiveness without proposing clear policy proposals but rather vague political opinions reflecting different social groups. The River roundly criticises intergovernmental decision-making in general; however Theodorakis has made it clear that he does not favour a federal EU. What kind of Europe this party wants still remains an enigma. It has certain principles on social rights, human rights, the environment, and development. However, it seems puzzled regarding European integration and its democratic legitimacy. In their opinion, Grexit would solve none of the problems facing Greece, since it will aggravate the recession and increase inequalities. According to the party’s rhetoric voices supporting a Grexit scenario and unilateral debt cancellation are irresponsible. The River favours debt relief only if the government of a country has successfully implemented a major reform programme. In any case, it considers that it is more important to participate in ‘the design of the new Europe’ (the current one being weak and disoriented) than to recycle questions of the past such as debt, memoranda, or other matters of national interest. It’s unclear however how the party will help the EU find its way. It argues that any discussion of the breaking up of Europe or the idea of two-speed Europe should be abandoned and that the EU must act united. Regarding EU external trade policy and globalisation’s effects, its position vacillates between the idea of further encouraging the liberalisation of trade and competition, and the idea of developing protectionist measures if necessary. EU institutions must overcome bureaucratic entanglements and take action for the good of the European citizen. The wording used is selected in such a way as to not slight the national spirit of certain groups of the electorate, while at the same time dropping hints against SYRIZA, KKE, and Golden Dawn without openly naming them.

This newly formed party introduces to the Greek electorate fresh, and not so fresh, candidates in an attempt to capitalise on the frustration of the impoverished masses and the romanticism of politically inactive but extremely disappointed groups of the electorate who are desperately seeking a solution to Greece’s economic and social problems. Stavros Theodorakis is not standing in the European Parliament elections himself, but the party has just announced its list of EU Parliament candidates. Among the candidates are Miltiades Kirkos, Leonidas’s son, a leading left-wing politician,<sup>95</sup> university professors, and some journalist and actor friends of the leader.

The political party ‘The Ecologist Greens’ adopts strong pro-European federalist rhetoric. The Ecologist Greens favour a move towards sustainable development and the promotion of citizens’ diplomacy and peace movements, and are against EU membership in NATO. The Ecologist Greens support the European Green Party’s election manifesto claiming that the 28-member bloc needs “a democratic renewal” and a new Constitution without neoliberal, anti-ecological, and militarist policies. It calls for the empowerment of the European Parliament. MEP Nikos Chrysogelos’s new initiative ‘Greens’ pays more attention to regional integration and local societies’ economic, social, and ecological potential, and is in favour of debt relief and Eurobonds. It adopts a slightly less radical stance since it considers that things can change from the inside.

DRASSI (ALDE) is a small pro-European liberal party supporting memorandum policies including structural reforms and privatisation, the reduction of the public sector, and smaller government. Professor Antigoni Lymperaki is head of DRASSI’s list for the 2014 EP elections.

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<sup>95</sup> Leonidas Kirkos was the last General Secretary of the Greek Communist party (interior) and then the founder of the party ‘Greek Left’ (both euro-communist parties).

Drassi has a pro-Eurozone, pro-Balkan enlargement, and pro-Lisbon stance. The party is in favour of a qualified majority system and against veto practice in the Council. Drassi's leader Theodoros Skylakakis recently announced a common coalition named 'Bridges' with another very small liberal party 'Creation Again'. The leader of this party, Thanos Tzimeros, is a controversial figure in European elections. The coalition is in favour of reforms, fewer taxes, and Greek producers and against the clientelist state. This cooperation takes place within the framework of the invitation that was sent by the Head of the Liberals Guy Verhofstadt to establish a joint pro-European liberal front in Greece. Initially Verhofstadt was in favour of a big coalition including different parties including DRASSI, Europe-Ecology (a new federalist and reformist party),<sup>96</sup> Creation Again, and Hellenic European Citizens (a new party formed by German MEP Jorgo Chatzimarkakis). Although DRASSI has not ruled out the possibility of a pact with other liberal parties, this has not yet been achieved.

### **A 'no real winner' scenario: between electoral volatility and partisan interdependencies**

In general terms, while the election of the next European Commission's President is not a high priority in the public debate, the nomination of candidates for the Commission Presidency has upgraded the importance of European elections. This provides a new argument to domestic political parties who are struggling to convince the electorate to vote. As a matter of fact, no safe projections regarding the winners of the upcoming European election can be made.

SYRIZA has not succeeded in capitalising on Tsipras' nomination, and this reveals a lack of political preparedness in relation to his new leading role in Greek and European politics.<sup>97</sup> The two-party coalition, ND and PASOK, perpetuate the 'theory of two extremes', effectively equating leftist party SYRIZA with the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. In fact, SYRIZA's political opponents managed to turn the nomination against Tsipras by openly accusing him of being the representative of a European political group, GUE/NGL, that brings together political parties with ambivalent and even hostile positions to the process of European integration. Jean-Claude Juncker is a European politician well-known in Greece mainly because of his prominent role as the Eurogroup president and his decisive involvement in the handling of the Greek crisis. Concerning the other candidates, Martin Schulz is referred to as Juncker's main political opponent while the other candidacies attract minimum attention.

In fact, the widespread political tension at domestic level determines more or less partisan voting preferences. According to a recent study conducted at Macedonian University, 47% of Greeks say that 'the view of government and the opposition and the policies promoted' are very important in influencing their vote, while only 37% of the sample consider 'the European Union and its policies' as a very important factor.<sup>98</sup>

In 49% of the sample, 60% of Greek voters wished either to condemn Samaras government (mainly voters of SYRIZA and ANEL), with 40% supporting them (mainly New Democracy and Olive Tree/PASOK voters). Of the remaining 51%, 10.5% of them stated that they wished to use their vote to condemn the EU and its policies (mainly voters KKE). Finally, 40.5% of the sample chose the more modest and socially acceptable option of voting to increase the representation of Greece in the European Parliament. It should be noted that the proportion

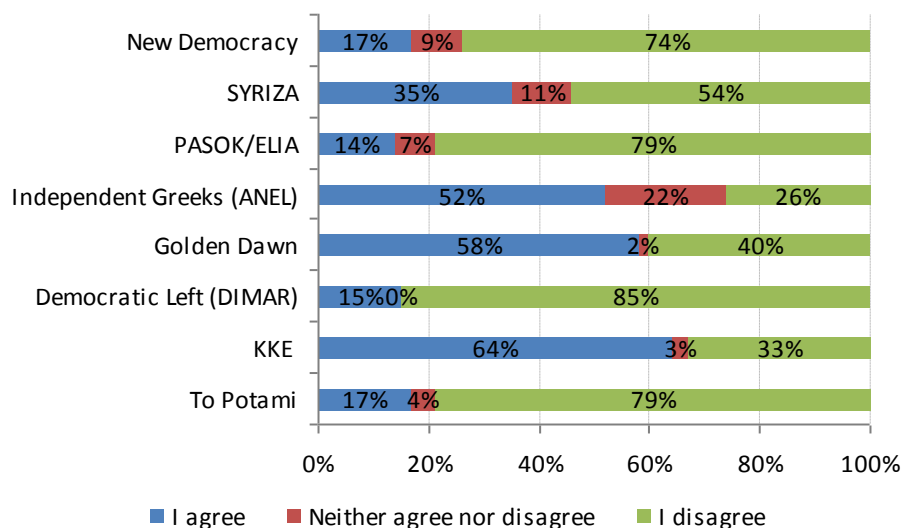
<sup>96</sup> Actually, Europe-Ecology expressed its official support for 'The River'.

<sup>97</sup> Several renowned intellectuals, among them Etienne Balibar, Judith Butler, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Zizek, signed a declaration to support Tsipras' candidacy for Commission President, highlighting the symbolism of the nomination. See the declaration here: <http://alexistsipras.eu/index.php/press/162-statement-of-support-for-alexis-tsipras-candidate-on-behalf-of-the-european-left-for-president-of-the-european-commission>.

<sup>98</sup> Research Institute of the University of Macedonia, Public opinion and market research unit, April 2014.

reached 70% in case of voters of the River.<sup>99</sup> As Figure 3 shows, enthusiasm varies across voters of the different political parties. DIM.AR, PASOK /Olive Tree, the River and ND as well as SYRIZA are firmly on the Europhile side, while ANEL and KKE are the parties less supportive of European integration.

Figure 3. The Greek membership in the EU was something 'bad'



Source: Research Institute of the University of Macedonia - Public opinion and market research unit, April 2014.

The position of a Greece kept under hard EU economic and financial surveillance inevitably leads all parties to refer to European issues, mainly relating to Greece's obligations under the new economic governance framework. The River, Ecologist Greens, and DIM.AR are positioned as the parties most interested in Europe's future. The north-south divide is a matter of minor importance in structuring the public debate. The pro-anti memorandum split – it could be transformed in the coming period to a 'pro-anti EU surveillance' divide – still has an important influence on voting. However, as pointed out above, this transversal realignment of voting patterns is just another version of more traditional divisions such as right-left and anti-pro EU. The pro-anti memorandum divide allows mainstream parties (mainly ND and PASOK) to position themselves as the responsible forces of the country, attempting to demonstrate their independence of ideological preferences, and to condemn any other attitude as anti-European. This trend increasingly reinforces rather than weakens SYRIZA's left-wing rhetorical strategy.

An important factor to watch is the participation rate, given that it is the first time that the European elections will coincide with the regional elections.<sup>100</sup> Figure 4 below shows the change in voting intentions in Greece for the forthcoming EP elections according to polling data<sup>101</sup> gathered since February 2014.

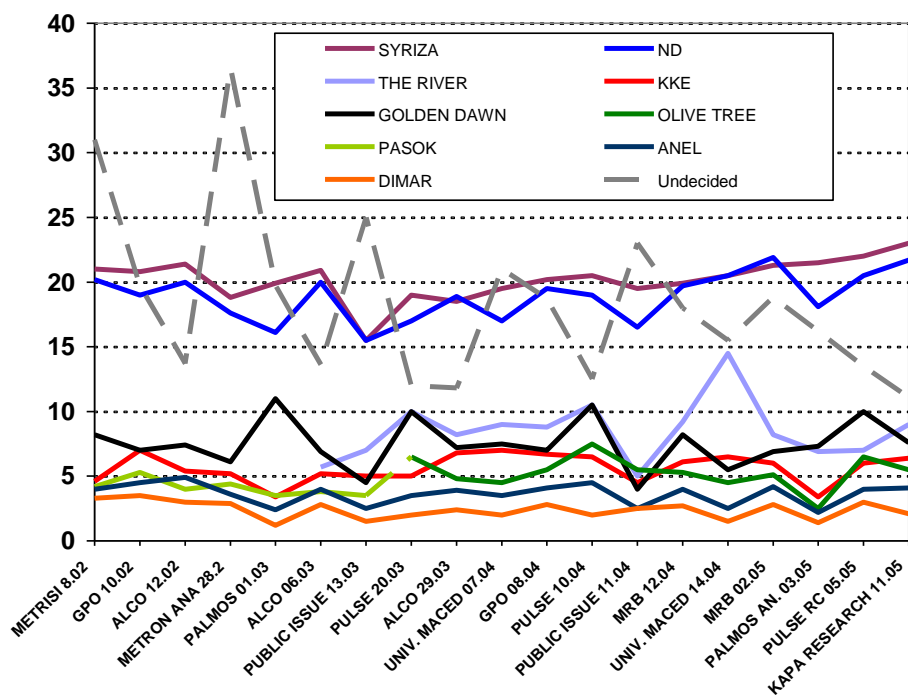
<sup>99</sup> University of Macedonia, Research Institute of Macedonian University, Public opinion and market research unit, April 2014, National research assessment policies trends for elections.

<sup>100</sup> The European Parliament elections traditionally have a relatively low rate of participation, while the regional elections generally attract more interest.

<sup>101</sup> Following the government spokesperson Yiannis Michelakis' [decision](#), poll results may be published up until May 23, as the two weeks poll publication ban has been lifted in order to prevent information leaks.



Figure 4. The change in voting intentions for Euro elections 2014



Sources: ELIAMEP, F. Chatzistavrou & S. Michalaki, May 2014.

According to the estimates based on available polling data, SYRIZA is projected to win between 5-8 seats; ND 5-7; The River 2-4; while Golden Dawn is expected to get 2-4; KKE 1-2; Olive Tree 0-2; ANEL 0-2; and DIM.AR 0-1 seats.

Polls show that the electoral dynamics are particularly volatile. The EU election traditionally constitutes a 'protest vote'. An important proportion of the poll participants have indicated that they would vote for very small parties (ecological parties, ANTARSYA, LAOS etc.) or have not decided yet. Although the number of citizens that are refraining from revealing their preferences has decreased, electoral volatility as a persistent trend is expected to play a critical role in determining voting behaviour as the May 2014 polling date approaches. It is thought that these voters who have not yet decided may not be distributed according to traditional patterns.

Two major political parties, ND and SYRIZA, dominate the political landscape. If SYRIZA finishes first in the European Parliament elections, it is almost certain that the party will push for national elections to be held as soon as possible. If Olive Tree fails to attract a substantial vote as polls reveal, the question of the coalition government's legitimacy as well as of PASOK leadership arises.<sup>102</sup> Golden Dawn's appeal remains strong, and its anti-memorandum rhetoric undermines the right-left divide, replacing it with a division between 'patriots' and 'non-patriots' (Golden Dawn gathered 7% of the votes in the 2012 national elections). Anti-EU parties such as the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the right-wing populist party Independent Greeks (ANEL) do more or less fare (KKE gathered 4.5% and ANEL 7.51% of the votes in the 2012 elections). Actually, data polls suggest an unexpected increase for The River.

<sup>102</sup> It is quite peculiar that Fofi Gennimata the current under-secretary for Defence, whose political career flourished because of her being her father's daughter, opened a discussion regarding PASOK's rebirth. Gerasimos Gennimatas, Fofi Gennimata's father, was a prominent Pasok MP close to Andreas Papandreu and responsible for establishing the national healthcare system and the right to vote at the age of 18.



The River will probably play a decisive role in the aftermath of the EP elections, changing the balance of political forces and evolving to become a potential government partner in place of the shrinking PASOK. DIM.AR apparently fails to reach the 3% threshold. In this case, its political future is rather uncertain.

Undoubtedly, rates of electoral abstention and volatility will be an important factor, and are expected to determine more or less negatively the strength of pro-EU establishment parties. Electoral trends indicate that, in the aftermath of EP elections, no party will have a high enough electoral rate to guarantee strong single-party government, thus suggesting a number of troublesome partisan interdependencies.

# Like a Feather in the Wind: Italy's Approach to the EP Elections

Eleonora Poli\*

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## Introduction

The fragmented Italian institutional and political panorama can be perfectly summed up by a famous verse of Verdi's *Rigoletto*: it is "flighty, like a feather in the wind". Since 2012, Italy has experienced four different governments<sup>103</sup> and two parliamentary compositions,<sup>104</sup> with the recent reshuffling of the cabinet by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi being a very good example of the above-mentioned institutional instability. In February 2014, after weeks of feuding, former Prime Minister Enrico Letta resigned and paved the way for Renzi ("il Rottamatore", or "the Scrapper") to present an emergency programme to be implemented by his new government, which is due to remain in office until 2018.

Certainly, the upcoming European Parliament (EP) elections are set to play a very important role on the Italian political scene, considering that Italy is due to take over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU next. On the one hand, the elections might test the legitimacy of the current government led by the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD), which is expected to receive around 33% of the Italian vote (27 seats).<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, they could represent a springboard for the eurosceptic Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Stars Movement, M5S) and a good chance for many political parties to reconfirm their political legitimacy. Indeed, the high rate of political turnover in Italy (at 70%, the highest among all Western European countries) means that many currently marginal parties, such as Lega Nord (League of North, LN), might be using Europe to aid their resurgence as legitimate political actors.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, the EP elections may spell the dismantling of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy, FI) or the revitalisation of a real left-wing alternative, such as Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (Left Ecology and Freedom, SEL).

Yet the European elections may well be overshadowed by local elections. In the spring of 2014, 4,089 local authorities will hold administrative elections and residents in Abruzzo and Piedmont will be also called on to vote for their respective regional president and council. However, information on the European Parliament elections has not been eclipsed by these. Indeed, the Italian media's coverage of EU political debates has been mainly influenced by

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<sup>103</sup> 2008-2011: Silvio Berlusconi; 2011-2013: Mario Monti; 2013-2014: Enrico Letta; 2014-ongoing: Matteo Renzi.

<sup>104</sup> 2008-2013: Popolo della Libertà (Pdl) 46.31%, Partito Democratico 37.52%, Unione di Centro (UdC) 5.69%. 2013-2014: Partito Democratico (PD) 29.53%, Popolo della Libertà (PDL) 29.18%, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) 25.09%. In November 2013, PDL was divided into two different parties: Forza Italia led by Silvio Berlusconi and Nuovo Centro Destra, led by Angelino Alfano.

<sup>105</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandsenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandsenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>106</sup> M. Prospero (2013), "The demise of multi-party politics and the rise of populism", in H. Giusto, D. Kitching and S. Rizzo (eds), *The Changing faces of Populism*, FEPS, CRS and Italianeuropei, pp. 147-8.

national political and institutional instability, together with Italy's current economic troubles.<sup>107</sup> Diminished Italian support for 'more Europe' may also have negatively impacted parties' electoral campaigns and their European political programmes. Indeed, Italians who could be seen as europhiles are nowadays in a minority, with only 30% trusting the European institutions and 39% believing in the EU.<sup>108</sup> This anti-EU sentiment has resulted in widespread anti-EU discourse that has been used to increase electoral support not only by eurosceptic groups, but also – even if in a less radical and populist form – by some traditional parties. *In this frantic context*, the impact of the European Parliament elections on national political debates is not an easy subject to analyse.

## Eurosceptic campaigns and Italian parties' electoral strategies

Building their campaign on several anti-EU arguments, the eurosceptic parties seem to be the ones devoting most attention to the EP elections. In this respect, Movimento 5 Stelle, the only Italian party refusing to accept public funding, is basing its political propaganda on a series of theatrical stories under the title "I'll give you Europe", directed and interpreted by the talented showman and party leader, Beppe Grillo. To attend the shows and receive more information about M5S's European agenda supporters have to buy a regular ticket. The stories are built on populist and eurosceptic rhetoric to leverage diffuse social discontent with the Fiscal Compact and the euro.<sup>109</sup> Generally, the euro is presented as a monster haunting Europeans, the Troika is worse than the mafia and Europe, which is "surreal, cynic and unsustainable", "has turned into a financial nightmare".<sup>110</sup> Referring to his political campaign, Grillo has admitted he wants "to do it in this way" as M5S "needs to win the elections".<sup>111</sup> Yet, winning the EP elections is not only important for pursuing the party's "anti-euro" but "pro-Europeans" ideas. It also a political strategy against Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (PD). During the 2013 national elections, M5S, standing as a single party, obtained proportionally more votes (25%) than PD. Grillo therefore expected Italian President Giorgio Napolitano to give his party the direct leadership of the country, but the latter opted for PD and its coalition, which received electoral support of 29%. If M5S becomes the first Italian party in the European Parliament, beating PD, Grillo believes it will have the legitimacy to ask for new national elections.<sup>112</sup>

Lega Nord also appears to be among those parties that have invested more energy in developing a coherent political campaign, even if it is rallying around eurosceptic ideas. LN was among the first political groups to publicly present an election logo, which was in fact revealed during the party's Federal Council on 31 March 2014. With the issuance of radical eurosceptic slogans, in which the EU is compared to a "gulag", Lega's political campaign will be based not only on the

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<sup>107</sup> V. della Salla (2014), "The European Parliament elections are yet another test for Italy's fragile political system", LSE (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/01/21/the-european-parliament-elections-are-yet-another-test-for-italys-fragile-political-system/>).

<sup>108</sup> Philippe Ridet (2014), "L'Italie prête pour les élections anti européennes", *Le Monde*, 17 April (<http://italie.blog.lemonde.fr/>).

<sup>109</sup> SkyTg24 (2014), "Grillo: Ue abolisca Fiscal compact o via dall'euro", 16 March (<http://247.libero.it/focus/28465198/0/grillo-ue-abolisca-fiscal-compact-o-via-dall-euro/>).

<sup>110</sup> M. Galanto (2014), "Elezioni europee 2014: Beppe Grillo in tour (a pagamento)", Polisblog, 28 February ([www.polisblog.it/post/201587/elezioni-europee-2014-beppe-grillo-in-tour-a-pagamento](http://www.polisblog.it/post/201587/elezioni-europee-2014-beppe-grillo-in-tour-a-pagamento)).

<sup>111</sup> *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (2014), "Candidati M5S, Grillo: 'Meglio scelti così che nominati. Chi è scontento è fuori'", 2 April ([www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/04/02/candidati-m5s-grillo-meglio-scelti-cosi-che-nominati-chi-e-scontento-e-fuori/935750/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/04/02/candidati-m5s-grillo-meglio-scelti-cosi-che-nominati-chi-e-scontento-e-fuori/935750/)).

<sup>112</sup> *ItalPress* (2014), "Europee, Grillo 'Se vince M5S Sciogliere le Camere e tornare al voto'", 16 March (<http://247.libero.it/focus/28467020/0/europee-grillo-se-vince-m5s-sciogliere-camere-e-tornare-al-voto/>).

use of social networks but also on a “Stop the euro tour”.<sup>113</sup> Although Matteo Salvini, the newly elected party secretary and former member of the European Parliament, maintains he wants to win the EP elections as he is fed up with Brussels telling Europeans how to live their lives, the elections may well be used by the party to recover its partially lost legitimacy, which has been hit by recent corruption scandals involving its former leader, Umberto Bossi, who was accused of misappropriation of party funds for his family.<sup>114</sup>

Among the traditional groups, left-wing parties have devoted more attention to developing their political campaigns, particularly Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL). Since March 2014, SEL has organised political events in Lazio, Marche, Tuscany and Lombardy to boost awareness of the forthcoming elections and to draw attention to social economic issues and European policies. Moreover, building on social discontent over European austerity policies, SEL's slogans, which invite citizens to vote for another Europe, are used by the party to present itself as the real alternative to the “Troika”.<sup>115</sup>

PD – the largest pro-European party in Italy – has also managed to promote some original ideas. First, in order to avoid EP elections becoming a legitimacy test for newly appointed Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, his name does not appear on the party's electoral logo.<sup>116</sup> Also, instead of directly confronting European political and economic issues, PD's political campaign boasts greater attention to citizens' needs. Posters presenting normal people have been displayed all around Italy; the most interesting one depicts Chiara, a party volunteer, posing with the flag of the European Union under the slogan: “My studies in Paris, my internship in Berlin, my life here (Italy), that's what Chiara is asking of the party”. The most innovative aspect of the campaign is that Chiara is a real student telling the story of many Italians moving abroad because they cannot find a job in Italy. This issue, which is one of the country's open wounds, is becoming the centre of PD's entire European campaign. Following this line, Renzi maintains that Italy has to restructure its economic political and social institutions not because Brussels is asking it to, but because the voters are.<sup>117</sup> Obviously PD cannot directly oppose the EU's hard economic line, since it has been implementing many of the austerity policies deemed to have reduced social welfare; however, it must be noted that 69% of the Italians believe that Italy should decrease its public debt and contain its budget deficit.<sup>118</sup>

As for the right-wing parties created out of the recent disintegration of Popolo della Libertà (People of Liberty, PDL) – the reconstituted Forza Italia led by Silvio Berlusconi and Nuovo Centrodestra (New Centre-Right, NCD) led by Deputy Prime Minister Angelino Alfano – appear not to have devoted many resources to developing a European campaign. NCD started its campaign on 18 April, and FI's campaign was supposed to begin on 28 April, the date on which Berlusconi was due to start serving his criminal sentence.<sup>119</sup> Like Lega Nord, NCD and FI are

<sup>113</sup> A. Signorelli (2014), “Elezioni Europee 2014, la Lega Nord presenta il simbolo con la scritta ‘Basta euro’”, Polisblog, 31 March ([www.polisblog.it/post/206009/elezioni-europee-2014-il-no-euro-tour-della-lega-nord-tutte-le-date](http://www.polisblog.it/post/206009/elezioni-europee-2014-il-no-euro-tour-della-lega-nord-tutte-le-date)).

<sup>114</sup> *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (2013), “Primarie Lega, Salvini neo segretario ‘Battaglia contro Ue. E abolire i prefetti’”, 7 December ([www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/12/07/primarie-lega-salvini-neo-segretario-battaglia-alla-ue-e-abolizione-prefetti/804881/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/12/07/primarie-lega-salvini-neo-segretario-battaglia-alla-ue-e-abolizione-prefetti/804881/)).

<sup>115</sup> See [www.sinistraecologiaeliberta.it](http://www.sinistraecologiaeliberta.it)

<sup>116</sup> A. Signorelli (2014), “Elezioni Europee 2014: il Partito Democratico presenta il simbolo”, Euroactiv.it, 4 April ([www.polisblog.it/post/148097/elezioni-europee-2014-partito-democratico-simbolo-candidati](http://www.polisblog.it/post/148097/elezioni-europee-2014-partito-democratico-simbolo-candidati)).

