



## RESULTS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS: FAR-RIGHT PARTIES NOTCH SIGNIFICANT GAINS, BUT THE CENTER HOLDS

- Elections were held across the European Union from June 6-9 to elect 720 members of the European Parliament. These are the only direct elections to the institutions of the European Union. The results were announced tonight.
- Far-right parties finished first in France, Italy and Austria, and second in Germany and the Netherlands.
- In the most significant surprise of the evening, French President Macron dissolved the National Assembly and calls a snap legislative election, first round on June 30<sup>th</sup> and the second on July 7<sup>th</sup>.
- It was a very good night for Marine Le Pen and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stumbled and now faces real opposition.

For some months, it was bubbling just below the surface – how well would right-wing parties do in the June 2024 European Parliament elections? It was never in doubt that they would do well, but suffice it to say that today’s results represent a significant shift (the far right finished first in France, Italy and Austria and second in Germany and the Netherlands), whose reverberations will pose a major challenge to the EU institutionalists going forward. The most immediate consequences of the reverberations, at least those felt in the Élysée Palace, hit the newswires this evening – President Macron, rolling the dice in a huge gamble, dissolved the National Assembly and called a snap parliamentary election. In his address to the nation this evening, Macron said, “Far-right parties ... are progressing everywhere in the continent. It is a situation to which I cannot resign myself.”

Tonight, candidate for re-election as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared “the center is holding, but the world around us is in turmoil.” As DW [proclaimed](#), “far-right parties dealt blows to leaders in Paris and Berlin, but fell short of derailing the centrist majority in the European Parliament.” This means that von der Leyen is well-positioned to be re-elected and to remain European Commission President until 2029.

### **What is the European Parliament?**

The European Parliament is the only EU institution directly elected by voters in the 27 member states. It in effect is the bridge to the EU’s executive arm, the European Commission, and the Council of the European Union (in which each of the EU national governments are represented).

The European Parliament supervises other institutions of the European Union, namely the European Commission and the Council. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) working alongside the Council vote on EU legislation (whether legislation that has direct effect (Regulations) or requires transposition by each of the member states into their respective national laws (Directives)). MEPs have a role, together with the Council, in



setting the EU's budget (in 2023 it reached €189 billion) and have the power to block trade deals. MEPs can pass or amend laws, and can ask the Commission to propose legislation.

MEPs have the right to approve (by a vote of more than 50%) the selection by the member states (via the Council) of the president of the European Commission. Election of the president in 2014 was based on the [system](#) of lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*) whereby each political grouping proposes a presidential candidate and the grouping with the most seats selects the president. In 2019, the Council selected von der Leyen, even though she was not a *Spitzenkandidat*.

The European Parliament does not figure prominently in daily discourse, including daily political discourse. That said, the election results are consequential, particularly so given the range of political and geopolitical issues confronting the European Union. The elections took place against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, escalating trade tensions between the United States and China, the climate crisis, the upcoming US elections and the war in Gaza, all of which are likely to find their way onto legislative agendas. Interestingly, while the upcoming British elections (July 4) may well catapult the UK-EU relationship back onto the agenda, Brexit has largely been a non-issue of late.

The elections also come at a time when the European Union has sought to modify behavior beyond its borders via legislation (corporate climate disclosure, supply chain due diligence, carbon border adjustment mechanisms) having what Anu Bradford of Columbia Law School has termed the “Brussels effect.” At the very least, MEPs are likely to exert influence across a range of trade matters. As POLITICO has [noted](#), MEPs may have limited input ultimately on trade policy fashioned by the Commission, but they do “have the power to slow the ratification of trade deals, can be tough negotiators on policies, and are capable of influencing public opinion.”

### **Political Groups in the European Parliament**

MEP are elected by voters in each EU member state (that vote took place over the past few days) based on a mosaic of national and European political groupings. Most join one of seven [EU-wide political groups](#):

- EPP (the European People's Party Group) is the largest. It is center-right. The EPP's lead candidate to head the European Commission is von der Leyen. Its president is Manfred Weber of Germany's Christian Social Union (CSU).
- S&D (the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats is center left. It encompasses, among others, Spain's Socialist Workers' Party, Germany's Social Democrats and Italy's Democratic Party. Its president is Iratxe García of Spain's Socialist Workers' Party.
- Renew Europe is a centrist party, encompassing a number of liberal members.
- ID (the Identity and Democracy) group is a populist, more-Kremlin friendly, far-right party. It is hard-Eurosceptic. It is chaired by Marco Zanni, of Italy's Northern League (formerly of the Five-Star Movement), and also encompasses members from Marine Le Pen's National Rally (*Rassemblement National*, or RN), Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), Geert Wilders' Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) and



Belgium's Flemish nationalist party, Vlaams Belang. Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) was kicked out of the ID at the end of May by Marine Le Pen.

- The Left (GUE/NGL), is a Eurosceptic grouping of left-wing parties, including *La France Insoumise* led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and Germany's *Die Linke*.
- The Greens/European Free Alliance group encompasses green parties. It is pro-EU, and its largest party is Germany's Greens.
- ECR (the European Conservatives and Reformists) are right-wing, soft-Eurosceptic conservatives (critical of the EU but not disruptive). The ECR encompasses Poland's Law and Justice party (PiS), Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, Spain's Vox, Finland's Finns and Sweden's Sweden Democrats. In 2016, the ECR expelled members of Germany's AfD. The British Conservative Party was a member until Britain left the European Union (at which time all 73 British MEPs left the European Parliament).

