

Major losses for ruling parties, gains for anti-EU parties in European elections

Chris Marsden
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In European Parliament elections, parties opposed to the European Union (EU), nominally on the right and left, benefited from hostility to the austerity measures being imposed by Europe's governments. With turnout low in voting across four days in 28 countries, many more registered their opposition by staying at home.

The most significant result for the far-right was in France, where preliminary estimates show the National Front (*Front national*—FN) led the poll with 25 percent support on a 40 percent turnout. In a devastating expression of popular hostility, the ruling Socialist Party of President Francois Hollande received just 14 percent of the vote, trailing third behind the traditional right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).

FN leader Marine Le Pen responded by calling for the dissolution of the French national assembly. France had “shouted loud and clear” that it wanted to be run “by the French, for the French and with the French” and not by “foreign commissioners” in Brussels, she said.

In Britain, the right-wing anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) emerged as the biggest party—the first time that Labour or the Conservatives have not done so. Led by Nigel Farage, it is expected to win around 28 percent of the vote, almost twice the 16.5 percent it won in 2009. Labour is expecting to poll at 25.7 percent, compared with 24.5 percent for the ruling Conservatives.

The Conservatives' coalition partner in Britain, the Liberal Democrats, were all but wiped out, with their vote halved to just under 7 percent, bringing them in at fifth place, behind the Green Party. They are left with just one member of the European Parliament.

Turnout was just 33.8 percent in the UK.

In Germany, the ruling coalition parties held their ground, with Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats suffering a fall in support to the benefit of

her partners, the Social Democrats. Projections showed the conservative CDU/CSU with 36.1 percent of the vote, with the SPD at 27.6 percent. But that victory of pro-EU parties in Germany will be cold comfort, given the results in France. In addition, Germany's anti-euro party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) (modelled on UKIP) won an expected 6.5 to 7 percent of the vote and seven seats in the European parliament. It will probably be joined for the first time by a member of the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP).

Other successes for the right include the victory of the nationalist anti-immigrant Danish People's Party in Denmark, and Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) taking a fifth of the vote, compared to 7.3 percent in 2009. Belgium's Flemish nationalist N-VA party were estimated to take 30 to 32 percent of the vote in Flanders.

However, in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) is predicted to finish fourth with 12.2 percent, after achieving second place last time. It is behind the centre-right Christian Democrats, Democrats 66 and Prime Minister Mark Rutte's Liberal Party. Given the FN's performance in France, it is significant that Wilders suffered due to his connections with Marine Le Pen's party, especially over the comments of her father, Jean-Marie, who said that the Ebola virus could solve the world's population explosion and France's immigration problems “in three months”.

Lucas Hartong, the most senior MEP for the Freedom Party, urged the PVV to distance itself from the fascist FN and to strike up an alliance with UKIP and to emulate its efforts to package nationalism and an anti-EU message in more respectable garb.

Hungary's ruling conservative Fidesz also lost two seats, with the far-right Jobbik coming second with

three seats, but making no progress. The Socialists lost two of their four sets, but two new left-wing parties won three seats and the Greens one.

In every instance, the right-wing has benefited above all from the support for austerity and for the EU on the part of the social democratic parties and the complicity of the trade unions in the implementation of austerity and the attack on the working class.

Workers are looking for a way to fight back, even where there is as yet no political means of doing so. For this reason, elsewhere in Europe, parties advancing themselves as “left” opponents of austerity, though not of the EU, did well.

In Greece, Syriza, led by Alexis Tsipras, topped the poll, securing a three percent lead over the ruling New Democracy on a vote against austerity. Its pro-EU line, based upon renegotiating the terms of Greece’s debt repayment, opened the way for the fascist Golden Dawn to secure between 9 and 10 percent of the vote and win a place in the European Parliament.

The social democratic PASOK, once Greece’s main party, now part of a coalition known as Elia, or Olive Tree, came fourth with 8-9 percent, while a populist *To Potami* movement won just 5-7 percent, the same as the Greek Communist Party (KKE).

In Spain, the governing Popular Party of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and the main opposition Socialist Party (PSOE) both suffered major losses. The PP’s share of the vote fell from 42 percent in 2009 to just 26 percent, while the PSOE vote fell from 39 percent to 23 percent. The two parties together lost more than five million votes compared to the 2009 election. The protest vote in the main went to the Stalinist-led United Left (10 percent) and a flimsy populist creation called *Podemos* (We Can) that emerged out of the *Indignados* movement (8 percent). Regionalist parties in Catalonia did well.

In Italy, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi’s Democratic Party (PD) received 41 percent, ahead of the 5-Star Movement of comedian Beppe Grillo with 22 percent and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party with 15.5 percent. The anti-euro Northern League received 6 percent of the vote, and the pseudo-left Tsipras List/Other Europe group (named after the Syriza leader) received 4.1 percent.

The results do not fall into any one pattern, other than all expressing rising but as yet inchoate opposition to

the existing political set-up, to the EU and to the social attacks imposed by governments across the continent.

Nevertheless, it is certain that the majority of Europe’s press will stress that the danger to the EU project—from the “right” and the “extreme left”—must be combated. That will inevitably take the form of calls to resist populist pressures to deviate from austerity, while, if possible, placating or neutralising right wing anti-EU formations by stressing that patriotism and nationalism is best served by being part of a “strong Europe.” The gains of the right-wing parties will be used to urge the adoption of anti-immigrant measures to provide a scapegoat for the social devastation unleashed on working people.

What will not be heeded at all is the voice of all those workers and youth whose disillusionment with the existing political set-up and opposition to the European Union is rooted in their experience with savage cuts to jobs, wages and social conditions, the undemocratic character of the EU and in the stepping up of militarism by the European powers, as evidenced in their provocative actions directed against Russia in Ukraine.

The *Partei fur Soziale Gleichheit* in Germany and the Socialist Equality Party in Britain stood in the European elections to offer a socialist alternative to the pro-EU parties of austerity and to the nationalist right. They called for the formation of workers’ governments and a United Socialist States of Europe.

The sections of the International Committee placed particular importance on the struggle against militarism and the danger of war, urging the election to be used as a referendum on war, now posed most acutely in Ukraine.



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