<sup>117</sup> A. Mauro (2014), “Matteo Renzi e i manifesti Pd per le europee: non c'è il suo nome ma quello degli iscritti”, Huffington Post, 2 April ([www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/04/02/matteo-renzi-manifesti-pd-europee\\_n\\_5077983.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/04/02/matteo-renzi-manifesti-pd-europee_n_5077983.html)).

<sup>118</sup> IAI and Università di Siena (2013), *Italians and Foreign Policy*, Research Report, p. 13.

<sup>119</sup> TgCom24 (2014), “Europee, da Berlusconi i vertici FI”, 21 April ([www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/2014/notizia/europee-da-berlusconi-i-vertici-fi\\_2040533.shtml](http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/2014/notizia/europee-da-berlusconi-i-vertici-fi_2040533.shtml)).

using the European elections as a vehicle to drum up national electoral support. In the case of FI, whose reputation has certainly been tarnished by the recent political and judicial turmoil involving Berlusconi, the choice to launch its political campaign in Milan is highly symbolic.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, as the EP candidate Giovanni Toti maintains, the day of the European elections (25 May) has to become another 27 March 1994, the date on which the FI was created in Milan.<sup>121</sup> In order to boost its electoral support, FI is basing its political campaign on the need to recreate a stronger role for Italy in the European decision-making process. Slogans calling for “more Italy in Europe” are being used to openly contrast with the PD government, which is seen to have implemented austerity reforms simply because the EU was asking for them.

As with FI, NCD also has a strong interest in winning the EP elections – it would guarantee the party renewed legitimacy, making it the real right-wing alternative to Forza Italia. In order to increase electoral support and overcome FI by using the very same political discourses, NCD’s campaign states that Italian interests should come first, then European interests. Moreover, NCD is set on cooperating with *Unione di Centro* (Centred Union, UDC) and *Movimento dei Popolari per l’Italia* (Popular Movement for Italy, PpI) in order to boost its chances of entering the European Parliament. While the legal threshold to access the European Parliament has been held at 4%, the number of MEPs to be elected has been reduced (from 78 to 73), reducing the chances of success for smaller parties.<sup>122</sup>

Also for this reason, *Scelta Civica* (Civic Choice, SC) founded by Mario Monti, *Centro Democratico* (Democratic Centre, DC) of Bruno Tabacchi and *Fermare il Declino* (Stop the Decline) have decided to join forces in a unique list, called *Scelta Europea* (European Choice, SE), together with other 13 liberal parties, political movements and foundations. Classifying itself as a positive alternative to the big parties such as the Democratic Party and Forza Italia, *Scelta Europea* is building its political campaign on the need to stop the crisis through new political and economic directives. According to Ezio Bussoletti, a member of *Fermare il Declino*, “we can, we have to, exit from the European crisis”, but it is necessary to say “no” to “eurosceptics and populists, that are only creating problems”.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, as with UDC and NCD, few resources and little time have been invested by SE in the political campaign.

To sum up, although the EP elections are likely to play an extremely important role in the Italian political arena, some political parties’ campaigns are behind schedule. These delays may have not been caused by a lack of interest; they may have been caused by the constitutional reform, approved in 2012, which limited the amount of financial resources granted to parties, possibly reducing their capability to allocate funds for campaigning.<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, the parties’ political campaigns are mostly led by a need to reconfirm or boost their national political legitimacy. Aside from the eurosceptic movements’ anti-euro and anti-EU propaganda, right-wing parties like NCD and FI both support the idea that at the EU level, Italian interests should come first, heightening anti-European sentiments which have already taken hold among citizens. On the

<sup>120</sup> AGL.it (2014), “Forza Italia to start European election campaign in Milan”, 3 March ([www.agi.it/english-version/italy/elenco-notizie/201404031742-pol-ren1072forza\\_italia\\_to\\_start\\_european\\_election\\_campaign\\_in\\_milan](http://www.agi.it/english-version/italy/elenco-notizie/201404031742-pol-ren1072forza_italia_to_start_european_election_campaign_in_milan)).

<sup>121</sup> *Il Giornale* (2014), “Via alla campagna europea: Forza Italia ‘incorona’ Toti”, 6 April ([www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/campagna-europea-forza-italia-incorona-toti-1007985.html](http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/campagna-europea-forza-italia-incorona-toti-1007985.html)).

<sup>122</sup> 20 MEPs for the North-West, 14 for the Northeast, 14 for the Centre, 17 for the South and 8 for the islands. Eunews (2014), “How to vote for the European elections? The Member States electoral systems, explained”, 8 April ([www.eunews.it/en/2014/04/08/how-to-vote-for-the-european-elections-the-member-states-electoral-systems-explained/14112](http://www.eunews.it/en/2014/04/08/how-to-vote-for-the-european-elections-the-member-states-electoral-systems-explained/14112)).

<sup>123</sup> Eunews (2014), “Nasce ‘Scelta europea’: ‘Alternativa all’alleanza socialisti e popolari al potere a Berlino’”, 4 March ([www.eunews.it/2014/03/04/nasce-scelta-europea-alternativa-allalleanza-socialisti-e-popolari-al-potere-a-berlino/13116](http://www.eunews.it/2014/03/04/nasce-scelta-europea-alternativa-allalleanza-socialisti-e-popolari-al-potere-a-berlino/13116)).

<sup>124</sup> LEGGE 6 luglio 2012, N. 96 ([www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2012-07-06:96](http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2012-07-06:96)).

other hand, PD, and specifically Prime Minister Renzi, has responded to the above-mentioned accusation of a lack of real Italian leadership at the EU level by claiming that the government has to rebalance its national economy not in the interest of the EU, but in the interest of its citizens. In this way, he is trying to depict the government as being independent of Brussels and attentive to social needs. In this frenetic political battle, only the campaigns of SEL and SE, albeit from different political perspectives, appear to be highlighting the need to exit from the crisis by implementing adequate political responses.

## Candidates for a European Parliament with teeth

The European Parliament used to be considered a “toothless” institution or, in the words of former member of the European Parliament Alberto Michelini, “a graveyard for elephants” or “a sort of end-of-career present” for national political actors.<sup>125</sup> However, in the post-Lisbon era, the European Parliament has certainly been playing a central role in the development of EU policies. In this respect, its increased powers should be also reflected in a more appropriate choice of candidates by national parties.

The fact that many of the top Italian nominees for the European Parliament in the five national districts are well-known political actors might suggest a changing trend. However, the choice of candidates holding a political role in the current government may be a mere smoke-and-mirrors tactic to increase parties' visibility. Indeed, if elected, they will most likely decide to renounce their positions in the EP in order to keep their national political office.

For instance, among Scelta Europea's top candidates are the current Minister of Education (Stefania Giannini) and members of the Chamber of Deputies (Gianluca Susta and Bruno Tabacci), who, if elected, will probably opt to leave their EP seat to other nominees. Apart from political strategies to raise electoral support, many parties have decided to nominate former ministers or members of the EP because they might offer great institutional knowledge. For example, among SE's top candidates is current MEP Nicolo Rinaldi.<sup>126</sup> Former Minister of Transport Maurizio Lupi and former Minister of Health Beatrice Lorenzin will represent NCD party at the EP, if elected. NCD is also putting forward former members of the EP, such as Antonio Cancian, Giovanni La Via and Lorenzo Cesa.<sup>127</sup>

As for Forza Italia, Silvio Berlusconi, having been denied access to the EP because of his criminal record,<sup>128</sup> has decided to confirm among his top candidates current MEP Elisabetta Gardini. EU knowledge thus appears to have been one of the criteria applied by FI. Berlusconi's former spokesmen, Antonio Tajani, who has been European Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship and one of the five vice-presidents of the European Commission, will direct campaigns in the central district.

The criteria for decisions over candidates also seem to also respond to domestic politics. For instance, Berlusconi's new political adviser, Giovanni Toti, whose electoral support is on the rise but who does not have a European background, will be leading Forza Italia's political campaign in the Northwest district. In other cases, the choice of candidates by FI has also been

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<sup>125</sup> J. Phillips (1994), “Italian candidates hunger for second taste of la dolce vita; European Elections”, *The Times*, 2 June.

<sup>126</sup> [www.sceltacivica.it/doc/1454/candidati-scelta-europea-alle-elezioni-europee-25-maggio.htm](http://www.sceltacivica.it/doc/1454/candidati-scelta-europea-alle-elezioni-europee-25-maggio.htm)

<sup>127</sup> [www.nuovocentrodestra.it/i-candidati-ncd-alle-europee](http://www.nuovocentrodestra.it/i-candidati-ncd-alle-europee)

<sup>128</sup> *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (2014), “Elezioni Europee 2014, Reding: ‘Berlusconi candidato? Regole Ue chiare’”, 17 March ([www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/03/17/europee-reding-berlusconi-candidato-le-regole-della-ue-sono-chiare/916417/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/03/17/europee-reding-berlusconi-candidato-le-regole-della-ue-sono-chiare/916417/)).



led by political trust, such as in the case of top candidates Raffaele Fitto and Gianfranco Micciché, who were ministers during Berlusconi's cabinets.<sup>129</sup>

In the case of the left-wing parties, the selection criteria are rather ambiguous. For instance, although Article 19 of the PD's statute clearly sets the modalities of consultation for choosing candidates, it is not clear how its candidates were appointed and whether Prime Minister Matteo Renzi directly nominated them.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, the choice of five women at the head of each EU electoral list – namely, Alessia Mosca, Alessandra Moretti, Simona Bonafè, Pina Picierno and Caterina Chinnici – seems mainly to reflect Matteo Renzi's political interests. This choice, which may well symbolise progress and openness, has been widely publicised in the Italian media to depict the party as modern and to boost its electoral support.<sup>131</sup> In other words, although these candidates have vast national political experience, they appear to have poor EU knowledge and may have been chosen mainly because of their gender. Populism is also a card that has been played by the party in putting forward candidates. For instance, during the electoral campaign Prime Minister Renzi hinted that the former football World Cup winner Marco Tardelli might be one of the candidates.<sup>132</sup> To quote Churchill, since “Italians lose wars as if they were football matches, and football matches as if they were wars”<sup>133</sup>, Renzi's declaration was probably designed to test a populist political strategy to raise support for his party. However, it was merely political advertising, as the official candidate lists show no sign of Mr. Tardelli. Instead, the majority of candidates have been involved in political activities at the European or national level. For instance, current members of the EP who may well have acquired greater experience in dealing with the EU, such as David Sassoli, Roberto Gualtieri, Gianni Pittella and Andrea Cozzolino, have been confirmed.<sup>134</sup>

**SEL delegated the choice of candidate to six intellectuals, who selected a total of 73 candidates according to various criteria encompassing gender, academic background and compliance with the law.<sup>135</sup> Among its top candidates, SEL has nominated the journalists Barbara Spinelli and Ermanno Rea, the writer Curzio Maltese and party activist Paola Morandin. Although knowledge of the EU does not appear to have been one of the main selection criteria, according to Nicola Fratoianni, SEL national coordinator, candidates' “high intellectual qualities” will make them able to represent Italians in the fight against liberal austerity policies, whose effects have resulted in the current social and economic crisis.<sup>136</sup>**

Among the eurosceptic parties, Lega's secretary and former member of the European Parliament Matteo Salvini has nominated himself as the top candidate in all five regional districts. As with PD, the choice of candidates was characterised by populist declarations made by Mr. Salvini to bring attention to the party's political campaign and to gain further support. For instance, in line with Lega's pro-independence and pro-autonomy ideas, he maintained that one of the candidates might have been a member of the radical movement “Indipendentisti Veneti” (Independent

<sup>129</sup> L. Romano (2014), “Ecco tutti i candidati di Forza Italia”, *Il Giornale*, 16 April ([www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/ecco-tutti-i-candidati-forza-italia-1011427.html](http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/ecco-tutti-i-candidati-forza-italia-1011427.html)).

<sup>130</sup> PD website ([www.partitodemocratico.it/doc/100454/lo-statuto-del-partito-democratico.htm](http://www.partitodemocratico.it/doc/100454/lo-statuto-del-partito-democratico.htm)).

<sup>131</sup> [www.partitodemocratico.it/doc/267035/i-candidati-alle-elezioni-europee-2014.htm](http://www.partitodemocratico.it/doc/267035/i-candidati-alle-elezioni-europee-2014.htm)

<sup>132</sup> L'Unità (2014), “Pd: Marco Tardelli alle Europee? Scegliamo i candidati mercoledì”, 7 April ([www.unita.it/politica/d%2527attorre-pd-europee-nomi-tardelli-emiliano-elezioni-bari-bresso-kyenge-1.562012](http://www.unita.it/politica/d%2527attorre-pd-europee-nomi-tardelli-emiliano-elezioni-bari-bresso-kyenge-1.562012)).

<sup>133</sup> See <http://mg.co.za/tag/winston-churchill>

<sup>134</sup> [www.eutwentyfourteen.com/italy](http://www.eutwentyfourteen.com/italy)

<sup>135</sup> See Lista Tsipras website ([www.listatsipras.eu/candidati/codice-di-autoregolamentazione-candidature.html](http://www.listatsipras.eu/candidati/codice-di-autoregolamentazione-candidature.html)).

<sup>136</sup> See SEL website (<https://www.sinistraecologialiberta.it/notizie/laltra-europa-con-tsipras-ecco-i-candidati-e-il-simbolo/>).



Venetians) who has been recently arrested under a charge of terrorism against the state.<sup>137</sup> Lega instead nominated experienced politicians like the mayor of Verona, Flavio Tosi (North-East district), who was convicted in 2009 of promoting ideas of racial superiority,<sup>138</sup> and former deputy Angelo Attaguile, accused (but not convicted) of bribery.<sup>139</sup> Among the party's other top candidates are its intellectual "guru", Professor Claudio Borghi, and Francesca Donato and Manuel Vescovi, who do not have any European experience.<sup>140</sup>

Movimento 5 Stelle adopted rather peculiar selection modalities by recruiting candidates online. To apply, contenders had to post a video and a CV online, be over 25 years old, have no criminal record, and have joined the party before 31 December 2012. Moreover, they should not have been elected to any other office or be a candidate for the 2014 local elections.<sup>141</sup> Despite 5,000 hopeful candidates posting their CVs online, only 73 were chosen thanks to a double-turn voting system, which reduced the systemic risk of candidates contrasting openly with the party's mainstream visions. Moreover, in order to ensure complete trust, once elected candidates will have to commit to paying a sum of €250,000 if their behaviour should contradict the movement's principles.<sup>142</sup> Among the several selection criteria, Grillo also maintained the need for candidates to be familiar with EU institutions and to speak at least one foreign language. However, the system did not prove to be very efficient, as the five districts top candidates demonstrate shaky European policymaking knowledge.<sup>143</sup>

In conclusion, the selection criteria of the left- or right-wing parties, together with those of the eurosceptic movements, often appear to respond to party interests, to trust or to a national logic more than a European one. Indeed, although many candidates demonstrate great national political experience, very few appear to have knowledge of EU institutions and European policymaking processes.

## Populism, euroscepticism and fragmented political programmes

That national interests outweigh European ones has also been reflected in some parties' political manifestos. For instance, although FI will join the European People Party EPP, its political campaign does not reflect the European party's programmes. On the contrary, the party's propaganda stating "More Italy in Europe and less Europe in Italy", clearly underlines the willingness to fight against what is considered excessive European interventionism. Indeed, according to Philippe Ridet, a correspondent in Italy for *Le Monde*, 54% of the FI party members are eurosceptic.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the party's pro-EU proposals encompass the need to

<sup>137</sup> *Sole24Ore* (2014), "Salvini presenta i candidati della Lega: forse in lista anche uno degli indipendentisti agli arresti", 11 April ([www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-04-11/salvini-presenta-candidati-lega-forse-lista-anche-indipendista-arresti--173045.shtml?uuid=AB8iflAB](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-04-11/salvini-presenta-candidati-lega-forse-lista-anche-indipendista-arresti--173045.shtml?uuid=AB8iflAB)).

<sup>138</sup> *L'Arena* (2009), "Nomadi, Confermata Condanna a Tosi", 11 July ([www.larena.it/stories/Home/68704\\_nomadi\\_confermata\\_condanna\\_a\\_tosi/](http://www.larena.it/stories/Home/68704_nomadi_confermata_condanna_a_tosi/)).

<sup>139</sup> A. Baccaro (2013), "Un Leghista resuscita il ponte sullo stretto", *Corriere della Sera*, 13 December ([http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2013/dicembre/13/legghista\\_resuscita\\_Ponte\\_sullo\\_Stretto\\_co\\_0\\_201312\\_13\\_930734d0-63c2-11e3-a057-4954ced8f6bb.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2013/dicembre/13/legghista_resuscita_Ponte_sullo_Stretto_co_0_201312_13_930734d0-63c2-11e3-a057-4954ced8f6bb.shtml)).

<sup>140</sup> See Lega Nord website ([www.leganord.org/index.php/elezioni-europee](http://www.leganord.org/index.php/elezioni-europee)).

<sup>141</sup> Il Blog di Beppe Grillo, "Comunicato politico numero cinquantaquattro #VINCIAMONOI", March 2014 ([www.beppegrillo.it/2014/03/comunicato\\_politico\\_numero\\_cinquantaquattro.html](http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/03/comunicato_politico_numero_cinquantaquattro.html)).

<sup>142</sup> A. Signorelli (2014), "Elezioni Europee 2014: tutti i candidati del Movimento 5 Stelle", Polisblog, April ([www.polisblog.it/post/213893/elezioni-europee-2014-candidati-movimento-5-stelle](http://www.polisblog.it/post/213893/elezioni-europee-2014-candidati-movimento-5-stelle)).

<sup>143</sup> See candidates at [www.beppegrillo.it/2014/04/i\\_candidati\\_del\\_movimento\\_5\\_stelle\\_alle\\_elezioni\\_europee.html](http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/04/i_candidati_del_movimento_5_stelle_alle_elezioni_europee.html).

<sup>144</sup> P. Ridet (2014), "L'Italie prête pour les élections anti européennes", *Le Monde*, 17 April (<http://italie.blog.lemonde>).

implement the Eurobonds and convert the European Central Bank (ECB) into an institution that is able to guarantee national debts, issue currency and lend capital.<sup>145</sup> These points are primarily based on national interests and, second, they are in open contrast to the EPP political agenda. In this respect, the EPP's formal candidate *to the Commission Presidency*, Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, *has recently claimed that Eurobonds cannot be a solution to the crisis on their own.*<sup>146</sup> In a nutshell, by maintaining both anti- and pro-EU discourses, FI's ambiguous position is the result of a catch-all political strategy to boost electoral support. Indeed, while Italians' goodwill towards the EU has been diminished, Italy is not a europhobic country and 53% of the Italians believe Italy should remain in the Eurozone (38% are against).<sup>147</sup> Hence, on the one hand the EU's austerity policies are harshly criticised by Silvio Berlusconi's party while on the other, the party's members appear to be europhiles, as FI supports a common fiscal, foreign and defence policy and the acceleration of those political, economic and banking unions that would benefit the Italian economy. Nevertheless, political scandals involving Berlusconi and the absence of a clear agenda seem to have negatively affected FI's electoral support, which is expected to take 18.3 % of the votes (around 15 seats), becoming the third political group after M5S.<sup>148</sup>

By contrast, the majority of Italian parties did not develop independent and in-depth political programmes, but instead appear rather keener to follow their European coalition. For instance, the ideas expressed by PD leaders are in favour of more European political economic and fiscal integration, safeguarding the euro, and tackling the crisis by **fighting unemployment**.<sup>149</sup> These declarations appear to be in line with the PES political programme, calling for a new system of economic governance able to guarantee the promotion of growth.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, as Renzi has maintained, PD is "proud to be part of the PES and so is the government", which will hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU next.<sup>151</sup> Partito Democratico has scored around 33% of the vote (27 seats) in opinion polls.<sup>152</sup> The right-wing parties Unione di Centro, Nuovo Centro Destra and Movimento Popolare per l'Italia, which do not have a clear agenda, have declared they will participate in the European People's Party and promote major reforms of the EU's economic governance, such as boosting fiscal policy at the national level and supporting efficient European economic policies.<sup>153</sup> However, according to Italian opinion polls, UDC and

<sup>145</sup> A. Signorelli (2014), "Elezioni Europee 2014: Forza Italia, ecco il simbolo", Polisblog, 14 April ([www.polisblog.it/post/157257/elezioni-europee-2014-pdl-forza-italia](http://www.polisblog.it/post/157257/elezioni-europee-2014-pdl-forza-italia)).

<sup>146</sup> Eunews (2014), "The 'German' Juncker and the 'Keynesian' Schulz", 9 April ([www.eunews.it/en/2014/04/09/the-german-juncker-and-the-keynesian-schulz/14152](http://www.eunews.it/en/2014/04/09/the-german-juncker-and-the-keynesian-schulz/14152)).

<sup>147</sup> IAI and Università di Siena (2013), "Italians and Foreign Policy", Research Report, p.13.

<sup>148</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>149</sup> A. Signorelli (2014), "Elezioni Europee 2014: il Partito Democratico presenta il simbolo", Euroactiv.it, 4 April ([www.polisblog.it/post/148097/elezioni-europee-2014-partito-democratico-simbolo-candidati](http://www.polisblog.it/post/148097/elezioni-europee-2014-partito-democratico-simbolo-candidati)).

<sup>150</sup> See PES website ([www.pes.eu/en/politicalinitiative/economy/rescue-plan-for-eurozone](http://www.pes.eu/en/politicalinitiative/economy/rescue-plan-for-eurozone)).

<sup>151</sup> L'Unità (2014), "Pse, il congresso sceglie Schulz. Renzi: 'Abbattere spread sociale'", 1 March ([www.unita.it/politica/pse-al-via-il-congresso-a-roma-br-oggi-parla-renzi-strong-live-strong-1.554852](http://www.unita.it/politica/pse-al-via-il-congresso-a-roma-br-oggi-parla-renzi-strong-live-strong-1.554852));

Libero (2014), "Congresso Pse a Roma, parla Renzi", 1 March ([www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/11559042/Congresso-Pse-a-Roma--parla.html](http://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/11559042/Congresso-Pse-a-Roma--parla.html)); M. Bonucci

(2014), "Elezioni: Pd nel Pse, Schulz da Renzi a Palazzo Chigi", Euroactiv.it, 24 February ([www.euractiv.it/it/news/elezioni-europee-2014/8758-elezioni-pd-nel-pse-schulz-da-renzi-a-palazzo-chigi.html](http://www.euractiv.it/it/news/elezioni-europee-2014/8758-elezioni-pd-nel-pse-schulz-da-renzi-a-palazzo-chigi.html)); M. Bonucci

(2013), "Elezioni: Pse chiude congresso, Schulz e Renzi star", Euroactiv.it, 1 March ([www.euractiv.it/it/news/elezioni-europee-2014/8767-elezioni-pse-chiude-congresso-schulz-e-renzi-star.html](http://www.euractiv.it/it/news/elezioni-europee-2014/8767-elezioni-pse-chiude-congresso-schulz-e-renzi-star.html)).

<sup>152</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>153</sup> Rainews (2014), "Europee, Alfano: 'Tra noi e UDC molto in comune'", 22 March ([www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/elezioni-europee-alfano-apre-a-udc-ncd-insieme-b76b34f2-caac-4c29-ba13-72140b6dd9f1.html](http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/elezioni-europee-alfano-apre-a-udc-ncd-insieme-b76b34f2-caac-4c29-ba13-72140b6dd9f1.html)).

NCD and PpI will barely reach the legal threshold to access the EP, with 5.6% of the vote (5 seats).<sup>154</sup>

The SEL agenda reflects GUE NLG's ideas on the need to stop austerity policies, to promote green production and to reform EU social and immigration policies, and it backs the candidacy of Alex Tsipras, current leader of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) in Greece, for the Commission presidency.<sup>155</sup> In the case of SEL, European and national debates converged, as its political programme is mostly based on sustainable development and social welfare. However, the party will probably not make the legal threshold to access the EP, as it is on course to achieve only 3.9% of the vote.<sup>156</sup>

Scelta Europea supports ALDE and the former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt to become President of the European Commission.<sup>157</sup> Like ALDE, its liberal political agenda is based on the need to create a stronger political union and to boost the European economy by restoring stable finances and the job market.<sup>158</sup> However, with only 2.4% of the vote, the party will not reach the necessary legal threshold.<sup>159</sup>

By contrast, the eurosceptic parties have been developing more or less radical anti-EU political agendas, which mostly reflect social discontent. For instance, Lega Nord (5.1% of the votes, or 4 seats), which will run with Marie Le Pen's Front National, is supporting the latter's anti-euro and eurosceptic programme.<sup>160</sup> These two parties, together with the Dutch Party of Freedom (PVV), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB) and the Swedish Democrats (SD), are attempting to create a coalition (the European Alliance for Freedom, EAF), meeting the two legal thresholds for forming a group at the EP (normally, a group must have 25 MEPs from at least seven member states).<sup>161</sup> In this respect, the party has launched a "Basta Euro" ("Enough with the euro") tour all over northern Italy based on the ideas expressed by Professor Claudio Borghi Acquilini.<sup>162</sup> As Professor Borghi explains in his book, European countries will be better off without the euro because in order to reshape the real economy, governments need to be able to independently use adequate monetary and fiscal policies.<sup>163</sup> Although many arguments from the M5S political agenda are in line with the European Freedom for Democracy group, such as the need to organise a referendum on the euro, M5S members will not enter into any political coalition.<sup>164</sup> Yet, the lack of affiliation to a

<sup>154</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>155</sup> A. Pisanò (2014), "Elezioni europee 2014, i sondaggi premiano la lista Tsipras: '5 eurodeputati'", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 7 March ([www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/03/07/elezioni-europee-2014-i-sondaggi-premiano-la-lista-tsipras-cinque-eurodeputati/905230/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/03/07/elezioni-europee-2014-i-sondaggi-premiano-la-lista-tsipras-cinque-eurodeputati/905230/)).