### **Election Results**

There will be 720 MEPs who are elected for five-year terms (up from 705 in 2019), and voter turnout based on initial estimates was 51%. Approximately 373 million voters were eligible to vote in an election held over four days. Today was the final day. The distribution of MEPs is proportionate to a member state's population. For example, [for the 2024 elections](#), Germany has 96 seats, France has 81 (up from 79 in 2019), Italy has 76, Spain has 61 (up from 59 in 2019), Poland has 53 (up from 52 in 2019), Romania has 33 and the Netherlands has 31 (up from 29 in 2019). It then drops to low 20s, all the way down to the minimum of six for Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta.

**Initial estimates** [project](#) that:

- The EPP will remain the largest grouping in Parliament, with 184 seats (25.6%).
- The second largest grouping will remain the S&D, potentially with 139 seats (19.31%).
- Renew Europe is on track to secure 80 seats (11.11%).
- The ECR is on track to win 73 seats (10.14%).
- ID is expected to hold 58 seats (8.06%).
- The Greens/EFA will likely hold 52 seats (7.22%).
- The Left will likely hold 36 seats (5.00%).
- Non-attached (NI), which now includes the AfD, will likely hold 45 seats (6.25%).
- The remaining 53 would be scattered among a number of small parties (7.36%).

On a member state-basis, based on preliminary [estimates](#), among others:

- In perhaps the most stunning development of the day, French President Emmanuel Macron has called a snap legislative election after suffering a massive defeat at the hands of Marine Le Pen's National Rally. The two-round system of voting will take place on June 30 and July 7 (just before the Paris Olympics). National Rally, led by 28-year old Jordan Bardella, won 31.5% of the vote (30 seats), followed by Macron's Besoin d'Europe (coalition of Renaissance, Modem, Horizons and UDI) led by



Valérie Hayer with 14.5% (13 seats) and Réveiller l'Europe (coalition of the Socialists and *Place Publique*) led by Raphaël Glucksmann with 14.0% (13 seats).

According to [Le Monde](#), the National Rally victory represents a 40-year record for any French political party in MEP elections – not since 1984 has any party reached 30%. Notwithstanding competition from another far-right list of candidates (Reconquête!, estimated at 5.5%), Bardella's increased his 2019 score (23.34%) by almost eight points. *Le Monde* characterized National Rally's campaign as one centered on domestic issues, seeking to turn the vote into a referendum on Macron.

Macron, whose term ends in 2027 and is term-limited, lost his parliamentary majority in 2022 and has been governing largely by bypassing the National Assembly under a controversial constitutional mechanism (Article 49.3). If National Rally were to do well in the national elections, Macron could be looking at a period of “cohabitation,” potentially with Bardella serving as prime minister. This is the first dissolution of the National Assembly since 1997, after which President Jacques Chirac was forced into cohabitation (the third under the Fifth Republic) with socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for five years.

- In Germany, the conservative parties (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)) are expected to win the largest share of the seats (30.3%), but the far-right AfD is on course to come in second (15.6%), up from 11% in 2019 in spite of a number of scandals, including a statement by its lead candidate, Maximilian Krah, that the members of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), a major paramilitary organization in the Nazi Party structure, were “not all criminals.” This prompted its ejection from the ID in late May and rendered it without a political home in Brussels and Strasbourg. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats are on course to record their worst ever national election result (14.1%). The CDU/CSU block will be the largest in the European Parliament (96 out of the 720 seats).

In May, a German court [ruled](#) that the German domestic security services (BvF) could continue to investigate and surveil members of the AfD as a “suspected” far-right extremist organization. The AfD is also facing significant opprobrium because senior figures in the party reportedly [attended](#) a meeting in Potsdam in November focused on so-called “remigration,” which refers to the return, forced or otherwise, of “migrants” to their place of origin.

- Austria's far-right party, the FPÖ, emerged as the largest vote getter (25.7%), ahead of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), which secured 24.7%, the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ), which secured 23.2% and the Greens (Grüne), which secured 10.7%. In 2019, the FPÖ secured 17% of the vote, compared to 35% for the ÖVP. This is the first time the FPÖ has won a national election.
- In Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy party is projected to win 28.6% of the vote (more than four times what it secured in the 2019 MEP elections and more than the 22% it secured in the 2022 national elections), with the center-left opposition Democratic Party (PD) under Elly Schlein projected to secure 25.6% of the vote and the Five-Star Movement with 9.7% (its worst showing since it



was launched in 2009). The PD result was seen as a pleasant surprise and a boon to Schlein.

- Spain's center-right People's Party (PP) secured 22 out of the 61 seats allocated to the country (34.2% of the vote), while Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists won 20 seats (30.2%). The far-right Vox party secured 9.6% of the vote.
- In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's ruling party Fidesz, in collation with the Christian Democratic Party (KDNP), won the most votes (44.3%), but its performance was its worst in years (an 8-point drop since 2019, and only the second time in close to two decades it has fallen below 50%). Former government insider, and now opposition politician running to counter corruption and revive democratic processes in the country, Péter Magyar's Tisza party won around 29.95% of the vote.

### **Concluding (Preliminary) Thoughts**

In stark contrast to French President Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Marine Le Pen and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni had great nights tonight. Meloni emerges as a key power broker. As POLITICO is [reporting](#), Orbán, who has been in power for 14 years, stumbled in Hungary and will now face a “real challenger.”

While the European Parliament has long been dominated by the EPP (center-right) and S&D (center-left), they lost their combined majority in 2019 and preliminary results indicate they have fallen short again of a majority.

Stay tuned.

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**Mark S. Bergman**  
**7Pillars Global Insights, LLC**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
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