<sup>156</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>157</sup> See ALDE website ([www.aldeparty.eu/en/news/verhofstadt-launches-ep2014-list-scelta-europea-italy](http://www.aldeparty.eu/en/news/verhofstadt-launches-ep2014-list-scelta-europea-italy)).

<sup>158</sup> Eunews (2014), "Scelta europea: 'An alternative to People's Party – Socialists alliance in power in Berlin'", 2 March; see Scelta Civica website ([www.sceltacivica.it/doc/1428/scegli-leuropa-il-programma-di-scelta-civica-per-le-elezioni-europee.htm](http://www.sceltacivica.it/doc/1428/scegli-leuropa-il-programma-di-scelta-civica-per-le-elezioni-europee.htm)); see ALDE website ([www.aldeparty.eu/sites/eldr/files/news/10204/2014\\_alde\\_party\\_manifesto.pdf](http://www.aldeparty.eu/sites/eldr/files/news/10204/2014_alde_party_manifesto.pdf)).

<sup>159</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandscenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>160</sup> M. Brusini (2014), "Marine Le Pen e Lega Nord, per gli euroscettici una piattaforma comune: azzeramento dell'euro e controllo delle frontiere", *Huffington Post*, 25 March ([www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/03/25/marine-le-pen-lega-nord-euroscettici-piattaforma\\_n\\_5026242.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=italy](http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/03/25/marine-le-pen-lega-nord-euroscettici-piattaforma_n_5026242.html?utm_hp_ref=italy)).

<sup>161</sup> See [www.eurallfree.org/?q=node/66](http://www.eurallfree.org/?q=node/66)

<sup>162</sup> See La Padania website ([www.lapadania.net/articoli/basta\\_euro\\_tour\\_salvini\\_lega\\_unico\\_antidotocontro\\_leuropa\\_bancaria12930.php](http://www.lapadania.net/articoli/basta_euro_tour_salvini_lega_unico_antidotocontro_leuropa_bancaria12930.php)).

<sup>163</sup> See Basta Euro website ([www.bastaeuro.org](http://www.bastaeuro.org)).

<sup>164</sup> See Beppe Grillo's blog ([www.beppegrillo.it/2014/03/comunicato\\_politico\\_numero\\_cinquantaquattro.html](http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/03/comunicato_politico_numero_cinquantaquattro.html)).

European political group does not seem to be negatively affecting M5S; on the contrary, political instability and confusion in the traditional political families, coupled with widespread social discontent and opposition to the EU, will probably work in favour of M5S, which is expected to gain 25% of the vote (21 seats) and become PD's strongest rival in the national political arena.<sup>165</sup> The triumph of M5S can certainly be linked to growing anti-EU sentiment among Italians. In 2000, 53% of Italians were confident in Europe, while in 2006 and 2010 the numbers were 52% and 48%, respectively. In 2012 and 2013, the erosion of support accelerated, falling to 41% and then 30%. Additionally, 52% of Italians believe that Europe has mainly favoured the financial markets, and 34% – mostly self-employed, entrepreneurs, traders (42%), unemployed and precarious workers (40%) – hope that Italy will leave the single currency.<sup>166</sup> Nonetheless, M5S's electoral success might well be caused by inefficient political answers given by the traditional parties. In the case of PD, Renzi has not responded to M5S's eurosceptic positions with a lucid set of pro-European political proposals. Instead, he has attacked Grillo's anti-EU campaign by accusing him of being a "political jackal". Moreover, late-starting political campaigns and the lack of a rigorous political agenda from many parties have resulted in their inability to develop solid pro-European arguments and ideas on EU institutional development. In this respect, debates over the EU cannot be classified according to a left- and right-wing split, but rather as being between radical eurosceptic parties, using populist arguments to gain electoral support, and traditional parties that are unable to counter anti-EU discourses with open dialogue and plans for attractive political economic reforms.

## Conclusion

The increased power of the European Parliament, together with the chance to renew, confirm or re-establish political legitimacy in the national arena, make the EP elections extremely relevant for many Italian parties. However, since European issues tend to be discussed through the prism of domestic politics and according to national interests, it is not easy to determine whether parties are pushing for their electoral campaign mainly because of internal needs or because they are driven by genuine European ideals.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, since Italian enthusiasm for Europe has decreased in recent years, many of the traditional parties – such as PD, FI and NCD – have not openly backed European policies and have been unable to develop credible ideas to boost support for the EU. In this respect, the major challenge to European institutional development may not be solely eurosceptic parties. In the future, common institutions might also have to face the lack of coherent and structured policy proposals from those political actors seen as being pro-EU.

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<sup>165</sup> See Pollwatch ([www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandsenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/it/pollsandsenarios/polls#country)).

<sup>166</sup> P. Ridet (2014), "L'Italie prête pour les élections anti européennes", *Le Monde*, 17 April (<http://italie.blog.lemonde.fr/>).

<sup>167</sup> F. Serricchio, M. Tsakatika and L. Quaglia (2012), "Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 52-53.

# A 'Dutch' Ballot? The EP in the Netherlands

Niels Goet and Afke Groen\*

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Dutch voters head to the polls on 22 May 2014 to elect their 26 representatives to the European Parliament (EP). Together with the UK, the Netherlands will be the first to cast its vote in this Europe-wide ballot. The Netherlands is faced with an interesting mix of low turnout, a political elite that is becoming increasingly critical of the European Union (EU), and a public that is turning its back on Brussels. In this complex political landscape, we explore the 'European' dimension of the EP election campaign of Dutch political parties. Are they basing their campaign on 'European' issues? Do political elites support the Commission candidates, and if so, why? Also, how strong are the ties with EP-level partners? In answering such questions we find that – with some exceptions – domestic issues dominate the campaign. The 2014 European elections in the Netherlands will not be 'different this time'; rather, they will most likely be a 'Dutch' ballot.

This paper is organised as follows. First, we discuss the organisation of the ballot and the Dutch parties' campaigns. Second, we study the candidate selection procedures. Third, we examine the congruence between Dutch parties' election manifestos and their EP-level counterparts. Fourth, we analyse political elites' support for the lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*). Fifth, we study the parties' discourse on the EU in the context of the upcoming election. Sixth, we present some forecasts of election turnout and results, after which we conclude.

## Setting the scene: Isolated elections and limited attention

In the upcoming EP elections, 19 political parties are set to compete for 26 seats – compared with 17 parties for 25 seats, and 15 parties for 27 seats in 2004 and 2009 respectively.<sup>168</sup> The elections thus promise to be slightly more fragmented than in previous years. The 19 parties include all ten that are currently represented in the Dutch House of Representatives, and nine parties outside the legislature.<sup>169</sup> There is no election threshold, and representatives are elected in a single nationwide electoral district. However, it is unlikely that the smaller parties will make it into the EP as they are expected to win only a small share of the vote (see section 6).

The 2014 EP elections will be a relatively isolated event. The national ballot is far off: the current government was voted in office in September 2012, and consists of a two-party coalition between the Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) and the Liberals (*Vrijheid, Veiligheid, en Democratie*, VVD). The attempt made by Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (*Partijvoor de Vrijheid*, PVV) to turn these elections into a referendum on EU membership largely failed. Instead, the

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<sup>168</sup> Carolien Van Ham and Kaat Smets (2010), "The Netherlands", in Wojciech Gagatsek (ed.), *The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament: Country Reports*, European University Institute, Firenze.

<sup>169</sup> The additional parties are *IQ (de Rechten-Plichten-Partij)* (IQ (the Rights-Duties-Party)), *Piratenpartij* (Pirate Party), *De Groenen* (The Greens), *Anti EU(ro) Partij* (Anti EU(ro) Party), *Liberaal Democratische Partij* (Liberal Democratic Party), *JEZUS LEEFT* (JESUS LIVES), *Ikkiesvooreerlijk.eu* (Ichoseforhonest.eu), *Artikel 50* (Article 50), and *Aandacht en Eenvoud* (Attention and Simplicity). In order to focus our analysis, the subsequent parts of this chapter will study the ten parties that are currently represented in the Dutch parliament, as well as *Artikel 50*, because this party is already represented in the EP (as a result of an MEP's split from the PVV).



campaign mostly focused on the economy. Similarly, European issues did not figure prominently in the municipal elections campaign of 19 March 2014.<sup>170</sup>

The electoral campaign for the EP elections kicked off in April 2014, when parties began to announce their manifestos. Preparations started earlier, however, in autumn 2013, when parties were working on their programmes and lists of candidates. The timing of the European elections is rather unfortunate in that respect: the municipal elections of March were right in the middle of these preparatory stages and running up to the actual ballot in May. This means that attention and resources were mostly concentrated on the municipal elections. One could of course argue that the parties now have time to devote all their attention and resources to the European campaign. Whether political parties will actually do so is another question, however: the Dutch have become increasingly critical *vis-à-vis* the EU,<sup>171</sup> and as such it may be politically harmful to devote too much attention to the party's European profile.

So far, only two nationally broadcasted debates amongst national party leaders for the EP elections have been scheduled.<sup>172</sup> Almost all events that have been announced at this stage only include Dutch MEP candidates, and are focused on national manifestos.<sup>173</sup> National parties also showed little interest in the first-ever 'presidential' debate among Commission candidates in the city of Maastricht on 28 April 2014.<sup>174</sup> Finally, it may be hard to capitalise on the elections in domestic terms, because the European ballot simply does not figure prominently in Dutch citizens' minds. Indeed, one month prior to the elections, an opinion poll showed that almost nine-in-ten Dutch citizens have little or no interest in the EP elections.<sup>175</sup>

### Candidate selection: From 'European' to 'national' candidates

Parties have selected MEP candidates from substantially different backgrounds. Table 4, below, summarises the selection procedures for each party. For all parties, candidates have to meet certain minimum political and cognitive standards. As concerns the remaining criteria, we identify three broad types of candidate profiles. These include the *international*, the *national*, and the *party profile* candidate. The first most closely resembles the idea of a 'European citizen', i.e. someone who approaches issues in a trans-European way and is expected to transcend national interests. The second type includes candidate profiles that emphasise the ability to defend national interests. Finally, the third category includes a profile that highlights the party identity of the candidate and her or his affinity with the party's doctrine and beliefs. Most political parties tend to stress selection criteria that are related to one or two of these ideal types.

Strikingly, the Liberal Democrats (*Democraten '66*, D66) are unique in having explicitly sought to recruit candidates with an *international* profile. The 'job profile' mentions that MEP candidates should have "an eye for different interests in the international society" and the ability

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<sup>170</sup> A notable exception is the references to the EP elections in the nationally broadcast debate on the evening prior to the elections, as well as on the night of the election results by Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders.

<sup>171</sup> Eurobarometer (2013), "Nationaal Rapport: Nederland" [National Report: The Netherlands], European Commission ([ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_nl\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_nl_nat.pdf)).

<sup>172</sup> Nieuwsuur, 1 May 2014 and EénVandaag, 19 May 2014.

<sup>173</sup> An overview of debates including Dutch MEP candidates can be found on [www.europeseverkiezingen.com](http://www.europeseverkiezingen.com).

<sup>174</sup> Informal talk with the organisers of the event on Monday 28 April 2014.

<sup>175</sup> IPSOS Nederland ([www.ipsos-nederland.nl](http://www.ipsos-nederland.nl)).

to “engage with other (political) cultures”.<sup>176</sup> Other parties require some minimum level of competence, including experience in politics and a good knowledge of European decision-making processes and inter-state relations (e.g. PvdA, *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA), and the Party for the Elderly 50PLUS). For some parties, experience in national or European politics is not mentioned as a formal requirement, but we may expect there to be some minimum standard (e.g. Article 50, Party for the Animals (*Partijvoor de Dieren*, PvdD)). On the other hand, some parties sought to recruit candidates who do not only fit the *party profile*, but are also *national* candidates: they should have the ability to represent Dutch interests at large, and ‘connect’ with citizens who are not party members (e.g. D66, CDA, and PvdA). Conversely, other parties put exclusive emphasis on the candidates’ affinity with the party doctrine. For example, the Christian Conservatives stress that candidates should represent the “unique profile” of the party.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the Animal Party looked for candidates with a “clear vision on the distinct role of party”.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> D66 (2013), “Functieprofielen D66” [Job Profiles D66] ([site.d66.nl/d66nl/document/functieprofielen\\_versie\\_juli\\_2011/f=/virdiylddln.pdf](http://site.d66.nl/d66nl/document/functieprofielen_versie_juli_2011/f=/virdiylddln.pdf)).

<sup>177</sup> ChristenUnie (2013), “Rapportage Selectiecommissie Kandidatenlijst Verkiezingen Europarlement 2014” [Reporting of the Selection Committee of the List of Candidates for the European Parliament Elections 2014] ([www.christenunie.nl/1/nl/library/download/595481](http://www.christenunie.nl/1/nl/library/download/595481)).

<sup>178</sup> PvdD (2014), “Kandidatenprofiel Europees Parlement” [Candidates’ Profile for the European Parliament] ([www.partijvoordedieren.nl/kandidatenprofielEU](http://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/kandidatenprofielEU)).



Table 4. Selection of Dutch MEP Candidates and Leading Candidates

	<b>CDA</b>	<b>CU<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>D66</b>	<b>GreenLeft</b>	<b>PvdA</b>	<b>PVV</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>VVD</b>	<b>PvdD</b>	<b>50PLUS</b>
<b>Selection leading candidate</b>										
Number of candidates	2 <sup>2</sup>	1	2	2	4	—	1	1	1	1
Means of selection	Referendum	Party conference	Referendum	Referendum	Referendum	—	Party conference	No other candidates	Party conference	Party conference
Date of selection	2 November 2013	1 February 2014	2 November 2013	27 September 2013	28 November 2013	24 March 2014	22 February 2014	27 April 2013	30 March 2014	17 October 2013
<b>Selection of other candidates</b>										
Means of selection	Local branches determined order of candidates on the list by sending in preferences	Party conference	Members determined the order of candidates on the list by e-voting	Party conference	Party conference	—	Party conference	Members determined the order of candidates in a ballot	Party conference	Party conference
Date of selection	8 February 2014	1 February 2014	31 January 2014	14 December 2013	15 and 16 February 2014	24 March 2014	22 February 2014	18 December 2013	30 March 2014	29 March 2014

Notes: — = no information available.

<sup>1</sup>ChristianUnion has a combined list with SGP.

<sup>2</sup>Initially, there were seven candidates. From these, an advisory committee proposed two candidates to the party executive.

<sup>3</sup>The threshold of 30% for the referendum was not reached, but the losing contestant withdrew.

Which candidates did the parties select? Table 5, below, provides an overview of the background of MEP candidates of the Dutch political parties. In addition to listing the number of candidates and the leading candidate, it considers four factors. These include: i) the percentage of candidates who have previous experience in EU matters, i.e. previous work experience in one of the EU institutions; ii) the percentage of candidates who previously served as MEP; iii) the percentage of candidates who are or have previously held a seat in the national legislature; iv) whether the party leader is included in the list of candidates.<sup>179</sup> The percentages shown are based on the top ten candidates for each party.<sup>180</sup>

A comparison between the main political parties reveals that the PVV in particular relies more heavily on its domestic profile than the other parties. Sixty percent of its candidates currently have, or have had a seat in parliament. This stands in stark contrast to the Liberal Democrats, who have a remarkably high proportion of candidates with EU experience (90%). This is in line with the parties' search for 'international' candidates as explained above.<sup>181</sup> The PvdA does not have any former MEPs on its candidate list, in spite of the fact that it traditionally has a relatively strong representation in the EP. This is because the party advised its current MEPs not to run for a seat in the 2014 elections for reasons of lack of visibility and a need for 'renewal'.<sup>182</sup> Other parties, including the Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists, show a mixed record of candidates with EU or MEP experience and a background in domestic politics.

Party leaders are important in Dutch elections. In the EU context, national parties build on this fact of electoral politics and aim to put forward strong 'leading candidates'. They are selected through separate procedures, and have different job profiles.<sup>183</sup> In this respect, we can distinguish between parties that appoint a leader through election by the executive committee or party conference (e.g. Socialist Party (*SocialistischePartij*, SP), the Christian Conservatives (*ChristenUnie*, CU, and *StaatkundigGereformeerdePartij*, SGP, PVV, PvdD), and parties that allow their members to decide through a party referendum (e.g. PvdA, GreenLeft (*GroenLinks*), D66, CDA). The contenders for the position of leading candidate were required to engage in several debates across the country. Generally, these positions were strongly contested, but the debates between candidates were internal party matters and did not engage with the general public. Moreover, even party members were not very invested: the GreenLeft ballot failed to reach the required threshold, and a leading candidate could only be appointed because the losing contestant withdrew.

What is more, when considering the party leaders who got elected, it is striking that almost none of them are political 'heavy-weights'. That is, none of the party leaders has held a particularly important post in domestic politics, such as minister or national party leader. Only a few may be well known to the Dutch electorate, for example as a former member of the Dutch House of Representatives (e.g. PVV, PvdA, VVD). Conversely, most of the party leaders have a

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<sup>179</sup> Considering that the Netherlands only has 26 seats and to allow for comparison, the table only considers values for the top-10 candidates for each party.

<sup>180</sup> We chose to limit the analysis to the top ten because this is the smallest number of candidates of all parties in the sample (i.e. PVV).

<sup>181</sup> Lack of EU experience does not mean that the candidates do not know anything about 'Brussels'. For example, Mark Dijk (#4 VVD) directed the party's 2009 European elections campaign, but has not worked in an EU institution. Nonetheless, we may expect him to know a fair bit about the EU and its workings.

<sup>182</sup> NOS (2013), "PvdA: Andere Europarlementariërs" [PvdA: Different MEPs] ([nos.nl/artikel/520125-pvda-andere-europarlementariers.html](http://nos.nl/artikel/520125-pvda-andere-europarlementariers.html)).

<sup>183</sup> Eva Huijbregts and Nel Van Dijk (2009), "Op de Kandidatenlijst: Een Onderzoek naar de Selectie van Kandidaten bij Nederlandse Partijen voor de Europese Verkiezingen" [On the Candidate List: A Study on the Selection of Candidates by Dutch Parties for the European Elections], Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, Amsterdam.

background in ‘Brussels’ politics rather than in The Hague (e.g. CDA, D66, GroenLinks, Artikel50, SP, ChristenUnie/SGP, 50PLUS). Thus, when it comes to the lead candidates, mainstream political parties tend to go for EU-level rather than domestic political experience, or for both.

*Table 5. Background of Dutch MEP candidates*

Party	# Candidates	Leading candidate	EU experience	MEP experience	Current/former national MPs	Party leader on candidate list (place)?
Liberal Democrats (D66)	36	Sophie in ‘t Veld	90%	30%	0%	No
Christian Democrats (CDA)	31	Esther de Lange	60%	30%	10%	No
Liberals (VVD)	20	Hans van Baalen	50%	10%	20%	No
Labour Party (PvdA)	47	Paul Tang	30%	0%	0%	No
Socialist Party (SP)	25	Dennis de Jong	30%	10%	10%	No
Christian Conservatives (CU/SGP)	20	Peter van Dalen	30%	20%	0%	No
GreenLeft	11	Bas Eickhout	30%	20%	10%	No
Freedom Party (PVV)	10	Marcel de Graaff	20%	10%	60%	Yes (# 10)
Article 50	21	Daniël van der Stoep	20%	10%	0%	Yes (# 1)
Party for the Elderly (50PLUS)	17	Toine Manders	10%	10%	0%	No
Animal Party (PvdD)	13	Anja Hazekamp	0%	0%	10%	Yes (# 13)

*Source:* own compilation.

## Manifestos: Similar contents, separate drafting processes

The manifestos of European parties and those of their Dutch affiliates are highly congruent. However, this is likely due to ideological convergence rather than active cooperation or imitation. For example, representatives of the CDA, VVD, and Greens confirmed to us that the manifesto of the EP party of which they are member did not play a role in the formulation of their own programme.<sup>184</sup> The VVD is most stringent in that respect, and states that “only party members decide on the election manifestos” and that “the ALDE has no influence on that whatsoever”.<sup>185</sup> The Greens point out that they have not incorporated the EGP programme because it was adopted much later than their own.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, across the board, Dutch political party manifestos were adopted well in advance of those of their European counterparts.<sup>187</sup> In turn, the CDA contends that “strictly speaking” the EPP has no influence on its programme, but points to some informal channels of influence:

<sup>184</sup> We sent out requests for information about this to all parties that are a member of a European party. These include: PvdA, D66, VVD, CDA, and the Greens. Only CDA, VVD, and the Greens responded.

<sup>185</sup> Email correspondence with the VVD of 17 April 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Email correspondence with the Greens of 16 April 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Dates are: CDA (8 February 2014); VVD (23 November 2013); PvdA (29 October 2013); D66 (25 November 2013); GreenLeft (3 October 2013).

Naturally, there is an interaction between the EPP and the CDA. We belong to the same family. As such, the CDA has submitted amendments to the EPP programme, and we have participated in the discussions on that programme. In addition, we consider the programmes of our neighbours (CDU in Germany and the CD&V in Belgium), because we belong to the same European family.<sup>188</sup>

Hence, although scope for exchange of ideas remains, it is more likely that similarities are due to influence exerted by the national political parties rather than vice versa.

How do these manifestos compare to those of the EP parties? The current section only studies parties with a clear affiliation, i.e. the CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66, and the GreenLeft. Three main types of manifesto can be identified among Dutch political parties. First, the PvdA and CDA emphasise consolidation of Europe's achievements. Second, the VVD wishes to return to a Europe that focuses on its core task, i.e. the economy, and to reduce the EU's role in other areas. Third, D66 aims for further integration and the creation of a federal Europe. On average, the national parties' election programmes are 2.5 times shorter than those of their European counterparts.<sup>189</sup> Substantively, Dutch political parties' manifestos reflect the content of their European counterparts. Common themes are EU reform and the economy. All parties emphasise economic growth, jobs creation, and reform of EU institutions. Specifically, as concerns the latter, they want to increase the role of national parliaments in the EU decision-making process.

Let us consider the documents in detail. First, the CDA and EPP both emphasise economic growth, values, and responsible finance. Moreover, neither manifesto clearly favours or excludes the possibility of further enlargement. Rather, they emphasise that in the future the EU should consider its "absorption capacity". Both point out that immigration comes with rights and responsibilities, and call for a strengthening of the European visa and asylum system. Finally, the parties want to counter the negative effects of worker migration *within* the EU. However, whereas the EPP focuses on issues such as terrorism and cross-border crime related to immigration, the CDA emphasises the problem of social dumping and unfair competition that it claims to result from migration between EU states.

The ALDE and VVD manifestos show both important similarities and differences. Both underscore the importance of a reformed EU, with better respect for subsidiarity, and a more efficient administration. The two parties similarly emphasise economic stability, job creation, improved policy for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and innovation. Conversely, although both manifestos call for a reform of the EU budget, ALDE aims to spend the EU budget more efficiently, whereas the VVD programme emphasises a fair distribution of the budget burden among member states. Moreover, whereas the ALDE manifesto is quite specific on EU-level policies, promising a successful completion of the EU-US Free Trade Agreement, and the abolishment of roaming charges by 2016, the VVD programme concentrates on the consequences of EU policy on the Netherlands, covering a variety of additional issues such as immigration, regional policy, and environment policy.

The second Dutch party within the ALDE group, D66, takes a similar approach. Again, there is a convergence in emphasis on innovation and growth. Also, the manifestos present a similar focus on civil liberties, and human rights. However, D66 focuses more strongly on education – building on its national policy programme – and gives explicit support for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Moreover, the party's reform ambitions go further: D66 aims for a federal Europe and treaty change that would make the EP into a fully-fledged co-legislator in all areas.

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<sup>188</sup> Email correspondence with the CDA of 17 April 2014.

<sup>189</sup> A notable exception is the EPP Action Programme, which is 2.38% longer than that of its Dutch member, the CDA.

The Labour Party (PvdA) has a programme that is largely on a par with its European counterpart, the PES. Both manifestos emphasise reform of financial regulation and more stringent control of the financial sector. Moreover, both pledge to curb bonuses, to shift the risk burden away from the taxpayer, and to introduce a financial transaction tax. Fighting tax evasion also figures prominently in both documents, as well as the need for a *Social Europe*. Key priorities are job creation and economic growth. As such, they call for a new industrial policy, more innovation, and for fostering a profitable environment for SMEs. The parties only clearly diverge on the issue of EU enlargement, for which the PES maintains support, whereas Dutch Labour makes it clear that no new commitments should be made.

Finally, both the Dutch GreenLeft and European Greens call for a New Green Deal and a social Europe. They advocate a holistic approach to solving the crisis and the need for rebuilding the economy in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way. Democracy and fundamental rights figure prominently in the manifestos, also in the context of the EU's role as an international actor. However, whereas the EGP commits to 'keeping the door on enlargement open,' the Dutch Greens claim that the EU should respect existing accession promises. Overall, it thus seems that national manifestos are broadly congruent with those of the EU-level parties.

### Half-hearted support for the Commission candidates

Dutch political parties generally offer support for the candidates of their EP party, but in most cases this support appears to be half-hearted. It is not surprising that parties pay some lip service to the candidates, as they were themselves involved in selecting them. Mostly however, political parties as well as the media present the elections as a battle between national party leaders. Let us consider the parties in detail. First, on 11 April 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker visited the Christian Democrats' EU conference to secure the party's vote for his campaign as the EPP Commission presidential candidate. The Christian Democrats announced their support for Juncker *before* the EPP party confirmed his candidature at the conference in Dublin of 6 and 7 March 2014. In response to Juncker's official confirmation as candidate party leader Sybrand Buma stated: "Juncker is our Benelux candidate and above all a true Christian Democrat". He also expressed his appreciation for Juncker's proven track record as prime minister of Luxembourg, and his ability to unite Europe in dealing with the crisis as president of the Eurogroup.<sup>190</sup> CDA candidates, however, differ in their assessment of the electoral utility of the Commission candidate (the 'Juncker effect'). Current leader of the European party group, Wim van de Camp, is confident that it will give the party an additional seat. Conversely, his colleague and leading candidate, Esther de Lange maintains that the campaign will be *Dutch* and that the CDA itself will secure the seats.<sup>191</sup>

Second, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats chose to support Guy Verhofstadt in a meeting with other liberal leaders from Luxembourg and Belgium in December 2014.<sup>192</sup> For the Liberals, this decision was not made lightly. Verhofstadt's public support for a federal Europe put the party in a rather difficult position domestically – even its own youth party attacked the decision.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, the Belgian politician's federalist dreams stand in stark contrast to the party's

<sup>190</sup> Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA) (2014), "CDA steunt kandidatuur Juncker" [CDA supports Juncker's candidacy]([www.cda.nl/actueel/toon/cda-steunt-kandidatuur-juncker-1](http://www.cda.nl/actueel/toon/cda-steunt-kandidatuur-juncker-1)).

<sup>191</sup> euobserver(2014), "Juncker campaign hits the road"(euobserver.com/eu-elections/123836).

<sup>192</sup> *De Volkskrant* (2013), "Rutte steunt kandidatuur Verhofstadt als voorzitter Europese Commissie" [Rutte supports Verhofstadt's candidacy as European Commission president]([www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/3556462/2013/12/04/Rutte-steunt-kandidatuur-Verhofstadt-als-voorzitter-Europese-Commissie.dhtml](http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/3556462/2013/12/04/Rutte-steunt-kandidatuur-Verhofstadt-als-voorzitter-Europese-Commissie.dhtml)).

<sup>193</sup> JOVD (2013), "Steun aan Verhofstadt past niet bij VVD" [Supporting Verhofstadt does not suit the VVD]([www.jovd.nl/nieuws/822/](http://www.jovd.nl/nieuws/822/)).

European election slogan, *Europe Where Necessary*. Hans van Baalen, the leading candidate of the VVD, motivated the choice for Verhofstadt by referring to his influence in European politics, and his ability to support the Benelux's and the Netherlands' interests in the EU.<sup>194</sup> The VVD has thus taken a pragmatic approach, but does not appear to be particularly enthusiastic about the European candidate. Conversely, D66 is openly supportive of Verhofstadt. The party hosted him at an EU election event in The Hague in April 2014, and the April edition of its magazine featured an extensive interview with ALDE's Commission candidate.<sup>195</sup>

Third, at the PES conference of 28 February to 1 March 2014, Labour expressed its support for PES candidate Martin Schulz. The party had announced that it would hold a ballot among party members in the case of multiple candidates, but this proved unnecessary. Dutch Labour has generally been positive of the candidate: it argues that the existence of Commission candidates improves the EU's democratic legitimacy, and that it will aid the Social Democrats' campaign in Europe.<sup>196</sup> However, Labour has also been keen to point out that the electorate can only vote for the national and not for the European candidates.<sup>197</sup>

Fourth, the European Green Party organised an online primary with four candidates – the only party to do so.<sup>198</sup> The Dutch GreenLeft has supported this strategy, as well as the two candidates, José Bové and Ska Keller. However, thus far this support has been limited to a positively phrased press release by the party in January 2014.<sup>199</sup> Finally, the Netherlands is home to a group of non-affiliated parties that do not support any candidate. For example, the Socialists are not a member of any of the EP parties, and explicitly state that they do not wish to support the existence of European parties. In their view, this represents a clear movement towards a *federal* Europe – a development they do not support.<sup>200</sup> This probably explains their lack of support for any EU candidate, because it amounts to the further strengthening of the EP. Similarly, Wilders' Freedom Party attacks the CDA, VVD, and PvdA over their decision to support Commission candidates, and attacks these parties for not being as Euro-critical as they claim to be.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> NRC (2014), "Na bemiddeling Rutte: Verhofstadt kandidaat liberalen voorzitterschap EU" [After Rutte's intervention: Verhofstadt liberal candidate for EU presidency] ([www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/01/20/verhofstadt-kandidaat-liberalen-voor-voorzitterschap-eu/](http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/01/20/verhofstadt-kandidaat-liberalen-voor-voorzitterschap-eu/)).

<sup>195</sup> D66 (2014), "Méér Europa op een intelligente manier" [More Europe in an intelligent way], *Democraat*, April, pp. 12-14; D66 Den Haag (2014), "Guy Verhofstadt lanceert Europa-campagne D66" [Guy Verhofstadt launches European campaign D66] ([d66denhaag.nl/actueel/guy-verhofstadt-lanceert-europa-campagne-d66/](http://d66denhaag.nl/actueel/guy-verhofstadt-lanceert-europa-campagne-d66/)).

<sup>196</sup> PvdA (2013), "Schulz sociaaldemocratische kandidaat voor voorzitterschap Europese Commissie" [Schulz Social Democrat candidate for European Commission presidency] ([internationaal.pvda.nl/2013/11/11/1443/](http://internationaal.pvda.nl/2013/11/11/1443/)).

<sup>197</sup> Carla Joosten (2014), "Pan-Europees Tintje" [Pan-European Touch], *Elsevier*, 8 February, p. 22.

<sup>198</sup> EurActiv (2013), "Greens select four candidates to run in primaries ahead of 2014 elections" ([www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/greens-candidates-compete-lead-p-news-531604](http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/greens-candidates-compete-lead-p-news-531604)).

<sup>199</sup> GroenLinks (2014), "Europese topkandidaten voor de Groenen: José Bové en Ska Keller" [European top candidates for the Greens: José Bové and Ska Keller] ([groenlinks.nl/nieuws/europese-topkandidaten-voor-de-groenen-jose-bove-en-ska-keller](http://groenlinks.nl/nieuws/europese-topkandidaten-voor-de-groenen-jose-bove-en-ska-keller)).

<sup>200</sup> Socialistische Partij (SP) (2012), "SP niet gerust op nieuwe voorstellen over Europese politieke partijen" [SP concerned about new proposals on European political parties] ([www.sp.nl/europa/nieuwsberichten/13256/121207-sp-niet-gerust-op-nieuwe-voorstellen-over-europese-politieke-partijen.html](http://www.sp.nl/europa/nieuwsberichten/13256/121207-sp-niet-gerust-op-nieuwe-voorstellen-over-europese-politieke-partijen.html)).

<sup>201</sup> House of Representatives of the States-General (2014), "Staat van de Europese Unie 2014, verslag van een notaoverleg" [State of the European Union 2014, report of a consultation note], 33877, No. 17, The Hague, 8 April.

## Debating Europe in the Netherlands: Focus on national issues

As discussed in the previous sections, Dutch political parties do discuss European policy issues in their manifestos. The most prominent topics are the economic crisis, job and social security, and EU reform. Parties' positions on these topics coincide with the left/right economic spectrum: while parties on the right emphasise the importance of the internal market and economic growth, left-wing parties argue that 'solidarity' should be put higher on the EU's political agenda.<sup>202</sup> This was also reflected in the first televised debate amongst the national party leaders that took place on 1 May 2014, where candidates from left-wing parties (PvdA and GreenLeft) faced resistance from parties located further right in the political spectrum (CDA and VVD) against their plans of raising expenditure to create jobs and fight unemployment.

However, the discourse in the run-up to the European elections mostly focuses on the position of the Netherlands within the EU. Indeed, ever since the no vote in the 2004 referendum, political elites have struggled to find a stable narrative for Dutch EU membership.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, a strong cleavage in the electoral debate centres on the anti- and pro-EU dimension. Two of the larger parties that compete in the elections strongly advocate 'less' Europe. These include Wilders' Freedom Party, and the Socialist Party. Both parties mobilise the recent problems in the eurozone and the bailouts to support the idea that the Netherlands would be better off with less EU integration or outside the EU. As the PVV puts it "the Euro is not money; the euro costs money".<sup>204</sup> The television debate of May 1<sup>st</sup> was also illustrative in this respect: rather than discussing how reform of the euro and measures to tackle the crisis could be accomplished, the debate focused on whether or not the euro is beneficial to the Netherlands. The debate was divided into two camps, with the Greens and Liberal Democrats pitted against the Liberals and Christian Democrats on the question of whether the EP should have more or less power. National media also frames the upcoming elections as a choice between more or less European integration. The national broadcaster NOS, for example, reported that the most important question of the televised debate was whether or not to transfer "more or less power to Brussels".<sup>205</sup>

Wilders' Freedom Party positions itself as the most radical anti-EU party, and campaigns for a complete Dutch exit ("NExit") from the EU. Other parties have responded to this by paying attention to the delimitation of competences between the national and European level in their election discourse. For example, the Christian Democrats, Labour and Liberals argue that national parliaments rather than the EP should have stronger role in the EU, and that further integration is only beneficial in some areas (such as the internal market), but not in others (such as the pension system). The Liberals in particular have adopted a very EU-critical discourse in the run-up to the elections. Moreover, in the TV debate between the national candidates, Wilders' party was attacked by others with the argument that it seeks support from extremist parties, such as the French *Front National*.

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<sup>202</sup> VVD (2014), "Europa Waar Nodig: Verkiezingsprogramma VVD Europees Parlement 2014" [Europe where necessary: European Parliament 2014 Elections programme of the VVD] ([files.vvd.nl/verkiezingsprogramma\\_ep2014.pdf](http://files.vvd.nl/verkiezingsprogramma_ep2014.pdf)); GroenLinks (2014), "Ons Europa: Verkiezingsprogramma Europese Verkiezingen 2014" [Our Europe: European Parliament 2014 Elections programme] ([start.groenlinks.nl/euverkiezingsprogramma/](http://start.groenlinks.nl/euverkiezingsprogramma/)).

<sup>203</sup> Tom De Bruijn (2011), "De Veranderende Rol van Nationale Parlementen in de Europese Unie" [The Changing Role of National Parliaments in the European Union], *RegelMaat*, Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 327-338; Robert Harmsen (2008), "The Evolution of Dutch European Discourse: Defining the 'Limits of Europe'", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 316-341.

<sup>204</sup> PVV (2012), "Hún Brussel, Óns Nederland" [Their Brussels, Our Netherlands] ([www.pvv.nl/images/stories/verkiezingen2012/VerkiezingsProgramma-PVV-2012-final-web.pdf](http://www.pvv.nl/images/stories/verkiezingen2012/VerkiezingsProgramma-PVV-2012-final-web.pdf)).

<sup>205</sup> NOS, 7AM News, Friday 2 May 2014.



Lastly, newspapers and websites tend to report on the selection of national parties' candidates and major televised debates. Media reports follow parties' discourse in concentrating on the economic crisis and EU reform. However, they generally pay limited attention to the policy issues at stake in the elections. Dutch media also generally cover news about the candidates for Commission presidency, although there was no nationwide live television broadcast of the debate between Martin Schulz, Ska Keller, Guy Verhofstadt and Jean-Claude Juncker that took place in Maastricht on 28 April 2014. After this debate, major newspapers covered the content of the debate, but were also keen to point out that all candidates are in favour of further integration, in spite of the electorate's wishes.<sup>206</sup> *Volkskrant*, for example, reported on the strong remarks of Verhofstadt and Schulz against Eurosceptic parties.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, it is frequently argued that the 'choice' between the candidates might actually be non-existent, as this decision also lies with the European Council, which may put forward a different candidate.<sup>208</sup>

### **Turnout and projected results: Important gains for both pro- and anti-EU parties**

Turnout in European elections in the Netherlands has experienced a steady decline over the past three decades (Figure 5). In 1979, 58% of the voting age population (VAP) showed up at the ballot box. This dropped to 29% between 1979 and 1999. There was a brief resurgence in voter numbers in 2004 (38%), and 2009 (35%). Overall, participation declined by 31% between the first EP elections of 1979 and the most recent in 2009. Participation levels in the Netherlands are thus well below the EU-average of 43%.<sup>209</sup> Importantly, this pattern is not exclusive to the European elections: the VAP percentage turnout for the national elections dropped by 17% between 1978 and 2009. Similarly, in general more than 70% of voters turned out for municipal elections in the 1980s, dropping to approximately 60% in the 1990s and up to 2006, and further declining to around 50% in 2010 and 2014. This amounts to a drop of approximately 30%. Thus, although the decrease in EP elections turnout is substantial, it is not altogether surprising when considered in the wider context of a wholesale decline in participation.

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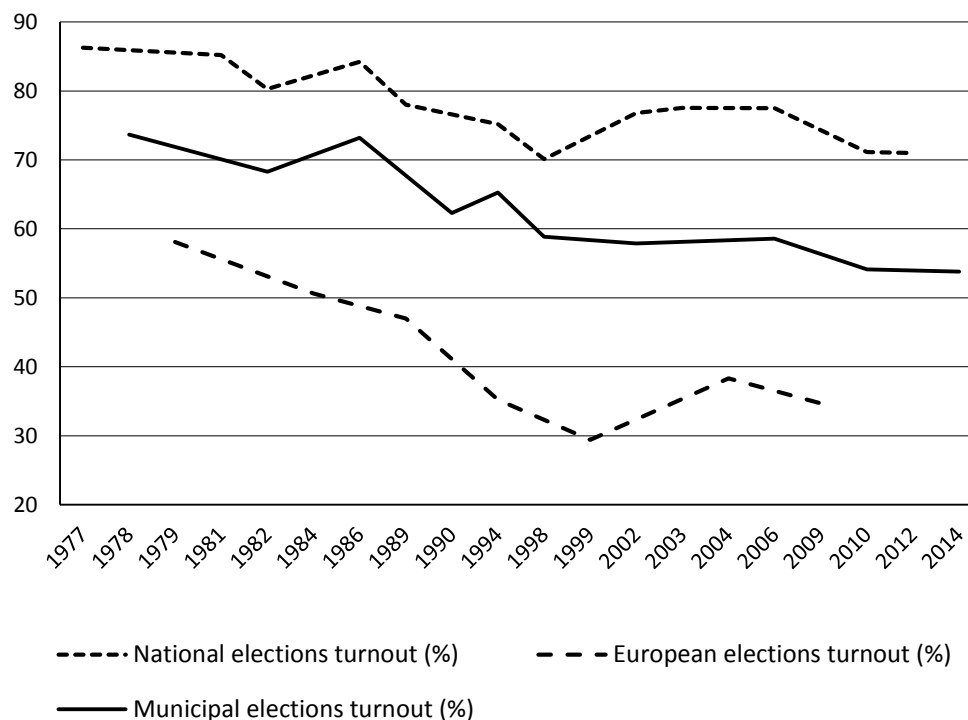
<sup>206</sup> e.g. Stéphane Alonso (2014), "EU-Debat Houdt Iedereen Wakker" [EU debate keeps everyone awake], *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 April; Theo Koelé (2014), "'Meer Europa' Klinkt het in Koor" ["More Europe" they chorus], *Volkskrant*, 29 April.

<sup>207</sup> *De Volkskrant* (2014), "EU-Kopstukken Waarschuwen voor Eurosceptis" [EU Leaders warn of Euroscepticism], 28 April.

<sup>208</sup> E.g. NOS (2014), "EuropeesDebatVoor Experiment" [European debate mainly an experiment] ([nos.nl/artikel/641497-europees-debat-vooral-experiment.html](http://nos.nl/artikel/641497-europees-debat-vooral-experiment.html)).

<sup>209</sup> Eurostat (2014), "Voter turnout in national and EU parliamentary elections" ([epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product\\_details/dataset?p\\_product\\_code=TSDGO310](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/dataset?p_product_code=TSDGO310)).

Figure 5. National, Municipal, and European Elections Turnout, 1977-2014



Sources: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (eds), “Voter Turnout Data for Netherlands” ([www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=NL](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=NL)) and De Kiesraad, “Databank Verkiezingsuitslagen” [Database of Election Results] ([www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl](http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl)).

What can we expect as turnout in the 2014 European elections? It is difficult to extrapolate from current trends. On the one hand, only 44% of the Dutch electorate appears to be aware that there are direct elections to the EP – compared with an EU-average of 54%.<sup>210</sup> On the other hand, the eurozone crisis figures prominently in the electorate’s mind, and most citizens believe that measures taken within the EU context better protect them against the crisis than national measures.<sup>211</sup> Turnout, we argue, will thus largely depend on the anti-EU parties on both the left (SP) and far right (PVV) of the political spectrum in motivating their supporters to show up at the ballot box. Traditionally, the PVV’s supporters have failed to show up in high numbers to cast their vote in European elections. The same can be said of the SP.<sup>212</sup> This has traditionally been less problematic for the mainstream parties. Turnout is thus largely dependent on the willingness of Eurosceptic voters to make the journey to their local ballot box.

Table 6, below, shows the projected results for the 2014 elections. The Greens are predicted to lose two of their three seats. This projection closely tallies with the most recent national and municipal elections, in which the Greens also lost substantially. The Labour Party and the Liberals, currently in government, will retain most of their seats. Only the former may lose one

<sup>210</sup> Eurobarometer (2013), “Nationaal Rapport: Nederland” [National Report: the Netherlands], European Commission ([ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_nl\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_nl_nat.pdf)).

<sup>211</sup> Eurobarometer (2013), “Percepties van het Europees Parlement September 2007/December 2012: Resultaten voor Nederland” [Perceptions of the European Parliament September 2007/December 2012: Results for the Netherlands] ([www.europeesparlement.nl/resource/static/files/pdf/tables-for-nl-nl-21-06-2013.pdf](http://www.europeesparlement.nl/resource/static/files/pdf/tables-for-nl-nl-21-06-2013.pdf)).

<sup>212</sup> NOS (2014), “Peilingwijzer: PvdA krabbelt op” [Poll indicator: PvdA creeping up] ([nos.nl/artikel/642018-peilingwijzer-pvda-krabbelt-op.html](http://nos.nl/artikel/642018-peilingwijzer-pvda-krabbelt-op.html)).

of the three seats it currently holds. This closely reflects polls for national elections, which show a decrease in popularity of the governing parties. It is striking that the parties that will likely gain additional seats (D66 and SP), are at the far-ends of the pro-EU/anti-EU political spectrum. The projected *doubling* of seats for the SP also follows domestic politics: the party has made substantial strides in polls for national elections in recent years. The most vocal anti-EU party, the PVV, contrary to what the table suggests, only stands to maintain its seat share. It originally won four in 2009, but one was added after the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, putting its total seat number at five. Again, this pattern reflects projected results for national elections: in a recent poll (March 2014), the PVV was predicted to be the largest party in parliament.<sup>213</sup> However, the Dutch mainstream parties (especially Labour and the Liberals) have quite effectively incorporated an EU-critical stance that might seduce some voters on either side of the spectrum. Moreover, the PVV has recently come under fire over what were perceived to be racist remarks by Wilders *vis-à-vis* the Dutch Moroccan population. This has led to defections of prominent party members. This development might affect the Freedom Party's electoral success.

Table 6. Projected Results

Party	Group	Result 2009	Projected seats	Seat change
Freedom Party (PVV) <sup>a</sup>	Non-aligned	4	5	+1
Liberal Democrats (D66)	ALDE	3	4	+1
Socialist Party (SP) <sup>b</sup>	GUE-NGL	2	4	+2
Christian Democrats (CDA)	EPP	5	4	-1
Liberals (VVD)	ALDE	3	3	0
Labour Party (PvdA)	S&D	3	2	-1
Christian Conservatives (CU/SGP) <sup>c</sup>	ECR	2	2	0
GreenLeft (GroenLinks)	EGP	3	1	-2
Party for the Elderly (50PLUS)	Non-aligned	0	1	+1
Animal Party (PvdD)	Non-aligned	0	0	0

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The PVV gained four seats in the 2009 elections, and gained one additional seat in 2011 as a result of the Lisbon Treaty. Two MEPs left the party, however, so the party currently has three seats.

<sup>b</sup> The SP gained two seats in the 2009 elections, but currently has only one seat because MEP KartikaLiotard left the party in June 2010. She continued as an independent MEP.

<sup>c</sup> The two Dutch Christian parties, Christian Union (CU) and the Reformed Political Party (SGP) formed an electoral alliance ("lijstverbinding") for the distribution of seats in the European elections.

Sources: Pollwatch2014 ([www.pollwatch2014.eu](http://www.pollwatch2014.eu)) and Parlement en Politiek (2014), "Zetelverdeling Nederlandse Eurodelegaties 2009-2014" [Seat distribution of Dutch Euro delegations 2009-2014] ([www.parlement.com/id/vi7dlomb45z5/zetelverdeling\\_nederlandse](http://www.parlement.com/id/vi7dlomb45z5/zetelverdeling_nederlandse)).

## Conclusion

In this paper we explored the European dimension of the electoral campaign of Dutch political parties for the 2014 political elections. We considered the issues of candidate selection, support for the Commission presidential candidates, and the compatibility of party manifestos between the EU and national levels. In all three aspects, we find a strong focus on domestic issues. First, most parties select candidates based on their compatibility with party values and standpoints

<sup>213</sup> TNS Nipo (2014), "PVV neemt verder afstand, D66 groeit door" [PVV takes more distance, D66 grows further] ([www.tns-nipo.com/nieuws/nieuwsberichten/peiling-tns-nipo-pvv-neemt-verder-afstand,-d66-gro](http://www.tns-nipo.com/nieuws/nieuwsberichten/peiling-tns-nipo-pvv-neemt-verder-afstand,-d66-gro)).

(i.e. *party profile*), or their ability to defend *Dutch* interests (*national profile*). Second, Dutch parties pay lip service to the idea of having European Commission candidates, but their support appears to be rather lukewarm. Indeed, they limit their contribution to the candidates' campaign to a short press release, or simply frame them as extensions of the Benelux's political clout in Brussels. Third, Dutch parties adopted manifestos months before the European Parliamentary parties published their official programmes. In addition, party representatives underscore that the creation of such manifestos is an independent process.

The projected results show that parties on both the anti- (SP) and pro-EU side of the isle (D66) stand to gain in the upcoming elections. However, a good showing at the ballot box will substantially increase the total number of Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs: if projections turn out to be correct, the SP and PVV will secure nine of the Netherlands' 26 seats. This may provide fertile ground for the more Eurosceptic members of the mainstream parties to force their parties to steer a more EU-critical course. Are the 2014 elections going to be truly 'different'? A political scientist's answer would be "Yes and No". This also seems to hold true in this case. While there is some support for the European candidates, and while some of the manifestos and discourse are about European issues, overall there is limited evidence to suggest that these elections will be truly European.

# More European than predicted, less European than needed: the EP election campaign in Poland

Agnieszka Łada\*

The European elections of 2014 are the third such elections for Poland. Previously two tendencies could be observed: first, they were perceived as second-order elections focusing on national issues with almost no European debates taking place. Second, the turnout was pitifully low with a notable lack of interest from both the political parties and the public. This time we may well see more of the same. But for the political parties these elections serve as a kind of rehearsal before a long election season. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the crisis in Ukraine has made Europe a live issue again. Although partly overshadowed by national battles, the debate has a polarising effect; it may either discourage or encourage voters to go to the polls.

These European elections are in some respect very typical for Poland, also in another sense. There are a few newly established parties that are running for election and it happens quite regularly in Poland that newcomers join the election marathon. In the past some of them even made it to the EP in 2004.<sup>214</sup> This will probably not happen this time, although they still do influence the campaign.

Recent opinion polls show that only a few parties have the chance to make it to the European Parliament: two from the current ruling coalition – Civic Platform and the Peasant Party – and the two biggest opposition parties – the right-leaning Law and Justice and the Democratic Left Alliance. The rest will most probably fall below the 5% election threshold.

## Usual suspects and newcomers

Among 20 registered lists there are several established political parties, a few ‘new kids on the block’, as well as a few voters’ committees.<sup>215</sup> In 2009 there were only four parties that reached the EP: Civic Platform, Law and Justice, the Democratic Left Alliance and the Peasant Party. The Polish political landscape there is now much more colourful.

Number of seats in the EP of Polish political parties (April 2014)	EP political group	Description
6 Democratic Left Alliance together with Union of Labour	S&D	post-Communists
1 Europe Plus-Your Move	S&D	supported by the ex-President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and founded

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<sup>214</sup> For example, the League of Polish Families or Self-defence, both of which are barely in existence today.

<sup>215</sup> As well as parties, groups of citizens are allowed to register as a committee and in this form run for election. Their chances of winning a seat are usually very low, however.

		by some previous Democratic Left Alliance members and some liberals
24 Civic Platform	EPP	current ruling party in Poland (Prime Minister Donald Tusk)
4 Peasant Party	EPP	smaller coalition partner in the government
7 Law and Justice	ECR	main right opposition party (leader: Jarosław Kaczyński)
4 Poland Together of Jarosław Gowin	ECR	founded in 2013 by a former Civic Platform MP and some previous Law and Justice MEPs
4 Solidarity Poland of Zbigniew Ziobro	EFD	a right-wing party created by a few MEPs who left the Law and Justice Party

Furthermore, among other registered lists one should mention the right-wing New Right of Janusz Korwin-Mikke and the Green Party, which is very weak in Poland.

The whole European election campaign in Poland is subordinated to one main goal, and that is not just about getting as many seats in the European Parliament as possible. Even though the European elections are the only ones taking place in Poland in spring 2014, they are highly nationalised, as they will open a long season of elections in the country. In autumn 2014 there are local elections when mayors, councils and local parliaments at all levels are elected. And 2015 is a big election year with both presidential and national parliamentary elections taking place within a few months of each other. That is why all political parties consider the European elections as a test – on the one hand, considering them even more reliable than opinion polls – on the other, seeing the event as establishing the division of power for the upcoming elections

As these predictions are widely known by the political parties, they are doing their best to achieve positive results. Leaders are travelling around the regions, there are TV broadcasts attacking their rivals and glorifying their own parties and the campaign features in nearly every media debate. Still, there are signs of both political and content-related weakness as well as evidence that the campaign is perceived as a second-order one, merely a rehearsal or stepping stone to the upcoming national elections: most of the parties do not really have a clear European agenda. And politicians' behaviour neither motivates voters to engage in the election itself nor brings European issues closer to them.

That is why it is not surprising that the turnout is expected to be very low and support for political parties in these elections will reflect national sympathies and antipathies.

The turnout in the European elections in Poland has always been pretty poor, reaching around 20% in 2004 and 25% in 2009. Predictions for May 25<sup>th</sup> are even worse. According to opinion polls, only 31% of those asked are interested in the elections and only 37% of Poles plan to vote (latest available data up to April 2014). Such results do not necessarily mean the turnout will reach this number, as it is usually around 10 percentage points lower than the declarations before the polling day.

Those who claim they will attend the polls plan to give their vote to the Civic Platform (29%) or Law and Justice (21%).<sup>216</sup> These two parties have also been battling at the top of national opinion polls – always within two percentage points of each other, one overtaking the other and vice versa. The latest polls, for the first time in recent months, give the Civic Platform a clear majority and this party will probably ultimately win the elections. Still, it is very difficult to say how high this majority will be. For sure, the Civic Platform will lose a few seats in the EP and Law and Justice will gain a few, but the difficult election law<sup>217</sup> makes it even more complicated to estimate numbers. All data show that a few seats will, as usual, go to the Social Democrats (6%). As always, before nearly each election the Peasant Party struggles to overcome the 5% clause (in the latest polls they have put at 4%). And as always they will probably manage to do so. The other political parties running can only hope to get into the Parliament by reaching the required minimum of 5%, but their chances are rather small. Showing 6% for the first time in a poll at the end of April, the New Right of Janusz Korwin-Mikke might have some chance. The Poland Together of Jarosław Gowin achieves 4% in the polls and the left-liberal Europe Plus - Your Move – 2%. Still, more than every fourth person (27%) willing to vote has not decided yet who he/she will support. So the campaign is still rather open.

### Political manifestos – empty slogans

This battle, even though the elections are European, is quite a national one. Nobody really appears to care what the European Parliament is supposed to do during its upcoming term. Parties and candidates discuss typical national issues that are not part of European law or they stick to general European matters (security, energy) without showing which aspects of these fields are within the competencies of the European Parliament.

The manifestos have been prepared very late and are not perceived as important – parties have not really highlighted them in their campaign and it is hard to believe that this will happen at a later stage.

The Civic Platform, the EPP member, runs with the slogan: “Secure Poland in a strong Europe”, thus addressing the current Polish fears and worries associated with connected Russia and the Ukraine crisis. The main message is, however, the success achieved by the party during the current term. The aim of the ruling party is to engender an atmosphere of welfare and stability by its activities, on the one hand, and to spread some uncertainty about Poland’s future, on the other. The calculation is both to motivate satisfied voters and to catch those who are worried and want a government that ensures stability through closer EU-integration. Even though the party claims to put the main goals of the European party in its programme, the topics are prioritised according to national interests, starting with energy and Eastern policy. So the crossing of national and European policies is visible, but rather well done. At the same time, politicians are trying to take part in European debates, mainly by lobbying for more engagement towards Ukraine and for the concept of the Energy Union. Donald Tusk, who came up with this idea, tries to reach his counterparts in European capitals and European opinion by articles in the press (such as the *Financial Times* in April).

The other EPP member, the Peasant Party, with their short election slogan “Together for Poland and Europe” stresses common values, agriculture and regional development. The text mentions the EPP as a European party and the Peasant Party’s means to influence European policy.

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<sup>216</sup> According to the polls conducted by CBOS, published on 30.04.2014.

<sup>217</sup> The elections in Poland take place in 13 constituencies. The number of seats for each constituency is, however, flexible, and depends on the turnout in this constituency. That complicates the elections as voters do not know if in the end there will be an MEP chosen from their region.



The Democratic Left Alliance seems very devoted to their European family as they have no manifesto of their own. On the web page one might only find a link to the S&D programme and a summary of it that, as it states “creates a base for our election programme”. However, it does not mean they are going to prepare their own manifesto, or that they are so close to the European S&D – even if it could be perceived in this way. It rather shows a lack of ideas about how the party would like to contribute to European discussions and a lack of experts who could bring some new values.

An interesting political animal in this regard is the left-liberal Europe Plus – Your Move. As a coalition of parties it does not have a clear political affiliation in Europe. The party’s one MEP belongs in the current EP to the S&D, but other parties’ members support the liberals. So in the elections it is running without a clear statement about which political group it will join after polling day – the S&D or ALDE. The candidates claim it depends who wins a seat (if any) and what kind of influence they can have in the respective political family. Even if sounds rather arrogant – as it is highly unlikely that such a small number of MEPs would make a difference in the large political groups, it shows how split the coalition is. Still, they have a manifesto that stresses liberal values (innovation, digitalisation, a flexible economy) close to ALDE, but also left-wing voters will find something there for them (work places for young people), which directly establishes ties with the S&D campaign. They are also the only political party that claims that Poland needs to join the eurozone as quickly as possible.

The only anti-European party, as they call themselves, is the New Right of Janusz Korwin-Mikke hovering on the 5% line (obtaining 4-6% in the polls). At the very beginning of their manifesto they mention Nigel Farage from UKIP as the best example of how one should – and they would – act in the EU to fight for the nation state and make the EU a free trade zone only.

Law and Justice, which is a part of the European Conservatives and Reformists, has not yet presented any manifesto, but claims it is ready to launch one. Still, by the beginning of May no programme could be found. They have only presented a slogan that goes: “To serve Poland and listen to the Poles”.

## **Europe suddenly in focus but from a very domestic perspective**

More about the parties’ positions towards Europe can be found in the running political debates that can be followed in the media.<sup>218</sup> Still, they are very national – based on the general question that has been accompanying Polish politics for years – how far the EU should influence Polish reality. The most important clash is based on the quarrel between Civic Platform and Law and Justice – did the current government help Poland to achieve much in Europe and to play an important role there, or did it “sell out” Poland and its national interests?

The 2009 campaign was very national in nature with almost no European debate. Both parties and their candidates focused on local issues that had little in common with decisions taken by the European Parliament. The current one was expected to be very similar or even more concentrated on national discourse because of serving as the aforementioned rehearsal for further polls. The crisis in the Ukraine has, however, changed things as it reminds Poles of the value of the Union. They feel insecure (according to the recent polls, 82% say the situation in the Ukraine has an influence on Poland and 72% say that what is happening there poses a threat to Polish security). So the EU is again – as it once used to be – perceived as a guarantee for security. The Poles are also reminded of the value of the EU-membership aiming for better living standards. The determination of the Maidan movement to forge the path towards European integration impresses the Poles and forces them to reflect on what the EU offers.

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<sup>218</sup> The observations are based on public and private radio and TV presentations as well as on the candidates debates, organised without conducting methodological research.

The campaign for the European elections shows very clearly that political parties are addressing these issues and using them. The main subjects stressed by the leaders of the two main parties – the ruling Civic Platform and the conservative opposition Law and Justice were directly connected to the topic of security and solidarity – and thus to the EU future in the long run.

The debates are also closely linked to the fact that on May the 1<sup>st</sup> Poland celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of joining the EU. The government is trying to use this anniversary to gain support by demonstrating the positive developments in Poland over the past ten years. The changes are indeed impressive and Polish society is very satisfied with EU-membership, so the opposition cannot really disagree with this main message. They instead try to stress what could have been done better, what still needs to be done and which social groups have not benefited from EU membership. The responsibility for all these negative developments, in the opposition's rhetoric, lies of course with the current government. Additionally, the left opposition – Democratic Left Alliance – likes to stress the fact that it was its government that signed the Accession Treaty. And the New Right of Janusz Korwin-Mikke finds only the negative aspects of integration, seeing the ultimate decline of Poland in this process. In the end the anniversary – while it was also supposed to motivate people to vote – has been so exploited in internal political quarrels that it could in fact discourage the electorate.

There is one more issue that should play a role in the current debate, but has surprisingly remained a non-issue in this campaign: Poland's future entry into the eurozone. Poland committed to entering the zone in the Accession Treaty, so theoretically no further debate or referendum on this issue should take place. However, opponents of this move argue that the eurozone itself has changed so much since 2003 when the Poles voted for accession that another poll is needed. Generally, the government and the left-leaning parties support entry and the right wing ones are in favour of waiting. But in both cases (with the exception of Europe Plus – Your Move, which claims that Poland should join the eurozone as soon as possible) no party has set any deadlines or explained what 'should enter' or 'should wait' means and what either option would cost. The reason for this is quite simple – Polish society is against adopting the euro (only one-quarter is for it) and associates it only with higher prices and instability (i.e. considering those countries suffering financial troubles) and generally does not understand how the change would affect Poland or them personally. The reason for these fears is a lack of knowledge about the topic. But rather than start a serious debate about the pros and cons using facts and arguments, political parties are avoiding the issue. This tactic from the government's side is understandable (though deserving of criticism); they know that Poles do not want the euro and so they are not driving the process forward the zone and avoid addressing it in the upcoming elections. The same logic applies to the Democratic Left Alliance. It is surprising that the right-leaning parties have not been using this issue more in their attacks. One can assume that the topic will be raised before the national elections in 2015 as the new Polish parliament will have to change the constitution if Poland is to enter the euro zone.

So Europe is present in the campaign, but maybe not quite as expected. European foreign, neighbourhood, security and energy policies are suddenly discussed, while topics such as a possible new treaty or reforms of the EU-institutions are mentioned only in high-level debates.

### **Leaders count – but not European ones**

The fact that there are leaders at the top of each European political party running for the post of Commission president counts for very little in Poland. No opinion polls have asked if Poles know their names or at least are aware that they exist, but it is highly likely that very few are. In

the opinion poll conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in September 2013,<sup>219</sup> 70% of those questioned could not name any of the current Polish MEPs.

Nevertheless, Polish parties invited European candidates and, because Poland is perceived as a large member state, Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt paid a visit to Poland in late April / early May 2014. There were, however, no candidate debates covered in the Polish media, and the online transmission was followed by few people.

This does not mean there are no leaders at the top of the campaign. They are the leaders of the Polish parties who both represent their parties and play a role in the debates. In the main parties where Donald Tusk (Civic Platform) and Jarosław Kaczyński (Law and Justice) are not running themselves, but have been battling each other on the Polish political scene for years and in the EP campaign. In the case of the smaller parties even their names are directly connected with their leaders and top-candidate (Jarosław Gowin, Zbigniew Ziobro, Janusz Korwin-Mikke).

### **Candidates – somewhere between professionals and celebrities**

It is however, not just the name of the party, but even the whole campaign based on the leaders who will fly out of politics if they do not win these or the next elections. The Poland Together of Jarosław Gowin, Solidarity Poland of Zbigniew Ziobro or the New Right of Janusz Korwin-Mikke have of course long lists of candidates, but only a few names count and are known. The previous political experience of the leaders helps to campaign, but is totally unimportant in respect of the EP's work. First, even those who have already been MEPs (excluding Paweł Kowal, MEP devoted to Ukrainian issues) are neither experts in the EP nor have experience in European politics as they have spent more time in Poland paying attention to national issues. Second, they will most likely not get a seat. Their rhetoric is, however, important while analysing the campaign as such. Positioned on the right side of the political landscape they compete with Law and Justice. So the latter one tries to show itself as the only defender of conservative values, further polarising the debates.

The lists of candidates of the other parties are much more expert and EU-based. This is important since the first term of Polish MEPs in the European Parliament was assessed as a term of many unprofessional personalities, people who did not really understand the European business and delivered little to the work of the EP. A few hard working ones managed to be re-elected together with other experts: former academia, civil servants or politicians who won respect among their colleagues in the 2009-2014 term.<sup>220</sup> The upcoming term might have chances to be even more professional in respect of potential MEPs.

The Civic Platform has selected for leading its regional lists a few European heavy weights beginning with the current MEPs (12 altogether), such as: Jerzy Buzek, a former President of the European Parliament, Danuta Hübner, a former EU-Commissioner and a chair of the Regional Committee in the EP and also some well-known national politicians, ministers and MPs. This group should create the image of a team of professionals, who understand the European business very well and are well prepared for their work ahead in Strasbourg and Brussels. Still, some of them are not automatically the candidates who might attract the voters. The former minister of finance is, for example, a very unpopular personality being blamed for hated reforms in the retirement system.

<sup>219</sup> Marek Dudkiewicz, Aleksander Fuksiewicz, Jacek Kucharczyk and Agnieszka Łada (2013), "The European Parliament. Social trust and ignorance", Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw (<http://isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/pliki/Mainconclusionsfinal.pdf>).

<sup>220</sup> J. Kucharczyk and M. Szczepanik (2012), "Not only Foreign Policy", Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw.

There are, however, also a few celebrities, for example Otylia Jędrzejczak. This former star and gold medal winner in swimming is perhaps well-known and liked, but not really connected with political experience or professional knowledge in important EU-matters.

The Law and Justice party's decision on lists of candidates is perceived by many experts and commentators as the personal choice of its leader who named only those he can trust and count on. As number ones there are a few names known from the media. However, highly educated professors, philosophers and sociologists can argue well, but are not really the professionals needed in the EP. From the current seven MEPs six are running. It is ironic that the one who has always been perceived as the best MEP from this party, the hard working specialist, Konrad Szymanski, is not one of them. The reason for this is unexplained, though, some journalists claim that he lost trust of the party's leader. Law and Justice lists also include a few family members of victims of the 2010 catastrophe of the presidential airplane in Smoleńsk.

The lists of Democratic Left Alliance contain the "usual suspects" all current six MEPs, MPs or former ministers. These team leaders are experienced politicians with some expert knowledge but with rather moderate successes in the recent years on both the national and the European scenes. They have a stable core electorate, but have had troubles reaching new voters and are perceived as an old, used team with little power.

The Peasant Party runs with its all four current MEPs, a few MPs and one minister at the top of the lists. Finally, on the lists of the coalition Europe Plus – Your Move one might find only a few former or current politicians. The majority of the top candidates are experts and well-known intellectuals from the liberal left of the political scene. Many of them have no experience in real politics yet still comment on political issues regularly. This list is supported by the former President, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who has maintained a good reputation in Polish society. His engagement is not very visible, prompting questions about his support for the coalition.

In total there are 41 out of the 51 current MEPs on the registered lists and a few current government ministers. As Polish membership in the European Union is still new there are few others who could be classified as having an EU background. Quite a few intellectuals and experts, well-known from public debates add some merit and controversy, but their election chances are fairly slim.

### **A more visible, more professional and more European but still unsatisfactory Polish campaign**

The 2014 European campaign in Poland is different from the previous ones for a number of reasons. It is much more important at the national level as the 2004 and 2009 ones used to be, as its results will be a rehearsal for the chain of upcoming Polish elections. But even though the final result will influence the Polish national scene, it won't have much influence on the way the Polish government acts in the Council of the European Union. The current government's position will be, however, a little weaker at the European level, as there will be a smaller representation of the Civic Platform in the EPP, whereas in the 2009-2014 term, as the third biggest national group, they had quite a lot influence.

Another difference is the greater professionalisation of the candidates and the inclusion of more European issues in the debates, which still does not mean that the elections are perceived by the political parties or voters as European ones. Here, not much has changed. The candidates for the position of EC president have no influence here even though they all paid a visit to Poland.

The turnout will probably stay at the same, miserable, level as in 2009, because, according to recent polls, Poles view the current campaign as rather discouraging. Many journalists, on the other hand, have adopted a more mature position by encouraging people to vote and to concentrate on European issues and the performance of different institutions. Even if it is

difficult and too early to assess how representative it is for the whole media landscape, this approach can nonetheless help to inform the voters in some way.

So, even if the elections are more visible, more European and more professional than five years ago, they will not be a big event for most Poles.

# Romania: Fragmented Centre-Right Opposition likely to favour Social Democrats

Agnes Nicolescu\*

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Romania, as the seventh most populous country in the EU with around 21.5 million people, has 32 deputy seats allocated in the European Parliament (EP). The elections for the EP on May 25<sup>th</sup> take place ahead of the national presidential elections, scheduled for late 2014. The share of the Romanian electorate that voted in the EP elections in 2009 was around 27.67%, which says a lot about the rather low level of interest of voters in the European elections, in spite of Romanians' enthusiasm for the EU. This percentage was lower than the turnout for national elections—whether local, parliamentary or presidential – which rose to an average of around 41% in the case of the 2009 legislative elections and to almost 57% for the presidential elections. Currently available estimates<sup>221</sup> for the turnout for this year's European elections are concentrated around 31–32%, a slightly higher percentage than for the previous EP elections.

So far, the elections for the European Parliament have failed to attract significant attention from the general public. Part of this is due to the perception<sup>222</sup> that European politics and elections are somewhat distinct from national politics and do not have the same relevance and stakes for everyday governance, since the European elections do not lead to the formation of a government as the national elections do. At the same time, there is a feeling that the performance of the European legislative is more difficult to follow and assess than that of national decision-makers. It may also be argued that the public is not always fully aware of the extent to which European politics may have a role in or impact on their own lives. Some of these factors could explain why around 20%<sup>223</sup> of the polled voters have not yet made up their mind about who to vote for on May 25<sup>th</sup>. It is also due to the relatively poor knowledge of and information on the European political families represented in the European Parliament, as well as on the different candidates.

A CSOP poll report from early 2014 showed that out of 1,000 respondents, almost half were not interested in political life, while about 35% declared themselves neither interested nor particularly ignorant on the topic, with only 15% being clearly interested.<sup>224</sup> It is equally telling that the same report revealed a rather low interest in political news and events in general, with only around 40% of respondents expressing a major interest in political developments while the majority declared themselves to have little or no interest at all.

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<sup>221</sup> INSCOP Research poll ([www.evz.ro/inscop-315-dintre-romani-declara-ca-s-ar-prezenta-cu-siguranta-la-vot-pentru-europarla-1080278.html](http://www.evz.ro/inscop-315-dintre-romani-declara-ca-s-ar-prezenta-cu-siguranta-la-vot-pentru-europarla-1080278.html)).

<sup>222</sup> Ziare.com (2014), "Campania cu miza zero și uriașă în același timp", 25 April ([www.dw.de/ziarecom-campania-cu-miza-zero-si-uriasa-in-acelasi-timp/a-17592669](http://www.dw.de/ziarecom-campania-cu-miza-zero-si-uriasa-in-acelasi-timp/a-17592669)).

<sup>223</sup> Idem 2, INSCOP Research poll.

<sup>224</sup> CSOP Omnibus Report ([www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-europarlamentare/](http://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-europarlamentare/))

## Resources, candidates and criteria for elections to the European Parliament

The official campaign for the European elections started on 25 April 2014, with 15 political parties and political alliances competing in the Romanian elections for the European Parliament. These are the PSD-UNPR-PC alliance, PNL, UDMR, PDL, PPDD, Partidul Mișcarea Populară (Popular Movement Foundation / PMF), PNȚCD and Forța Civică (Civic Force). Out of the 33 current MEPs, 23 announced their intention to run for re-election in the European Parliament. Not all of the candidates announced for the 2014 elections have an EU background, which suggests that some of these nominations are a response to domestic politics.

As for the resources invested in their campaigns by the various parties, this very much comes down to capitalising on the domestic political and image capital of some of the most prominent figures of the political groups. Of the candidates for the EP, those who have made themselves known through their activity at the national level are better known to the Romanian public. For instance, a candidate of the ruling S&D and conservative coalition, Maria Grapini, stressed<sup>225</sup> the need to send to the European legislative people with expertise in important areas for the EU economy, such as SME's and the industrial sector, having a professional background herself in these fields. The PDL leader, Vasile Blaga, highlighted that his party's candidates would include experienced MEPs like Theodor Stolojan, Monica Macovei, Marian-Jean Marinescu and Traian Ungureanu, but also younger people.<sup>226</sup>

Ahead of the campaign and with good results in current polls, the governing PSD, allied with PC and UNPR, will cover the centre-left spectrum, while PNL, PMP, PDL, PNȚCD, UDMR, the Civic Force and the New Republic share the centre-right and right-wing electorate.

Romania's current political opposition is made up of the PDL/the Democrat Liberal Party, the Popular Movement Party (PMP), the Civic Force (Forța Civică) and PPDD (Dan Diaconescu People's Party), all of which are affiliated to the European Popular family. The Hungarians' Democratic Union (UDMR), which is also affiliated to the European Popular group, used to form part of the opposition until recently but was co-opted in the governing alliance. Their main agenda remains very much limited to internal claims (for the Hungarian minority in Romania), and the intention to transfer these further on to the European forum. For the UDMR candidates, the main challenge right now is to get enough supporters to the ballot to be able to be represented in the EP. The UDMR list for the European elections is headed by Iuliu Winkler and Sogor Csaba, both currently MEPs with the same party, followed by Vincze Lorant, Hegedus Csilla and Antal Lorant.

The opposition became fragmented after some of the PDL's top members left recently to establish the Popular Movement Foundation (PMF). The movement remains largely unknown to the general public, with a platform dominated by mostly domestic politics. At the same time, PMF is in a competition to win over part of the electorate on the right ahead of the national elections later this year, relying extensively on the political capital of the support given by President Traian Băsescu. The recently established PMF remains largely entangled in a national political struggle and seems to have the same problem of defining a clear political agenda and narrative for the European elections, in spite of its significant connections and visibility, mostly in urban areas.

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<sup>225</sup> RADOR Bulletin, May 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Ziare.com (2014), "Care sunt democrat-liberalii in carti pentru europarlamentare" ([www.ziare.com/alegeri/alegeri-europarlamentare-2014/care-sunt-democrat-liberalii-in-carti-pentru-europarlamentare-1268124](http://www.ziare.com/alegeri/alegeri-europarlamentare-2014/care-sunt-democrat-liberalii-in-carti-pentru-europarlamentare-1268124)).



Another potential competitor for the Popular Movement Foundation (PMF) is the Civic Force, which is encountering very much the same difficulties as the other emerging right-wing groups ahead of its first electoral test. The Civic Force has the advantage of being led by Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, former Foreign Affairs Minister; however, the party faces serious shortages in terms of financing and electorate mobilisation.

### ***Challenges to the political centre-right agenda ahead of the European elections***

As a consequence, the main concern of the PDL party at the moment is to prove that it can stick together to face the coming EP elections and that it can still have a say to the right of the Romanian political spectrum. However, the struggle between the former USL (Social Liberal Union) coalition, currently dominated by the social-democrats and president Băsescu, on one side, and PDL and other emerging right-wing formations on the other left the party's leadership with little energy and resources to build up a consistent electoral platform. The leadership has thus remained focused on the fight against corruption discourse, advocating the need for change.

For this round of European elections, the Democrat Liberals (PDL) are relying on some political figures who have already had a deputy mandate in the European Parliament (such as Monica Macovei and Theodor Stolojan, with a particular reference to Macovei's role in anti-corruption efforts), but have also thrown into the electoral battle domestically grown politicians who have not made a name for themselves so far beyond their local communities. These latter candidates are the most likely to remain relatively unknown to the wider electorate. From PDL, the experienced politicians in the EP with the greatest chances of being elected are Theodor Stolojan, Monica Macovei, Traian Ungureanu and Marian Jean Marinescu. In an unexpected move, Elena Băsescu, the daughter of the Romanian president and a former PDL MEP who recently switched to PMP, will not run for a new mandate. From PMP, the top three candidates will be Cristian Preda, **Siegfried Mureşan (European People's Party Political Advisor on Economics and Social Policy)** and **Teodor Baconschi (former Minister of Foreign Affairs)**.

**In terms of mobilised support, some 15,000 people are said to have joined the Popular Movement Foundation since its establishment.<sup>227</sup> As regards the political platform, these European elections hold particular importance for the party as it seeks to score highly enough on May 25<sup>th</sup> to be able to propose a candidate for the national presidential elections. Another declared objective of the new political group is to contribute to “reforming the Romanian political class”. This will not be an easy task for a political group including people as different as Elena Udrea, former Minister of Regional Development, and Cristian Preda, who has held an MEP mandate since 2009 on the PDL list.**

Another party affiliated traditionally to the European Popular family is the PNȚCD (Christian Democrat National Peasants' party), a party with a historic role and roots in Romanian politics but which has lost a significant share of its voting base after the death of Corneliu Coposu and the emergence of other major right-wing formations. The main challenge for PNȚCD today is to adapt to the current national and European context, while preserving some of its core ideology. One of the fundamental game-changers and reformers of Romania between 1996–2000, PNȚCD needs to build a contemporary discourse suitable for a society that has dealt with the process of land restoration – one of the key objectives of the party at that time – and which now seeks to regain a competitive profile on the European markets, perhaps also through its agricultural sector. Unlike most of the recently formed centre-right formations – which have so far largely failed to understand or establish a connection with their electorate base, in most cases due to a highly elitist discourse – PNȚCD should have the ability to rebuild the critical mass across the country needed to regain its former place among the top parties. One of the objectives

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<sup>227</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

announced<sup>228</sup> so far by one PNTCD candidate for the European Parliament is to seek a reduction in Romania's food dependency on imports from abroad. Attempts by the PNTCD to reinvent itself as a party should also aim at maximising the benefits of the currently available funds for the Common Agriculture Policy, given Romania's tradition and potential in this field.

As for Dan Diaconescu People's Party, although it joined the European Populars' family, its platform can hardly be considered as belonging to a particular ideology. Given the declared intentions to increase "all pensions and wages" without any differentiation or indications of how such a measure could be achieved, this formation clearly lacks the necessary objectives, instruments and expertise to play a lasting role on the political scene, whether national or European. Its public discourse is predominantly populist, revolving around Romanian values and identity but without exploring further ways in which these may be put to use. In terms of resources, for several years it has benefited from the support of a TV channel owned by Dan Diaconescu, targeting mainly people from rural areas with scarce information sources or relatively poor education.

The most well-known candidates of the ruling Social Democrats include Ioan Mircea Pașcu, Corina Crețu and Daciana Sârbu, to name a few. The final list of PSD candidates is headed by current MEPs and former ministers (Corina Crețu, MEP and Vicepresident of the S&D group; Cătălin Ivan, MEP and head of the Romanian Delegation of PSD). The electoral platform of the Romanian Social Democrats includes the pursuit of fundamental European rights and liberties. Particular attention is paid to job creation as an instrument to encourage young professionals and university graduates to stay in the country and to create a competitive work environment generally.

In terms of its voter base, the general target of the S&D is middle-class Romanians who are concerned with economic stability.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) is part of the ALDE family. The party's list is headed by current PNL MEPs including Norica Nicolai, Renate Weber and Adina Ioana Vălean. Most of the current MEPs enjoy strong credibility both nationally and at the European level. However, the great challenge for the party if it wishes to have a place of its own in Romanian politics remains to adapt its political agenda to better meet the expectations of a wider spectrum of voters.

Independent candidates include Corina Ungureanu, a former world gymnastics champion and previously a UNPR then PSD member.

### ***European versus national politics and priorities***

In light of these reasons, the pool of resources gathered for the Euro- elections are likely to be more reduced than those mobilized for the national elections. These refer to candidates, party infrastructure across the country and time, as these elections serve rather as a preparation for the national ones.

Most of the political parties represented in the European Parliament are capitalising as much as possible on the profiles and experience of those members who have already held seats and had notable initiatives. Those deputies who already succeeded in leaving a strong mark on the European agenda are the most likely to receive strong political support from their political groups and alliances. Also, most mainstream parties seem to favour and bring to the frontline those candidates who already enjoy great media exposure and perform well in the national polls.

In the case of the Social Democrat candidates, there has been an emphasis on the accomplishments of current deputies in pursuing economic and social development objectives through deepened integration instruments as a factor for continued support.

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<sup>228</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

### ***Alliance of European conservatives and reformists***

The New Republic Party has set itself as an objective the pursuit of Romanian national interests by a team of mostly young candidates with little if any political experience. The party constantly resorts to a conservative discourse, with occasionally strong nationalist accents, looking back to the past rather than towards future projects. The candidates placed at the top on its electoral list are Mihail Neamțu, the party leader, George Mioc, who has lived in the US for almost four decades, and Ștefan Bârgăoanu, an entrepreneur and the party's prime vice-president. The full candidates list is large, totalling 32 names, of which 16 are entrepreneurs.

Another minor political party competing in this year's European elections is the Great Romania Party (PRM), a nationalist party which gained two seats in the 2009 elections. The party is currently trying to reinvent its political discourse after a struggle for power among its top members. Given the high scores of the Hungarian extremist Jobbik party and its revisionist political platform calling for territorial secession in relation to neighbouring countries where Hungarian ethnics live (including Romania), PRM may experience a trend of slight growth in Romania provided the party manages to mobilise its traditional electorate, which is uncertain according to the latest polls.<sup>229</sup> It is not just PRM that is concerned with Jobbik's agenda and rise in popularity, mainstream parties such as PSD and PNL are worried about the degree of toleration and support the party's extremist discourse is currently enjoying in Budapest.

In Romania, a distinctive note in the political discourse on national versus European issues came from UDMR leader Kelemen Hunor, who stated during a speech on April 26th that "[t]he European Parliament elections concern us first of all, and not the EU. These elections are about the present and the future of Hungarians from Romania".<sup>230</sup> For UDMR, the European elections represent atest in terms of voter participation ahead of the national elections, but also a call for support of Hungarian ethnics to secure their continued representation in the European legislative.

## **How do the manifestos of the European political alliances translate to the electoral platforms of national parties?**

### ***European People's Party***

Under the slogan "Europe in every house", the PDL leadership is hoping to win at least 20% of the vote at the European elections. The party's platform announces its intention to continue fighting corruption, particularly where major public procurement projects are concerned. PDL's European-related platform includes objectives such as pursuing the social and economic integration of the Roma minority.<sup>231</sup> The new approach seeks to make better use of the available funds by ensuring they reach the communities concerned directly, rather than remaining under the control of specialised NGOs. Another dimension of the party's platform concerns the much-desired objective of energy independence.

### ***European Socialists***

One of the main topics promoted by the Social Democrat candidates in their campaign concerns ensuring the full respect and protection of the rights of Romanians as European citizens in the EU. This should be understood in the recent context of the anti-European messages in some member states, calling for some form of limitations to the right of free movement. Another

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<sup>229</sup> CSOP Omnibus Report ([www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-euoparlamentare/](http://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-euoparlamentare/))

<sup>230</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

<sup>231</sup> RADOR Bulletin No. 7, May 2014.

major issue discussed is the need to make up the development disparities between Romania and the EU, as well as to reduce social polarisation across the country, which still persists in spite of Romania's steady economic growth of 3.5% last year. As S&D MEP Corina Crețu remarked, the party's purpose is to continue to speed up the absorption of European funds: "We have rejected austerity, and asked for more cohesion funds for catching-up countries, such as Romania."<sup>232</sup> Particular emphasis was also placed on the idea of European solidarity as a connecting factor between the national and European agendas of socialists.

### ***Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party***

Topics tackled by the liberal parties' leaders and their candidates in the campaign focus primarily on the need for a stronger relationship between the activity of the national legislative and the positions adopted by Romanian MEPs, aiming to increase democratic legitimacy and transparency. Such a move should also seek to increase information and expertise in the national policy-related debates about the proposals and decisions under preparation in the European legislative forum, and which are likely to have a direct impact on Romanians' lives.

### **Political elites' support for their candidates for the European Commission**

In the case of the European Populists, who have many political affiliations in Romania, the candidate for the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, is supported for his approach to economic and monetary union issues or for his stance on the current Ukraine crisis. His support of economic sanctions against Russia—along the same lines as the other candidates for the EC—earned him appreciation among the Romanian centre-right representatives.

When it comes to S&D support for their candidates for the European Commission, it is worth noting that Martin Schulz participated at the opening of the Romanian Social Democrats' European elections campaign in Bucharest in late April. The main message centred on the support of the Romanian Social Democrats' for Schulz's nomination, with Prime Minister Victor Ponta arguing that this would bring "not only Romania but also Europe back on the track of solidarity, development and to the core values of the EU".<sup>233</sup> In the same discourse, the Romanian Prime Minister asked for Schulz' support in offering the Republic of Moldova the prospect of European membership.

Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE's candidate for the EC, has been praised by his like-minded Romanian colleagues<sup>234</sup> from the National Liberal Party for his performance in the first debate between candidates for the Commission presidency, particularly for the way he covered the main priorities and questions addressed (exit from the economic crisis, the development of the labour market with a particular focus on integrating young people through entrepreneurship programmes for youth, and reindustrialisation projects across the EU). A better integrated transports infrastructure (in terms of energy and telecommunications) is also part of Verhofstadt's political vision embraced by NLP leaders. At this point, Romanian leaders see in the smart specialisation of the European economy an opportunity for Romania's SMEs to further extend their comparative advantages on the EU market and globally.

### **National parties tackling EU issues**

There is a set of major issues which have been tackled by all mainstream parties, with various nuances: the economic and financial crisis; unemployment and job creation, especially for

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<sup>232</sup> RADOR Bulletin No. 7, May 2014.

<sup>233</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

<sup>234</sup> RADOR Bulletin, May 2014.

young people; potential adoption of the euro; preserving the funding for the Common Agricultural Policy as a budget priority; the Schengen Area; European foreign and security policy; the European future of the Republic of Moldova; democratic legitimacy; and energy policy, with a recent focus on the pros and cons of the exploration for shale gas. Positions on this last topic are particularly divided as the debate continues at the European level.

One particular issue of general concern in Romania is the decreasing interest of Europeans in the elections for the European Parliament, and in politics for that matter. Political leaders are all too aware of this trend, with many of them keen to address this issue in their public appearances during the campaign. The main reason for this situation has been identified as the fact that people do not feel these elections bear a direct relevance to their lives.<sup>235</sup> Major issues, such as the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy, have been signalled by all major parties as essential and thus enjoy wide consensus for support in the European legislative. Positions were more nuanced, however, highlighting the differences of ideological perspective.

PDL's political platform mainly seeks to capitalise on the achievements and profile of Monica Macovei in the fight against corruption. Given that during the years for which the PDL-led coalition was in power, its austerity measures and confrontational political discourse led to increased public discontentment and eventually to its being ousted from government, for these European elections the leaders switched to a more growth-based narrative, without yet much detailing. The Social Democrats' discourse has been dominated by economic and crisis-related matters, with a strong focus on the need for solidarity and an emphasis on the full respect of Romanian citizens' rights in the EU.

In light of the recent developments in Ukraine, all the mainstream parties have expressed concern and support for the European path of Ukraine and of the Republic of Moldova. There is an emphasis on the need for Europeans to work more closely with one another, while supporting a strong response capable of preserving stability in the region. The current context has sparked major preoccupation in the Romanian public space, in relation to the national interest of having a stable neighbourhood and allowing for the continuation of the Europeanisation of the Republic of Moldova. This topic has become particularly heated in the aftermath of the economic sanctions imposed on Moldova by Russia, as Chişinău prepares to sign the Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU in the coming months. Romanian MEPs from the main alliances – S&D, the Popular Party and ALDE – have been active in the debates of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and in the delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. One can note a full consensus among these major parties as regards promoting the prospects for European membership for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and the need to sign Association Agreements with these two as soon as possible. There is also a general view among MEPs from these parties that the economic and visa-related sanctions applied so far on Russia are too weak to effect a genuine change of course.

The liberals' agenda<sup>236</sup> states that candidates will struggle to obtain additional financing for agriculture and lower tariffs for phone communications, while opposing any coordination in fiscal and economic policy. A particular European initiative they have committed to supporting concerns the introduction of the concept of European company, through which they also want to push for a greater role for Romanian firms in the EU. Candidates of the National Liberal Party also played an important role in the European Parliament discussions on Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) and in making sure that the initiative was not adopted.

The general media debate regarding the European elections has revolved around how the various candidates approach topics such as deeper economic integration, prospects for job creation (partly as a tool to have more young professionals employed on the Romanian market),

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<sup>235</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

<sup>236</sup> RADOR Bulletin, April 2014.

cohesion funds and ways in which they can be maximised and better spent (with a focus on agriculture and Roma integration), and relations with the Republic of Moldova and Romania's role in keeping this topic high on the European agenda (also in relation to the Ukraine crisis).

## Conclusion

This European Parliament campaign is somewhat different from the last one in terms of the changing structure and implicitly national electoral perspectives of the Romanian centre-right parties, marked by high fragmentation and competition for the electorate. As regards the political discourse and platforms, compared to the last European elections in 2009, this year's elections are much more focused on internal rather than European issues.

a) The candidates' messages reflect this trend; at the same time, it can be observed that ideological cleavages between centre-left and centre-right parties remain rather limited, as the impact of the economic downturn has made both put at the forefront of their political platform the need to fight the negative effects of the crisis – mainly unemployment and the general state of the economy. While for the S&D this topic has always played an important role, for centre-right parties this comes as an adaptation to voters' concerns, after a period in which right-dominated coalitions have pressed for strict austerity measures.

b) More so than in the previous European elections, the role of traditional parties in deepening and improving the quality of the political debate, and hence of the electoral campaigns, is crucial in order to draw attention whenever the fundamental achievements and rights forming the core of the Union are in danger of being attacked or downplayed for populist movements.

The liberals and the Social Democrats were among the most vocal and strongest in signalling and condemning the extremist and occasionally even xenophobic discourse of certain political groups across the EU. During the campaign, it has not gone unnoticed that representatives of the centre-right had little if anything to say in this regard to their EPP colleagues from formations in other countries that are lenient towards extremists. What is most worrying about the rise of these parties is the fact that it happened almost simultaneously in many member states – old ones included – under the disguise of discontentment with the EU without proposing reasonable solutions to the issues raised, whether economic or migration related.

For Romanians, these liberties – particularly those pertaining to the Single Market – are the concrete and credible manifestation of the European project at a time when some parties from states which helped build it are questioning its future in one way or another, for electoral purposes. Thus, the anti-Europe narrative is practically inexistent, with most parties arguing for the need for a better and stronger representation of the Romanian perspective in the European legislative.

c) The polls conducted so far reflect a reality which has shaped the Romanian political scene over the last decades, with three or four major parties (S&D supported by the National Conservative party, the Liberals, Democrat liberals and the smaller UDMR) which have, in turn, exercised power or acted as political opposition over time. According to a CSCI poll<sup>237</sup> conducted in March 2014, around 42% of Romanians would vote for the Social Democrat Party (PC-UNPR (SDP)) at the European elections, which would presumably achieve 16 mandates, compared with its current 11 seats. Next in line is the National Liberal Party (with 15% of the vote, or seven potential mandates compared to the present five ones). The Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) and the Popular Movement would each get around 10% and potentially five or six

<sup>237</sup> *Agerpress* (2014), "Sondaj CSCI: Alianța PSD+PC+UNPR ar câștiga alegerile europarlamentare cu 42% din voturile românilor; PNL-15%", 25 March ([www.agerpres.ro/politica/2014/03/25/sondaj-csci-alianța-psd-pc-unpr-ar-castiga-alegerile-europarlamentare-cu-42-din-voturile-romanilor-pnl-15--22-01-18](http://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2014/03/25/sondaj-csci-alianța-psd-pc-unpr-ar-castiga-alegerile-europarlamentare-cu-42-din-voturile-romanilor-pnl-15--22-01-18)).

seats, the Democrat Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) around 7% of the vote and two seats, and the People's Party (PPDD) 4% or two mandates. In another poll<sup>238</sup> conducted in early 2014, the Social Democrats were in the lead with 39%, while the Democrat Liberal party was second with 19% and the National Liberal party third with 17%. Yet, about a third of respondents were not sure of their electoral preferences at the time of the survey. According to the same poll, the top issues of concern for Romanians ahead of the European elections included job creation, the standard of living and corruption.

In terms of the influence of the European elections on Romania's future European policy choices, as proven on many occasions previously when important issues were at stake (such as the case of negotiations on the multi annual financial framework), the various parties are expected to collaborate so as to reach a compromise.

As regards their impact on Romanian national politics, these elections are seen as a first important test for the divided centre-right, ahead of the national elections later this year, to improve its political platform and its relationship with voters. At the same time, they present a challenge for the centre-left to live up to its electoral commitments in a year which is set to be difficult for the average taxpayer.

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<sup>238</sup> Caleaeuropeana.ro (2014), "Sondaj CSOP: Cu cine voteaza romanii la europarlamentare", 7 February ([www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-europarlamentare/](http://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/sondaj-csop-cu-cine-voteaza-romanii-la-europarlamentare/)).



# Spain: An inward-looking and dispirited (but still pro-European) campaign

Salvador Llaudes and Ignacio Molina\*

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## Introduction

The European Parliament elections of 2014 will be held in Spain on May 25<sup>th</sup>. With 54 MEP seats at play, the Spanish delegation is the fifth largest among the 28 EU member states. However, the stability and strength of its two main parties – the conservative People’s Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE) – have traditionally given the country an extra influence on the big two groups that dominate the parliamentary activity in Brussels/Strasbourg: the centre-right EPP and the Social Democrats. After all, considering the divisions and the eccentric behaviour or irregular electoral results of their French, British and Italian counterparts during the last few years, the PP and PSOE have almost become the second most-solid members of their respective groups, only behind the German CDU/CSU and SPD.<sup>239</sup>

Actually, what is at stake in these elections in Spain is the extent to which these two big parties are able to resist the erosion of their joint hegemony as a result of the economic crisis and the successive social unrest.<sup>240</sup> And, in contrast to other European countries in which the long-established parties have been challenged and in some cases surpassed by new parties – often eurosceptic or europhobe varieties – it seems that the Spanish party system will not collapse. To be sure, the polls predict that PP and PSOE will lose support compared to five years ago but not to the point of putting at risk their control of the national political arena.

Therefore, if these EP elections incite some expectation vis-à-vis the Spanish voters, it is primarily connected to the curiosity about just how strong this punishment will be. And, despite the attempts by EU affairs pundits to highlight the importance of voting from a supranational perspective (making the case for a truly European campaign with the well-known argument that it is the first elections after the crisis and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty),<sup>241</sup> the truth is that national media, candidates and citizens in general do not seem to be particularly interested in the growing legislative powers of the EP. Moreover, they only remotely take into

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<sup>239</sup> During the 7<sup>th</sup> European Parliament (2009-2014), the PP has been nearly tied with its Polish and French centre-right partners as the second largest member of the EPP while the PSOE has also been the second-largest delegation in the Party of European Socialists (PES). Similarly, both the PP and the PSOE were the second biggest national delegations of their respective European parties in the previous 6<sup>th</sup> EP (2004-2009), and they two occupied the third place within the EPP and the PES in the 5<sup>th</sup> (1999-2004). This stable influence has helped the two big Spanish parties to achieve amendment capacity or office goals in committees, rapporteurships and leadership positions somewhat above the objective weight of Spain. For example, three Spaniards (and four Germans) have been appointed as Presidents of the EP over the last 25 years, as compared with only one Frenchman and no Italian or Briton at all.

<sup>240</sup> The PSOE was in office from 2004-11 (and, thus, it suffered the impact of the first recession following the global financial crisis of 2007-08). The PP won elections in late 2011 when Spain was seriously hit by a second recession produced by the debt crisis in the eurozone. Both parties had to implement unpopular austerity measures and structural reforms.

<sup>241</sup> Daniel Ruiz de Garibay (2014), “The 2014 elections to the European Parliament: Towards truly European elections?”, ARI paper 17/2014, Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid.

account the theoretical indirect election of the President of the Commission – a development with huge potential for the future politicisation of the EU institutions, but that remains distant and uncertain, as the European Council will yet have to agree on this matter.

Several EU member states will host other elections (national, regional or local) on the same day of the EP voting, but this is not the case for Spain. This fact, along with the tough crisis experienced by Spain during the last six years as a debtor member of the eurozone, should supposedly transport us to a scenario in which the debate is fundamentally about EU issues. However, and in a disturbingly similar way to previous European campaigns in Spain, the debate so far has focused on domestic issues. This is a common feature of all 28 member states but it is perhaps more intense in Spain for two reasons. On the one hand, there is a general consensus that membership of the EU and the eurozone confers certain advantages, with consequent little incentive for national parties to mobilise voters to debate the pros and cons of Europe. On the other hand, and somewhat contradictory to this pro-European consensus, Spanish public opinion is distinguished by its remarkable lack of knowledge or interest in EU affairs.<sup>242</sup>

As a result of this, all parties prefer to deal with issues on the domestic agenda as the best strategy to reach a good result. The most important cleavage, therefore, will continue to be the traditional division between national left and right, with some space reserved for the always lively centre-periphery debate. Elections will be inward-looking, even dispirited, but without any chance for anti-EU discourse to flourish. Spaniards are certainly no longer naïvely enthusiastic about Brussels or Frankfurt, although they are still consistently in favour of the integration process. The trust on EU institutions has fallen even dramatically but trust in national politicians is still inferior. In contrast to what is happening in Greece, not even the North-South or creditor-debtor gap has become truly important, although some parties (including the Socialist Party) have included a little anti-Merkel narrative in the debate.

The low profile of the campaign also serves to explain the expected turnout, which may well be the lowest in the history of Spanish democracy (around 40%). This trend follows the path of the most recent European elections, in which participation plummeted, not only in Spain, but also in the rest of the EU.<sup>243</sup> It is still to be seen what will finally happen, but what it is already clear is that the so-called ‘historical’ elections will not witness any increase in voter turnout.

## **The candidates and lists of the Spanish political parties**

Five years ago, in 2009, the Popular Party won the EP elections in Spain, with more than 42% of the votes and 24 seats. The PSOE came in second place, receiving 39% of the vote and 23 seats, only one less than the PP. Both parties together achieved 81% of the votes. As said and shown in Table 7, it is sure that neither PP nor PSOE is going to see the same good results as in 2009, but that does not mean that they will not draw an important share of the total (60%-65%).

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<sup>242</sup> According to Eurobarometer, around 81% of Spaniards say that they are poorly informed about EU affairs ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_es\\_es\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_es_es_nat.pdf)).

<sup>243</sup> In Spain, turnout has fallen from 63.05% in 1999 to 44.9% in 2009, compared to an average participation of 43% in 2009 in the EU as a whole. See Sonia Piedrafita and Vilde Renman (2014), “The ‘Personalisation’ of the European Elections: A half-hearted attempt to increase turnout and democratic legitimacy?”, EPIN Paper No. 37, European Policy Institutes Network, Brussels, April ([www.epin.org](http://www.epin.org)).

Table 7. Spanish parties in the 2014 EP elections

Name of the party or coalition	Predicted vote share <sup>a</sup>	Predicted seats	Current seats	European affiliation
People's Party -PP	30.4%-34.9%	19-22	24	European People's Party
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party – PSOE (in Catalonia PSC)	28.4%-31.0%	17-19	23	Party of European Socialists
The Plural Left <sup>b</sup> (Leftist coalition)	8.8%-11.9%	4-7 1	1 1	Party of the European Left European Green Party
Union, Progress and Democracy – UPyD	5.6%-6.3%	3-4	1	To be decided (Non-attached during 2009-2014)
Coalition for Europe <sup>c</sup> (Moderate peripheral nationalists)	4.1%-5.6%	1 1 0-1	1 1 1	Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) European Democratic Party European People's Party
“Left for the Right to Decide” <sup>d</sup> (Catalan independentist coalition)	2.5%-4-4%	1-2	0-1	European Free Alliance
“Peoples Decide” Coalition (Left-wing peripheral nationalists)	1.6%-2.0%	0-1	0-1	European Free Alliance
Others		0-4	0	To be decided

<sup>a</sup> The predicted results show all polls published in the first few days of May.

<sup>b</sup> The Plural Left coalition includes the “United Left” IU party (which belongs to the Party of the European Left and it may get from four to seven seats according to the polls) and the Catalan junior partner ICV (which belongs to the European Green Party and it would get one seat).

<sup>c</sup> The Coalition for Europe includes the Catalan CDC (member of ALDE party and expected to get one seat), Basque PNV party (member of European Democratic Party, one seat) and Catalan UDC (member of the EPP, which would get 0-zero seats).

<sup>d</sup> In 2009, most parties now members of the “Left for the Right to Decide” and “Peoples Decide” coalitions were together in a same coalition which got 1 seat.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The governing PP has initially paid less attention to the elections than its main rival, although its leader, the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, has said that it needs to campaign hard and attract the attention of the public. The head of the PP list enjoys long experience and big expertise on EU affairs (Miguel Arias Cañete has been Minister of Agriculture twice, 2000-04 and 2011-14; MEP during nearly 15 years, from 1986 to 1999 and chair of the EU Affairs Committee in the national parliament from 2008 to 2011). However, he was chosen in the very last minute, following Rajoy's traditional tactic of waiting and waiting until he decides. Mr. Arias Cañete is also constantly mentioned as the most feasible candidate for the post of Spanish Commissioner after autumn 2014, so he will probably not be the leader of the PP delegation in Brussels, leaving that position to his deputy, Esteban González Pons. The rest of the list<sup>244</sup> is composed of 52 candidates, 23 of whom have already participated in the previous elections, demonstrating a combination of continuity and renewal. Some of the new candidates in the list also enjoy expertise in European affairs, such as Ramón Luis Valcárcel, former President of the Committee of the Regions.

<sup>244</sup> See the PP's list to the European Parliament: [www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/candidatura-pp-las-elecciones-al-parlamento-europeo](http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/candidatura-pp-las-elecciones-al-parlamento-europeo)

The PSOE, the main opposition party, is suffering from both an internal crisis and a crisis of confidence from the electorate. Thus, the Socialists approach these elections as an opportunity to change course and approach the European Parliament in view of the upcoming general elections next year, as reflected in one of the mottos of the campaign: “The change starts from Europe.” The party has chosen Elena Valenciano, a former MEP and currently number two in the party, as its leader in the elections. Given the party’s commitment to gender balance, 27 women and 27 men make up its lists with a balance between young and more experienced candidates. The combination between candidates with a more national or European profile and between new candidates and those who are already MEPs is quite similar in the PP.

Two other significant parties are expected to increase exponentially their share of the vote: the left-wing Plural Left (IU-ICV) and the centrist Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD). Both share the ambition to break the hegemony of the PP and PSOE, with leaders of their lists having already acquired experience in the European Parliament: Willy Meyer (IU)<sup>245</sup> and Francisco Sosa Wagner (UPyD).<sup>246</sup> Their ideologies differ, however, as Plural Left MEPs will adhere to the Party of the European Left (the Catalan MEP of ICV will join the European Green Party), while UPyD will try to enter the ALDE liberal group.

Peripheral nationalist parties are also very important in Spain and, according to the polls, the Catalan nationalists may get 2-4 seats and the Basque 1-2. However, since the electoral system for EP elections treats the whole country as a single constituency, their ability to win seats is weaker. The latest polls indicate that the moderate nationalist Coalition for Europe (whose leader is the active MEP Ramón Tremosa<sup>247</sup>) may secure two to three seats. Two more radical nationalist coalitions whose candidates lack previous political experience on Europe will participate in the elections. Both of them are favoured to obtain some representation: the Catalan “L’Esquerra pel Dret a Decidir”, which ironically translates into English as: “Left for the Right to Decide”) is basically supported by the “Esquerra Republicana” party (ERC)<sup>248</sup> and the “The People decide” coalition is led by the Basque EH-Bildu, with the Galician BNG as junior partner.

Finally, another four small candidacies may obtain one seat each: i) the centrist and anti-nationalist “Citizens” party, ii) the green and regionalist coalition “European Spring”, iii) the left-wing movement “We Can” and iv) the conservative VOX, created by dissidents of the PP.

### **Trying, unsuccessfully and without commitment, to have a truly European campaign**

As said, the traditional cleavages in Spain are left-right and centre-periphery, without space for a pro- or anti-EU division, even now after the eurozone crisis. There is no real questioning of the European identity for a country that until the late 1970s suffered a prolonged and isolationist dictatorship. As a consequence of that experience, and also because of the majoritarian features of the Spanish democracy, populism does not enjoy much support.

However, this does not mean that a truly supranational vision exists in Spanish politics. On the contrary, even if some interesting steps have been taken to promote a real European debate and more participation in the elections (also from the civil society<sup>249</sup>), the campaign has lacked a

<sup>245</sup> The complete list of the Plural Left can be found at [www.izquierda-unida.es/europeas2014/listacompleta](http://www.izquierda-unida.es/europeas2014/listacompleta)

<sup>246</sup> The list of the UPyD list can be found at [www.upyd.es/contenidos/ficheros/111741](http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/ficheros/111741)

<sup>247</sup> <http://tremosa.cat/>

<sup>248</sup> [www.esquerra.cat/documents/eu2014-proposta-llistes-barcelona.pdf](http://www.esquerra.cat/documents/eu2014-proposta-llistes-barcelona.pdf)

<sup>249</sup> Initiatives such as CC/Europa (<http://cceuropa.net/>) and Sexy Europe (<http://www.sexyeurope.eu/es/>) can be mentioned in the context of the European elections.

real impulse on EU issues in Spain. The strategies of the parties have responded to the (correct) idea that citizens in Spain usually vote on the basis of national issues.<sup>250</sup> Therefore, candidates tend to frame the debates on the EP elections in terms of domestic politics. One example is the little follow-up by the national parties and media of the debates between the top European candidates, Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP candidate for the president the European Commission) and Martin Schulz (PES candidate) on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Nor was much attention paid to the debates among the candidates of the five main families (EPP, PES, ALDE, Greens and the European Left), which took place on April 28<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup>.

Nevertheless, some parties are talking even less about Europe than others. The smallest ones such as VOX, “We can”, or “Citizens” are absolutely focused on national issues and are simply using these elections in order to become better known before the national elections are held next year. Something similar can be said of the peripheral nationalist parties (in Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia), which take advantage of the elections as a tool for their sub-national ambitions and causes which they intend to internationalise. Notwithstanding this, the moderate Coalition for Europe is formed by three parties with deep roots in pan-European parties (Catalan CDC in ALDE party, Basque PNV in European Democratic Party and Catalan UDC in the EPP).

The centrist Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD) is more relevant because it is predicted in the polls to obtain at least three seats and it has realised that joining a EP political group is necessary to be more influential (despite its pro-European narrative, the only MEP of UPyD from 2009 to 2014 was not attached to any EP political group). The party has a supranational federal platform<sup>251</sup> and highlights the necessity of delegating more competences from the member states to Brussels in order to advance towards a real political union. This discourse mirrors its federalist anti-nationalist position in Spain, but this is paradoxically a reason why it is going to be difficult to upgrade its EU position within the European centrist family. Its goal now is to join the liberal and democrat ALDE alliance but this may be obstructed by the fact that Catalan and Basque nationalists, hostile to UPyD, also belong to that group.

Regarding United Left, the main partner of the Plural Left coalition (with the Catalan ICV, which is part of the European Greens), it must be said that it is expected to become the third party on the ballot. This candidature is undoubtedly the more critical towards the current EU, but it is still not widely considered to be eurosceptic or europhobe. Although it is a member of the European Left Party and supports Alexis Tsipras as candidate for the European Commission, it is also more inclined to talk about national issues than European matters.

The two mainstream parties tend to think more in European terms, but they do not always communicate that to the public. A debate between the heads of their lists (Arias Cañete and Elena Valenciano) took place on May 15<sup>th</sup> but domestic issues dominated the discussion. In the case of the Popular Party, it may be worth mentioning the practical non-existence of its European candidate to become President of the Commission in the campaign: Jean Claude Juncker will spend only one day in Spain, as compared to two in Portugal and six in Germany.<sup>252</sup> The PP is much more focused on underlining the idea of the economic recovery, claiming that Spain is now better than when they arrived to office in late 2011, highlighting their triumph and waving the flag of fear in case the Socialists return to power. Actually, given that all polls predict a tight result between the PP and the Socialists, it seems more interested in attacking the PSOE than in making European proposals.

<sup>250</sup> As a matter of fact, in the last four elections to the EP, between 45 and 60% of the voters have decided their vote taking into account issues related to Spain rather than the EU: <http://politikon.es/2014/03/20/politizar-europa-buena-suerte/>

<sup>251</sup> See their programme for the elections: [www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/508/112233-Programa de UPyD para las Elecciones al Parlamento Europeo 2014](http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/508/112233-Programa%20de%20UPyD%20para%20las%20Elecciones%20al%20Parlamento%20Europeo%202014)

<sup>252</sup> [www.elboletin.com/internacional/97331/juncker-ignora-rajoy-espana.html](http://www.elboletin.com/internacional/97331/juncker-ignora-rajoy-espana.html)



Last but not least, the PSOE is paradoxically alternating both a national discourse and a European one. The leader of the party in these elections, Elena Valenciano, does not hesitate to reply or attack her PP opponent, and she insists on bringing national issues such as abortion to a European level. The party considers these elections as the first step to a change in the national government in the elections of 2015. On the other hand, the Socialists are making a noteworthy effort to communicate the importance of the elections and to talk openly about EU issues such as immigration, social rights, a European minimum wage or the need to fight against unemployment and poverty.

### **The electoral programmes and the closeness of Spanish parties to their EU affiliation**

Although there is a shared view in all Spanish parties that the country's economic policy should shift from austerity to stimulus measures, there is a difference between the PP, which considers that sacrifice was necessary, and the left-wing parties, which reject this past. That is the reason why the PP is underlining that what is now at stake is the future (see slogans at Table 8). Before presenting the electoral programme,<sup>253</sup> the party opened an initiative to encourage its voters to participate in its drafting.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, and similar to the political manifesto of the EPP at European level,<sup>255</sup> the programme is short and vague. The PP is now campaigning with two main axes: i) The EU is a safe place right now because of the austerity measures taken in all these years (the best evidence of support for these measures was the election of Mr Juncker, former President of the Eurogroup, as the candidate of the EPP to be President of the European Commission), and ii) Spain is much better now than before and the crisis is starting to come to an end, so voters should not allow the Socialists to return to power and ruin it.

For its part, the Spanish Social Democrat Party, the PSOE, finds itself very comfortable not only with the manifesto<sup>256</sup> of its political alliance, the Party of European Socialists (or PES), but also with Martin Schulz as the candidate for President of the European Commission. Mr. Schulz has proved to be an energetic President of the European Parliament and now tries to convince voters of the necessity of a change in the Commission. Schulz was already in Spain last March 30<sup>th</sup> for the campaign launch of PSOE<sup>257</sup> and will be again on May 11<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>258</sup> The party has launched a website<sup>259</sup> with detailed information about the PES manifesto and the political statement<sup>260</sup> of the party, in line with all 10 proposals of the manifesto: 1) Jobs first; 2) Relaunch the economy; 3) Putting the financial sector at the service of the citizens and real economy; 4) Social Europe; 5) Union of equality and women's rights; 6) Union of diversity; 7) A safe and healthy life for all; 8) More democratisation and participation; 9) Green Europe; and 10) Promoting Europe's influence in the world.

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<sup>253</sup> [www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa\\_electoral\\_europeas\\_2014.pdf](http://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa_electoral_europeas_2014.pdf)

<sup>254</sup> [www.pp.es/en140](http://www.pp.es/en140)

<sup>255</sup> [www.epin.org/new/files/EPP-Manifesto.pdf](http://www.epin.org/new/files/EPP-Manifesto.pdf)

<sup>256</sup> [www.epin.org/new/files/pes\\_manifesto-adopted\\_by\\_the\\_pes\\_election\\_congress\\_en.pdf](http://www.epin.org/new/files/pes_manifesto-adopted_by_the_pes_election_congress_en.pdf)

<sup>257</sup> [www.martin-schulz.eu/en/#campaign](http://www.martin-schulz.eu/en/#campaign)

<sup>258</sup> [www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20140418/54405922342/martin-schulz-apoyara-al-psc-en-barcelona-cuatro-dias-antes-de-las-europeas.html](http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20140418/54405922342/martin-schulz-apoyara-al-psc-en-barcelona-cuatro-dias-antes-de-las-europeas.html)

<sup>259</sup> <http://europeas2014.psoe.es/inicio>

<sup>260</sup> <http://europeas2014.psoe.es/doc/DeclaracionPolitica.pdf>

Table 8. Political slogans

Spanish party or coalition	Political slogan
People's Party –PP	<i>“What is at stake is the future”</i>
Socialist Party – PSOE	<i>“You move Europe”</i> <i>(“Let's change Europe, let's stop Rajoy” in Catalonia)</i>
Plural Left	<i>“Power of the People”</i> <i>(“Our rights, our dignity” in Catalonia)</i>
Union, Progress and Democracy – UPyD	<i>“Union makes strength”</i>

As for the third most important group in the European Parliament, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe<sup>261</sup> (or ALDE) is so far only formed in Spain by nationalists: Catalan (CDC, within the ALDE party) and Basque (PNV, within the European Democratic Party). While CDC is a more centrist and liberal party, PNV is more conservative and more inclined to social issues. Nevertheless, both parties aspire to the statehood of Catalonia and the Basque Country.

The Greens have also a common manifesto for all its members,<sup>262</sup> whose most important actions are the creation of a more democratic and green European Union, a different role in the world for the EU and the necessity of promoting health and sustainability. ICV (the junior partner of Plural Left) and the green-regionalist “European Spring” coalition are the Spanish members of the alliance and fully subscribe to the manifesto. The Greens will probably form a political group in the EP with the regionalist and nationalist European Free Alliance, which claims in its manifesto<sup>263</sup> that “it's time for self-determination for all the peoples of Europe”, and whose strongest Spanish party is the Republican Left of Catalonia (the main partner of the “Left for the Right to Decide” coalition).

The Party of the European Left, which has chosen the Greek opposition leader Alexis Tsipras as its candidate for European Commission President, is polling between the third and fourth position at European level. If it finally reaches the third position, it will probably have an important meaning for the upcoming period, pushing for their basic political priorities: a democratic reorganisation of Europe, the end to austerity, to set in motion the ecological transformation of production and to reform the European immigration framework.<sup>264</sup> The United Left, the representative party in Spain of the Party of the European Left, claims “the crisis is the result of the policies applied in the last years”, notably neoliberal. Its programme<sup>265</sup> is very critical of both the EPP and the PES, which are considered by United Left as the two sides of the same coin. The Spanish version of that manifesto keeps the same priorities, but seen from a more national perspective.

And finally, no Spanish parties are members of the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists. As said before, the eurosceptic movement has no roots in Spain.

<sup>261</sup> See manifesto at [www.aldeparty.eu/sites/eldr/files/news/10204/2014\\_alde\\_party\\_manifesto.pdf](http://www.aldeparty.eu/sites/eldr/files/news/10204/2014_alde_party_manifesto.pdf)

<sup>262</sup> <http://europeangreens.eu/content/egp-manifesto>

<sup>263</sup> See [www.e-f-a.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/EFA\\_3263\\_manifesto\\_ENG\\_230114.pdf](http://www.e-f-a.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/EFA_3263_manifesto_ENG_230114.pdf)

<sup>264</sup> <http://european-left.org/positions/news-archive/programatic-declaration-alexis-tsipras-my-candidacy-mandate-hope-and-change>

<sup>265</sup> [www.izquierda-unida.es/sites/default/files/doc/Programa\\_Europeas2014.pdf](http://www.izquierda-unida.es/sites/default/files/doc/Programa_Europeas2014.pdf)



## Forecast for the elections

One of the main problems in strengthening the future legitimacy of the European Parliament is the increasingly low turnout in the elections. For that reason, even if the EP can state that it represents the interests of all European citizens as the only directly elected EU institution, it may be in a weak position vis-à-vis the EU Council. The member states can claim that national elections, from which they derive their political legitimacy, attract a much higher rate of participation. It does not seem that the results will improve this time round either, and polls on the likely turnout in Spain are worrying. According to the latest poll for Metroscopia, the turnout in Spain will reach only 43%,<sup>266</sup> which is below the 45% in 2009, a poor figure but still above the average of the European Union.

*Table 9. The evolution of turnout in the Spanish EP elections*

1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	Predicted 2014
54.7%	59.1%	63.1%	45.1%	44.9%	40%-43%

Regarding the general results, a close race is expected between the governing PP (which also won the previous EP elections in 2009) and the PSOE. In any event, the average polls shown in Table 1 and the latest predictions by Pollwatch<sup>267</sup> indicate a scenario with a small victory for PP, winning 19 seats for the EP (PSOE 17) and 32% of the share (PSOE almost 30%). With this result, the PP would be the second-largest party in the future EPP group (after the German CDU/CSU and ahead of French, Polish and Italian mainstream centre-right parties), while the PSOE would be the fourth in the Social Democrat S&D group if the PES joins again with the Italian democrats (the fourth after the German Social Democrats, the Italian democrats and the British Labour but well ahead of the governing French “Parti socialiste”). The EPP and the Socialists are nearly tied with a prediction of 210-220 MEPs each.

Pollwatch also foresees a very good result for the leftists of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left all around Europe, which may increase their number of seats from 35 to 51. Latest polls suggest that the Spanish party of the coalition, United Left, would be –with 6 MEPs – the third most important in the group, only behind the Germans of “Die Linke” and Greeks of “Syriza”.

As noted above, the centrist Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD) is also slated to make substantial gains, from one MEP seat to three or four, gaining some of the seats lost by the PP and PSOE. UPyD would like to join a political group in the EP and is looking to ALDE (the future third political group according to Pollwatch) as the logical choice. However, as already noted, there are some difficulties in joining that group. ALDE group hosts Catalan and Basque nationalist parties, while UPyD is known for its fierce opposition to peripheral nationalism and, therefore, it is complicated to think of a scenario in which the three parties would co-habitate.

The other parties that are likely to reach representation in the EP are probably the European Free Alliance (the Catalan Republican Left or the Basque EH-Bildu), which operates together with the European Green Party (where Catalan ICV, the junior partner of United Left in the same coalition, will have one seat). The last parties that may reach representation are “Citizens”, the coalition “European Spring”, “We can” party and “Vox”.

The “Citizens” party has its roots in Catalonia (where some polls give them third place at the moment, even better than PP and PSOE), but it is now growing faster in the rest of the country.

<sup>266</sup> [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/04/25/actualidad/1398454628\\_995709.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/04/25/actualidad/1398454628_995709.html)

<sup>267</sup> [www.electio2014.eu/pollsandscenarios/polls](http://www.electio2014.eu/pollsandscenarios/polls)

They have a clear position against the independence of Catalonia from Spain and call themselves progressives, but far from the traditional left-right cleavage. They still haven't decided whether they are going to be part of one political group or another, but they claim that they will work for the creation of the United States of Europe, increased transparency of the institutions and positioning the citizen at the centre of the European project.<sup>268</sup>

The “European Spring” coalition is currently polling about 3% of the votes and may reach thus one MEP. This coalition wants to “rescue people and not banks” and end with the “austericide”. At the same time, they stand for<sup>269</sup> fostering democracy and sustainability. In case they win the seat, they would join the Green party. The other options such as VOX (rightist party, led by Alejo Vidal Quadras, former PP member and still Vice President of the EP) or “We Can” (a leftist party, led by Pablo Iglesias, a lecturer in the Spanish University and current TV star) may have enough support to enter the European Parliament as well, but they do not have any European links.

To sum up, support for the two main Spanish parties is losing ground. Despite that fact that both major parties are going to be the first and second in the elections, they are surely going to gain much less support than in 2009, with a joint share of around 60-65%, whereas five years ago it was more than 80%. Nevertheless, the Spanish party system seems quite resilient since both PP and PSOE are still far away from their competitors. Furthermore, it cannot be argued this time that the result will be artificially favouring a two-party system as a result of the majoritarian bias of the Spanish electoral law. Ultimately, in elections to the EP there is only a single constituency (compared to 52 in the general elections) and no legal threshold, which increases the proportionality of the system favouring smaller parties.

## Conclusions

The imminent elections to the EP have been characterised as being significantly different from previous rounds. Some analysts have even called them “historical”. They are the first to be held after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which empowers the Parliament vis-à-vis not only legislation but also the appointment of the President of the Commission after the most important parliamentary groups have nominated their candidates to the position. Nevertheless, it seems highly unlikely that this innovation will result in increased participation by the citizens or spawn a campaign that focuses on truly European rather than domestic issues.

The last Eurobarometer highlighted the deep lack of knowledge about and interest on the part of EU citizens in what the European Union does and how it affects people's daily lives. In Spain, the results are even worse than in the EU as a whole. That is reflected in the European campaign of the parties, which promote a debate in domestic terms, and not in European ones. First, the ruling PP has envisaged the elections as a kind of plebiscite to endorse the attempts of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to show that macroeconomic improvement will soon be reflected in the day-to-day lives of Spain's citizens. Secondly, the PSOE has opposed the austerity policies of the last two-and-a-half years and, thus, looks on the elections, in fact, as an opportunity to obtain a first ballot before the national elections to be held in 2015. For their part, the smaller parties (especially the left-wing coalition IU-ICV and the centrist UPyD, but also other minor candidatures) have primarily adopted an approach of assigning shared responsibility to PSOE and the PP for the gloomy economic and political situation of Spain. Also at the regional level, and most notably in Catalonia where centrifugal tensions run high owing to the crisis, the peripheral nationalists regard these elections as a test for their own efforts to revisit profoundly

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<sup>268</sup> <http://europa-cs.org/>

<sup>269</sup> <http://primaveraeuropea.eu/manifesto>

the current relationship with the centre and even to call for an independence referendum in the near future.

After May, the levels of support for the major parties will decrease and it will be more difficult to consider Spain as an example of the two-party system. But even if the worst-case scenario of the opinion polls materialises, PP and PSOE will retain at least 60% of the votes (and the most accurate projections suggest up to 65%). Thus, we will not witness a dramatic shift towards a new multi-party system. It is true that several smaller parties will significantly improve their share of the vote and the number of seats but much less than other third countries, such as Le Pen's National Front in France or Nigel Farage's UKIP in the United Kingdom, which might even snatch victory from the mainstream parties. In notable contrast with the likely outcome in other EU member states, eurosceptic or europhobe parties will not gain any seats in the Spanish delegation to the EP. In short, Spain will not experience dramatic changes in its political landscape this time round.

# Elections to the European Parliament in the United Kingdom: A pro versus anti-EU campaign

Vilde Renman\*

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## Introduction

This year's elections to the European Parliament (EP) are expected to be different from previous ones because they are taking place in the wake of the euro crisis and because a new EP initiative means voters can exercise a bigger role in determining who the next President of the European Commission will be. These factors are expected to incentivise citizens to go to the ballot box in May, but could also mean that a strong surge in populist parties with eurosceptic leanings will be witnessed across Europe following the elections.

The United Kingdom is facing the European elections in the context of a particular development that is likely to positively affect voter turnout and have an impact on voting choice, namely the possibility of the country voting in an in/out referendum on EU membership. The European Union (EU) has become one of the most potent voting issues, both for the upcoming European elections as well as for the 2015 general election, following the announcement by David Cameron on January 23<sup>rd</sup> last year that an in/out referendum would be held in 2017 if he is re-elected as prime minister. This promise opened up never-ending discussions among all sections of British society about the pros and cons of EU membership and has led to the EU being debated in the media and by prominent politicians on nearly a daily basis. The British case therefore stands apart from other member states (although it shares many of the eurosceptic traits found in many countries, notably France and the Netherlands) because it is the only country that is having a serious debate on whether to stay in or leave the EU altogether.

This paper will analyse the run-up to the elections to the EP in the UK against the backdrop of the 'British question', aiming to show how British parties, which have divided themselves into pro- and anti-EU camps, seem more interested in using the potency of this debate to launch their own political campaigns for next year's general election instead of discussing substantial EU issues as part of their campaigns for the European elections. The parties that will be examined are the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), as these four parties currently hold nearly 90% of the total 73 EP seats belonging to the UK<sup>270</sup> and are the parties that will determine the outcome of the EP election in the UK this year. Although there are a number of smaller parties also putting forward MEP candidates,<sup>271</sup> these are expected to gain fewer than two seats (if any at all).

First, the EP elections in the UK will be contextualised. Following this, the 'British question' will be discussed, highlighting how it has necessitated all parties to clearly position themselves on this issue and how it has set the scene for their election campaigns. This will then be linked

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<sup>270</sup> BBC News (2009), "European Election 2009: UK Results", 8 June ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion\\_999999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion_999999.stm)).

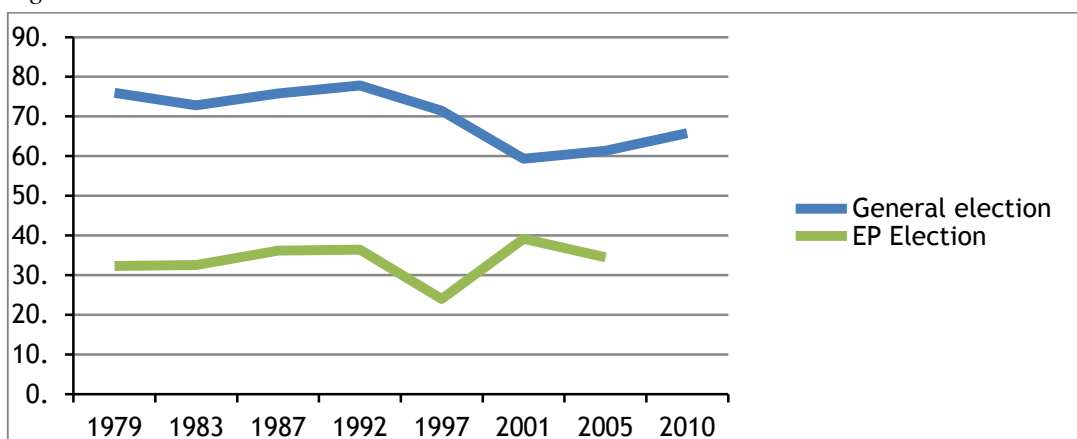
<sup>271</sup> Green Party, Scottish National Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Féin, Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales, British National Party, Ulster Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party (PollWatch 2014, [www.electio2014.eu/fr/pollsandsenarios/polls#country](http://www.electio2014.eu/fr/pollsandsenarios/polls#country)).

to a clear impact on the current polls and predictions of the electoral outcome and feed into the following section looking at how the UK EP election is taking shape as a pro- versus anti-EU campaign. Finally, some concluding remarks on how the election result will impact both the national and EP political landscape will be made.

## The UK elections to the European parliament in context

Local elections in the UK take place on a yearly basis, and were scheduled to be held on May 1<sup>st</sup> this year. However, in June last year a proposal calling for the local elections to be moved to May 22<sup>nd</sup> in order to coincide with the European elections was approved. The main argument for why this would benefit voters was that holding two sets of elections within a three-week period would cause a lot of inconvenience. Voter turnout in European elections has been notoriously low and the mainstream Westminster parties typically fare better in general elections compared to local and European ones, leading to doubts over whether this change in voting date will lead to a higher number of voters turning up at the ballot box and thereby minimise the divide between so-called first- and second-order elections. The Commission's post-electoral survey in 2009 found that the top four reasons for British voter turnout being one of the lowest in the EU are that the electorate feels a general lack of trust in politics, that they are not interested in politics as such, that they usually do not vote in any type of election, and that they feel too busy to vote. The last reason stands out in particular when compared with other member states.<sup>272</sup> However, in some instances voter turnout in EP elections improves when they are held simultaneously with either national or regional elections.<sup>273</sup> This, alongside the fact that voters in the UK, as in many other member states, are expected to want to show their dissatisfaction with the current political climate and how the EU works, might therefore have a positive impact on voter turnout in the May elections.

Figure 6. UK voter turnout over time in national and EP elections



Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).<sup>274</sup>

In 11 out of the 12 European electoral regions (East Midlands, East of England, London, North East, North West, Scotland, South East, South West, Wales, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the

<sup>272</sup> S. Ayres (2014), "European Parliament Elections: Turnout trends, 1979-2009", House of Commons Library ([www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06865.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06865.pdf)).

<sup>273</sup> House of Commons (2009), "European Parliament Elections 2009", Research Paper 09/53 ([www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2009/rp09-053.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2009/rp09-053.pdf)).

<sup>274</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance - International IDEA ([www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=GB](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=GB)).

Humber), the selection of MEPs starts with the national parties putting forward closed candidate lists. The electorate in England, Scotland and Wales can vote either for one of the lists or for a single candidate standing as an “independent” via proportional representation, while in Northern Ireland one running candidate per party is presented, later elected via a single transferable vote. Each constituency, depending on its size, elects between three and ten MEPs. The challenge for British parties is therefore to secure enough seats from the different regions that will then be translated into seats at the EP.

Looking at this year’s electoral lists, it is clear that there are differences across the parties in terms of the MEP candidates having a European political background or not. In almost every constituency, the Conservatives’ top candidates are MEPs running for re-election. In the complete list, the Conservatives have a much higher overall number of candidates who are MEPs compared with the other parties. In the instances where they are not an MEP, they still have a solid background in European affairs, often having worked in national government European Committees or as political advisors in the EP. This contrasts sharply with UKIP’s candidates; only half of their top candidates are current or former MEPs. The rest lack any experience working directly with EU affairs, with their only political viability coming from working for the party at the regional level. The lists from Labour and the Liberal Democrats are both fairly moderate in terms of the numbers of all candidates who are MEPs, but almost all of their top candidates are. The lists for all parties share the trait of not consisting of many (if any) candidates coming from high-profile national politics. This can best be explained by the general sentiment amongst UK politicians that moving to the EP would be a ‘step down’ from Westminster. A particular feature this year is that all three current British chairpersons of EP Committees are standing down due to retirement.

### The ‘British Question’ – setting the scene for both the national and European elections

The debate leading up to the election day will most certainly revolve around the EU question. Following Cameron’s speech in January last year, there has been no option for prominent UK politicians *not* to do so. The major criticisms being voiced against the EU are the cost imposed upon the UK by being a member, the EU exercising too much regulatory power over UK businesses, the freedom of movement leading to a mass influx of immigration, and the EU lacking a general sense of democracy. Defenders of EU membership point to the necessity for countries to work together in order to ‘survive’ economically in the modern world and reject the notion of the EU’s power being too great.

Nevertheless, the latest YouGov survey suggests that, with a small majority, the British people would vote to remain in the EU if a referendum were held today. Forty-two percent of respondents said they would vote to remain in the EU, while 37% said they would vote to leave. The figures have changed compared to a year ago, when 36% supported remaining in the EU and 43% were against.<sup>275</sup> This polling result marks the first time since Cameron’s EU speech that a majority is in favour of staying in the EU, yet the anti-EU rhetoric that has come to occupy most of the British political space during the past year still seems to be setting the tone for the ongoing election campaigns. However, Cameron’s speech did not only feed into the anti-EU mantra, but also stirred up arguments from the pro-EU camp. Gauging the stance of the main parties towards the EU helps to understand both their national and European campaign strategies, as well as their respective popularity or otherwise amongst voters.

The stance of the **Conservatives** has been clear from the onset, with Cameron presenting his vision for a renegotiated relationship between the UK and EU. He maintains that he is not

<sup>275</sup> YouGov 2014 ([http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/shoqjssafd/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Europe-Referendum-070414.pdf](http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/shoqjssafd/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Europe-Referendum-070414.pdf)).



pessimistic about EU membership in itself, but that the relationship between the two entities needs to be renegotiated. Using the main line of argument that people no longer have faith in the EU and that its institutions have lost legitimacy, his idea of letting the British people vote on whether or not they want to remain in the EU is almost a quest for true democracy and not simply a renegotiation of, for example, immigration and trade rules.<sup>276</sup> The growing Conservative desire for reform has been known for a long time in the EP, and the party left the European People's Party (EPP) to form the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) following the EP elections in 2009. In the run-up to this year's EP elections, the party has renounced the new EP initiative whereby all political groups in the EP are to present a common candidate for the position of next president of the Commission on the grounds that this would boost federalism in Europe where, according to the Conservatives, there is no such thing as a single electorate. They further claimed that this EP initiative does not substantially increase the power of voters since the Council will maintain the same rights in choosing the next Commission president as it has always had. This anti-federalist sentiment is often echoed in general by the Conservatives when it comes to their view on Europe.

The **Labour Party**, the main opposition to the Conservatives, has unsurprisingly positioned itself as pro-European. Party leader Ed Miliband has ruled out a referendum on EU membership, a move that some regarded as risky in the UK's current political climate. Although his arguments as to why there is no need for a referendum are fairly straightforward (the EU does not have an excessive amount of power impacting the UK and a mass surge in its current power in the years to come looks very unlikely, alongside his perceived need to focus firstly on national issues such as strengthening the healthcare system and creating more jobs), they have also angered the party's more eurosceptic MPs who see this stance as potentially leading to a loss of voters.<sup>277</sup> But Labour has not completely shied away from showing their dissatisfaction with the federalist tendencies of the EU; the party openly refused to support Martin Shulz as candidate for the position of next Commission president and stated that they do not believe he represents the views of their party. There was even speculation over whether Labour would leave the PES faction altogether. This pragmatic approach might win over some voters who are not generically eurosceptic but who nevertheless appreciate politicians 'standing up to Brussels'.

The strongest pro-EU camp remains concentrated in the **Liberal Democrats** and their party leader Nick Clegg. They see no need for an in/out referendum and have not jumped on the EU-critical bandwagon sweeping through the political and media landscape of the UK. The very idea of holding a referendum of this sort is, according to the party, foolish, and they have made no attempts to hide the fact that on this particular topic, they stand in clear contrast to their Conservative coalition government partners. Although the Liberal Democrats originally supported Olli Rehn as ALDE candidate for the role of next Commission president and the party argued internally over endorsing Guy Verhofstadt instead, they eventually voted along with the majority of ALDE party members in support of the former Belgian prime minister.

**UKIP** has not dramatically changed its stance towards the EU following Cameron's speech. They maintain the same eurosceptic ideology as at the outset of the party in 1993, claiming that what the UK needs is an immediate exit from the EU. Their popularity in the European elections stems from their promise that they will argue for the UK leaving the Union "from within the

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<sup>276</sup> *Spiegel Online International* (2013), "EU Speech: Cameron Says Britain to Hold 'In or Out' Referendum in 2017", 23 January ([www.spiegel.de/international/europe/british-prime-minister-david-cameron-to-offer-in-out-eu-referendum-a-879175.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/british-prime-minister-david-cameron-to-offer-in-out-eu-referendum-a-879175.html))

<sup>277</sup> D. Hughes and J. Tapsfield (2014), "Ed Miliband rules out EU referendum: Eurosceptics accuse Labour of 'shoddy compromise'", *The Independent*, 12 March ([www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/no-eu-referendum-under-labour-party-eurosceptics-accuse-miliband-of-shoddy-compromise-9186163.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/no-eu-referendum-under-labour-party-eurosceptics-accuse-miliband-of-shoddy-compromise-9186163.html)).



heart of the EU” and their adamant position on this issue has led a number of Conservatives who regard Cameron as not taking a strong enough stance against the EU to swap party loyalty for UKIP. Indeed, many commentators argue that it is due to UKIP that Cameron, after starting to lose the more eurosceptic MPs to Farage, decided to promise a referendum in the first place. UKIP are, however, avoiding aligning themselves too closely with certain eurosceptic parties in Europe. Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, who are hoping to form a new eurosceptic political group in the EP following the elections, have not been able to persuade Farage to join forces with them. The UKIP leader has been wary of coming across as too radical; fearing that working with certain far-right parties in Europe would significantly diminish his political popularity nationally. On April 13th, he appeared at the campaign launch of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, leader of French party Debout La Republique (DLR), in Paris. Farage declared that he had chosen DLR as a political partner in France instead of Front National because the latter is the reason for many linking the notion of euroscepticism with racist and anti-Semitic comments. Farage argued that this is far from being the case, and said that “we need to tell the electors and voters in this and every other country in Europe that euroscepticism, belief in the nation state, belief in having your own currency isn’t extreme – it is the right and democratic thing for us to fight to get back to our countries”.<sup>278</sup> Farage also expelled UKIP councillor candidate Andre Lampitt in late April following his racist comments on social media with the stated motive that such views are not tolerated within the party.

### Forecast for electoral outcome

Currently, the Conservatives are the party with the greatest representation in the EP with 26 seats. This is twice as many as Labour and three times as many as UKIP. The Liberal Democrats follow close behind with 12, with the remaining seven smaller parties holding only between one and two seats.

However, this year’s European elections are expected to stir up the current composition of British MEPs, with the Liberal Democrats likely to lose more than half of their EP seats and the Conservatives to lose many seats to UKIP and Labour, who are both expected to double their seats.

*Table 10. Current and expected EP seat composition*

Party	Group	Seats	Non-attached	PollWatch 2014 seat prediction
Labour	S&D	13		26
Conservatives	ECR	26		17
Lib Dem	ALDE	12		3
UKIP	EFD	8	2	19

Source: European Parliament(<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/search.html?country=GB>) and PollWatch 2014 (<http://www.electio2014.eu/fr/pollsandsenarios/polls#country>).

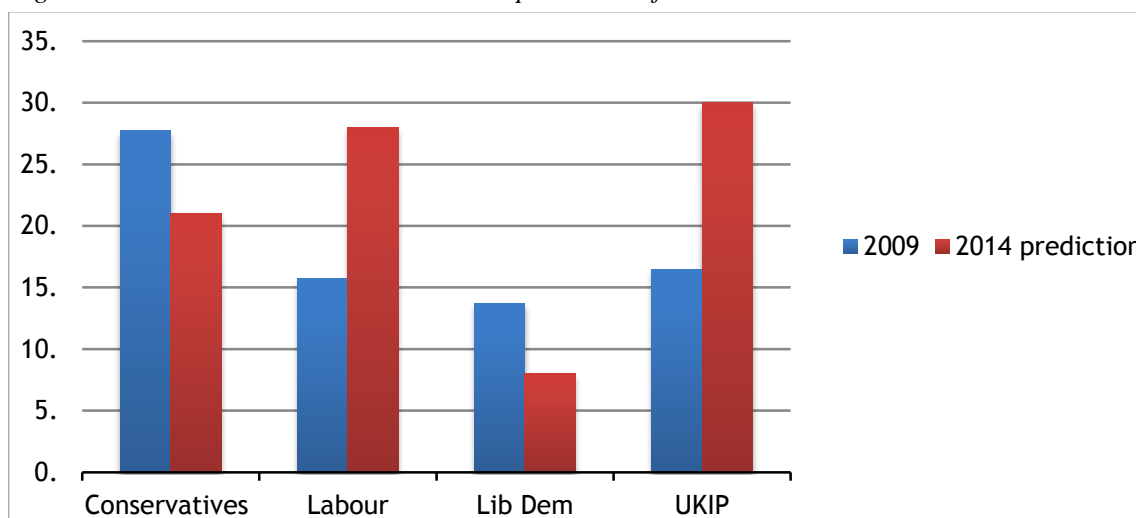
The latest YouGov poll, presented in the *Sunday Times* on April 6<sup>th</sup>, shows that UKIP might receive 34% of the vote (out of those who have claimed they are certain to vote), but PollWatch estimates are lower, predicting 25.3% for the party.<sup>279</sup> The numbers for the remaining parties are

<sup>278</sup> H. Schofield(2014),“UKIP’s Farage finds new French ally”, BBC News, 14 April ([www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-27026805](http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-27026805)).

<sup>279</sup> PollWatch, op.cit.

fairly constant, with the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats polling at around 21%, 30% and 8%, respectively.<sup>280</sup>

Figure 7. UK EP elections 2009 result and predictions for 2014



Source: BBC News, “European Election 2009: UK Results”, 8 June 2009 ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion\\_999999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion_999999.stm)) and ComRes 2014 ([www.comres.co.uk/poll/968/independent-political-poll.htm](http://www.comres.co.uk/poll/968/independent-political-poll.htm)).

The figure above clearly shows that the parties that will lose out on votes in this year’s election compared to 2009 are the current national government incumbents – the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. This supports the commonly used argument that citizens take part in the European elections to cast a vote that “punishes” their current government. Labour and UKIP are therefore in a good position to pick up these protest votes; a position that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats found themselves in during the last election. This year, however, the Liberal Democrats are part of the coalition government and are in a particularly vulnerable position. The Conservatives are facing the same dilemma, and are also lagging behind in the polls partly due to the fact that citizens are showing their dissatisfaction with the current government, but also because of the increase in popularity of both UKIP and Labour. UKIP will undoubtedly pick up many votes precisely because the upcoming elections are *European* and, unlike for the other parties, the EU itself is the essence of their political standpoint.

Since the system of electing MEPs is broadly proportional, securing a seat requires between 7-11% per region. This puts extra pressure on the Liberal Democrats, with their current vote estimate of 8%, to secure electoral support in the constituencies where they are strongest. The other parties will also face the challenge of securing voters’ support across the different electoral regions and are hoping that the fact that the local elections will be held on the same day as the European ones will increase the chance of people actually going to the ballot box, thereby ensuring that the parties receive the votes they need to be represented in the EP. This is definitely the case for the Labour party, who have a massive vote base in the metropolitan London area. Their fear now is that UKIP might be able to overtake their vote base in the Midlands and in the North, adding it to the list of regions where they are already predicted to receive many votes (notably the East, from which 40% of their average vote is expected to

<sup>280</sup> Patrick Wintour (2014), “Ukip is the party with the most reasons to be cheerful ahead of European elections”, *The Guardian*, 10 April ([www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/10/ukip-party-most-reasons-cheerful-ahead-european-elections](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/10/ukip-party-most-reasons-cheerful-ahead-european-elections)).

come).<sup>281</sup> In this sense, UKIP is living up to the image of a party that is stirring up the political order because they are stealing from the Labour party votes that have traditionally been considered as coming from the ‘working class’, and from disillusioned Conservatives the votes of those who do not think their party is taking a strong enough stance towards the EU. For the Conservatives it might not be that bad to come third in the EP elections, but current national polls suggest that the EP result will in fact be a projection for the 2015 national election.

Judging from the current polls, the electoral outcome in the 2015 national election will consist of slightly different numbers but a relatively similar voting tendency to that expected in the May EP elections. Labour is expected to overtake the Conservatives both in the European elections and in the general election. The Liberal Democrats are likely to witness a massive loss of seats both nationally and in the EP, with polls suggesting a fall from 23% to 8% domestically. UKIP is set to double its share of the vote in the European elections, and the same is predicted to happen at home with an increase from 3.1% in the 2010 general election to 14% in 2015.<sup>282</sup> The outcome of the European elections might therefore be an indication of what can be expected in national politics. For UKIP, this has not previously been the case; they have been strong in the European elections but this has never translated into electoral gains at home.

### The pro- versus anti-EU election campaigns

All four parties have now presented their political manifestos for the EP elections. The Conservative manifesto was the first to be released in the middle of April. Although it gives voters the chance to clearly see what policy areas the party is likely to focus on at the European level, it is hard to verify whether all of this will be supported by fellow ECR members in the EP because the group has declined to produce a common manifesto in support of their anti-federalist ideology. This makes it difficult for voters to see whether there is indeed an interconnection between the Conservative manifesto and that of their EP allies. The largest part of the manifesto contains the promise of taking powers back from Brussels and negotiating a new deal for Britain in its relations with the EU, especially regarding cutting the ‘red tape’ for businesses and lowering the tax burden on UK citizens.<sup>283</sup>

The promises made by Cameron in his party’s manifesto look quite moderate next to those of Farage. UKIP held a big public rally in Sheffield on April 22nd to present their manifesto as well as a range of campaign billboards containing strong critique on how foreigners are taking British jobs and how the majority of legislation comes directly from the EU. Since their EP counterpart, EFD, is not a political party but a political group, they have no manifesto to which UKIP’s can be compared. When comparing it with the Conservative manifesto, however, its use of many more populist phrases is striking, including a call on voters to use the May 22<sup>nd</sup> elections as the “EU referendum the other parties have denied you”.<sup>284</sup>

The Liberal Democrats launched their manifesto on April 24th and it contrasts with the above two both in terms of being more pro-EU as well as having a much clearer link between what the Liberal Democrats stand for and how this will be translated at the European level through ALDE. In fact, all of the main points outlined in the ALDE manifesto (addressing the economic challenge, making the EU more accountable and transparent, removing trade obstacles and

<sup>281</sup> *The Guardian*, op. cit. ([www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/10/ukip-party-most-reasons-cheerful-ahead-european-elections](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/10/ukip-party-most-reasons-cheerful-ahead-european-elections)).

<sup>282</sup> YouGov 2014 ([http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus\\_uploads/document/fa4henks2c/YG-Archive-Pol-Sun-results-100414.pdf](http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/fa4henks2c/YG-Archive-Pol-Sun-results-100414.pdf)).

<sup>283</sup> Conservative Party European Election Manifesto 2014 ([www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Downloadable%20Files/MANIFESTO%202014/Large%20Print%20Euro%20Manifesto\\_English.ashx](http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Downloadable%20Files/MANIFESTO%202014/Large%20Print%20Euro%20Manifesto_English.ashx)).

<sup>284</sup> UKIP Manifesto 2014, “Create and Earthquake” (<http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/5308a93901925b5b09000002/attachments/original/1398167812/EuroManifestoMarch.pdf?1398167812>).

making market regulation more effective, creating more jobs, fighting crime and supporting human rights) also appear in the Liberal Democrat's one. During his speech at the launch, Clegg also stated that these elections are so important because they are first European elections where the fundamental question of whether the UK is better off in or out of the Union has been brought up and, unlike the other two party leaders, he urges voters to vote to remain in the EU.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Labour launched their European election campaign, featuring a number of posters directly criticising Farage and the policies UKIP stand for. The party also presented their manifesto, which is very much in tune with that of PES, showing that although Labour have decided not to support Martin Schulz as the candidate for the next Commission president, they are nonetheless in support of the general ideological direction of the socialists in the EP. The overall message of both manifestos is that Europe, as well as the EU, is in need of reform in order to create more jobs and economic growth, with special attention to be paid to youth unemployment. Labour's manifesto also criticises quite extensively the Conservatives, claiming that "Cameron has no clarity about what he is negotiating for, no support from the rest of the EU for his treaty change, and no strategy for achieving this".<sup>285</sup> It also outlines how they are committed to tackling social and economic inequalities as well as strengthening the NHS, aspects that are traditionally associated with the party's domestic political endeavours.

Apart from the political manifestos, the election campaigns of the four parties are revolving around pro- or anti-EU tactics, which has been emphasised in particular during televised debates and speeches. So far, Nigel Farage and Nick Clegg are the only two party leaders to have met in televised debates in which, on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the EU was indeed the main point of discussion. Not surprisingly, the two men represented two opposing views regarding whether membership of the EU is good or bad for the UK, with Farage urging British voters to go to the ballot box in May to "join the people's army" and "topple the establishment who got us into this mess", and Clegg claiming that he will "do everything [he] can to make sure that we remain part of the European Union because that is how we protect the Britain we love".<sup>286</sup> Farage was declared the winner and the Liberal Democrats fell slightly in the polls following the debate. Cameron, who declined to participate, did not comment afterwards on who he regarded as being the winner and loser, but claimed on the BBC Breakfast Show that both party leaders are wrong when it comes to questions regarding Europe:

Nick thinks there is nothing wrong with Europe and we should not have a referendum. Nigel thinks there is nothing right with Europe and we should just get out and leave. They are both wrong. The right answer is to be tough for Britain, renegotiate, get a better deal, and then give people the choice in an in/out referendum. That's what I will do if I'm Prime Minister after the next election. That's what Britain needs and it's what people want: a proper choice for real change in Europe. And that is what these European elections should be about too.<sup>287</sup>

Before the debate, Clegg expressed surprise at the decision of both Cameron and Miliband not to take part in the debate, and during the launch of his manifesto a few weeks later suggested that both are avoiding open debates on the EU because they are scared of losing voters to UKIP. Cameron is also thought to be deliberately avoiding such debates as he did not do well in them during the 2010 general election campaign. Miliband, on the other hand, has renounced the idea of debating with Farage, stating that he is only interested in debating with Cameron, while critics have pointed out that Miliband seems to be deliberately avoiding discussing the EU altogether.

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<sup>285</sup> The Labour Party European Manifesto

([www.yourbritain.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/LABOUR\\_PARTY\\_euro\\_manifesto.pdf](http://www.yourbritain.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/LABOUR_PARTY_euro_manifesto.pdf)).

<sup>286</sup> BBC News (2014), "Cameron: Clegg and Farage on 'extremes' of EU debate", 3 April ([www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-26865692](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-26865692)).

<sup>287</sup> BBC News, op. cit.

The potential for the EU to be hot electoral question is strong, yet a campaign for the European elections *per se* remains absent. The websites of the main political parties contain little or no information about the upcoming European elections. On the other hand, they provide thorough campaign material for the 2015 general election, with the question whether to stay in or leave the EU often being raised. This further strengthens the observation that UK parties seem to be using the European elections rallies to lay the foundation of what they consider to be the ‘real’ election, namely that taking place nationally a year later. Both Cameron and Miliband, leaders of the two mainstream parties that will battle it out in 2015, are apparently shying away from making comments as strong as, and participating in debates over the EU with, Farage and Clegg in order not to lose popularity ahead of the general election. The problem with this tactic is that it gives more visibility to the eurosceptic UKIP, who are clearly not afraid to make their arguments heard. Labour are undoubtedly more moderate than their rivals when it comes to discussing the EU, but the fact that they have nonetheless demanded change in the EU has helped them to win over voters who regard Cameron’s politics as a bit too risky and not well thought-through, and UKIP as too radical.

## Conclusion

This year’s EP elections are turning into a referendum on the EU and the eurosceptic parties are expected to make big gains, both in the UK and in other member states. With UKIP as the forerunner in the election campaign, an increased prominence of the EFD in the EP following the elections can be expected, bolstered by potential new members from other national eurosceptic parties, while the ECR is likely to become one of the smaller groups in the EP. This means that concerns over the forthcoming political landscape in the EP are well founded; new eurosceptic alliances may be formed and make it more difficult for the mainstream parties to operate as they have up to now.

The UK should also be concerned about how their national political scene could develop. It is not only the EP but also Westminster that is likely to be shaken up when UKIP makes big gains, and this will have consequences for all parties. The only UK party actively standing up to the eurosceptic discourse that has hijacked British politics is the Liberal Democrats, but as we have seen they are set to lose a majority of their seats at the EP and will not prove popular in the national election either.

In order to stop euroscepticism taking over the political orientation of the EP, mainstream parties need to avoid the temptation of pleasing voters by engaging in a more eurosceptic rhetoric. However, in the British case, this seems unlikely as both Labour and the Conservatives are responding to the anti-EU sentiments of their citizens and do not dare make any political errors ahead of the general election in 2015. The left-right political split remains visible in terms of domestic politics, and to some extent helps explain why Labour, with their promise of strengthening the economic and social dimension for citizens, are leading the polls, but in the EP elections it is more plausible that this will be overshadowed by the EU question at large. This is made clear – not least by the fact that the Labour Party are unlikely to vote for Martin Schulz if the Socialists win the EP elections, despite sharing their overall political ideology. Further complications could arise if the UK’s ‘referendum fever’ leads to Scotland voting to become independent in September; a scenario that means they would have to re-apply for EU membership. In this sense, the UK elections for the EP are ones to watch, because the outcome will give an indication of both the national and European political landscape we can expect to see in the coming years – one either with or without the UK (and potentially Scotland) as an EU member.

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