

EU elections 2019: Before the next crisis

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As was to be expected in any parliamentary drama, all the top candidates and parties were initially pleased with the increased turnout in the elections to the European Parliament. For the first time since 1994, more than half of all voters in Europe, 50.97 percent, went to the ballot box. Not surprisingly, since various social forces had presented the elections as a "fateful choice" whether they were "Eurosceptic" and right-wing populist actors, who had already celebrated some successes in 2014, or representatives of the "mainstream" around the conservatives and social democrats or, for that matter, Liberals or Greens.

All of them regarded the elections as a kind of "decisive vote" on the future of Europe even if, of course, they did not decide it at all. All the same, their outcome not only shows that a large number of political forces, as well as the population, regarded the ballot as an important political debate but also that they expressed shifts in the balance of power in the EU and in the individual states.

Further fragmentation of the bourgeois camp

The so-called "People's Parties", the established government forces of the European People's Party, EPP, and the Progressive Alliance of Social Democrats, have again lost ground. This is neither a national nor a European surprise at the moment. The EPP won just 178 seats, losing 39 compared to 2014, a good 20 percent. The loss for conservatives in Germany was particularly dramatic. The defeat of the Tories is in line with this, even though the British Conservatives have not belonged to the EPP faction for a long time and their defeat was made much worse by the Brexit disaster.

At the level of the EU Parliament, Christian Democrats and Social Democrats together do not have a majority. They are dependent on the support of liberals and/or Greens for the next Commission. The former "Grand Coalition" in the EU was the clear loser in the elections and, in the light of the simultaneous strengthening of right-wing populist parties, it is clear that the fragmentation of the bourgeois camp continues. This also shows the different orientation of the bourgeois forces in the EU and a clear loss of the hegemony of the conservative parties in the bourgeois camp.

The bourgeois workers' parties of Social Democracy and the European Left Party are also clear losers. Together they make up less than 200 out of 751 deputies. The Social Democrats won only 153 seats and lost 32 seats compared to the previous elections. The United European Left/Nordic Green Left will have 38 parliamentarians in the future, 14 fewer than in the previous period.

Opposites

This election result illustrates the crisis of the EU for the bourgeois camp as well as the workers' movement. As far as the bourgeois classes are concerned, the ruling capitalist factions of the member states are finding it increasingly difficult to find a common perspective and goal for the Union. This is also expressed in the dispute over the next head of the European Commission. The EPP and thus the Christian Union support the German, Manfred Weber, who the French President, Emmanuel Macron, openly rejects.

He fears too much "German influence", especially since the replacement of the ECB head by the head of the Bundesbank, Jens Weidmann, seems difficult to prevent.

These and other personnel issues are only understandable against the background of the fight for the future direction of the EU and, therefore, are not the accidental result of manoeuvring behind the scenes. While everyone, from the Conservatives, Liberals and Greens to the Social Democrats, never tires of "recognising Europe", everyone is afraid of being taken for a ride by the "partners". Moreover, no one should forget that the larger bourgeois factions do not represent "European parties", but ultimately the ruling classes, or factions of them, of separate nation states. The negotiations over the coming weeks will be conducted accordingly. Only one thing seems certain; neo-liberalism, racism both externally and internally, arms build-up and intensification of repression will all be pushed forward by the new Commission.

Strengthening Liberals and Greens

While the Greens, especially in Germany, grew strongly, outperformed the SPD and became the second strongest force, the Liberals from the new French governing party La République en Marche, and new parties from Eastern Europe, such as the Czech governing party ANO 2011 of the populist oligarch Andrej Babis, also scored well. The increased voter turnout, especially among first-time and young voters, benefited the Liberal and Green spectrum. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE, now has 105 MPs, compared to 69 in the previous parliament, the European Greens have increased their seats by 17 to 69.

First-time voters in particular were mobilised via the climate issue and the Fridays for Future movement. There, Green parties and organisations as well as left-wing NGOs are a decisive factor for mobilisation on the streets and this was reflected in the elections. While there was much speculation about Russia's influence via the social media before the elections, it can now be seen that the Green mobilisation in particular brought many voters out. As a result, climate, environment and sustainability also became buzzwords of the election campaign, on which neither Christian nor Social Democrats had much to offer.

The Right is Consolidating

It is not yet clear what the new joint faction of right-wing populists and nationalists will look like. Their aim will be to form the third strongest group. Symbolically for the crisis of the EU, in France and Italy, the biggest competitors for German imperialism, the right has become the strongest force. Le Pen was able to repeat the 2014 result with the renamed Rassemblement National, National Rally Movement, RN, which, with 23 percent, lies one point ahead of the Macron party, La République en Marche with 22 percent, and the Italian Lega is now the leading force of the European right. With Interior Minister Matteo Salvini as the leading candidate, it won 33 percent and left its coalition partner, the Five Stars Movement, clearly behind with 16 percent. This also confirms the trend of recent regional elections. The AfD and the FPÖ have so far been secure partners in the Europe of Nations and Freedom, ENF Group, it is uncertain who will join them.

A United Right?

To what extent the Sweden Democrats, the Polish governing party PiS, the "Brexit Party" of Farage or the Flemish nationalists, Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and Vlaams Belang and the new Spanish Francoists, Vox, will be drawn in is questionable. With Salvini, the former US presidential advisor Steve Bannon hopes to be able to pull strings in the EU parliament. The former "Breitbart-News" boss founded a foundation in Brussels and an academy in Rome. His aim is to bring as many parties as possible from the factions of the European Conservatives and Reformers, EKR and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, EFDD, to the ENF.

A "new" ENF group, bigger than the Greens and the Liberals, now seems possible but it should not be forgotten that the racists and nationalists are torn apart by internal contradictions, whether over financial policy or relations with Russia, which is a particular sticking point for Eastern European parties.

The bourgeois workers' parties

On the Iberian Peninsula, the colour red appeared on the electoral map. Together with the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain were the only countries in which the established Social Democracy could win, partly at the expense of left-wing parties such as Podemos. In Portugal, the left-wing bloc and the Communist Party also managed to gain ground. Social Democracy could present itself as a social force for the EU and as a social, democratic and progressive alternative to the right, attracting the hopes of the working class, unlike in almost all other states. Now it will be able to negotiate a good result for the Commission with the Iberian heads of government, but nothing more than that.

It was not only the Social Democrats that lost, but also the European Left Party. It lost 10 seats, especially due to the losses of the German Left Party and Podemos. Even the weakened group is unable to formulate a common European strategy. Between a nation-state-oriented rejection of the EU, as in the case of La France insoumise, FI, which is also supported by Podemos, the Swedish Left Party and the Portuguese Left Bloc, and hopes for reform, such as those brought into the EU by Syriza and the Left Party, the European Left Party is still not in a position to represent an anti-capitalist alternative to the EU, let alone to mobilise for it.

Together with the European trade unions, these reformist forces have not been able to mobilise around even one of their demands or even become visible. The demonstrations under the motto "A Europe for All - Your Voice Against Nationalism" were not accompanied or strengthened by the demands and actions of the workers' movement, the field was left to NGOs like the Greens in many places.

Large parts of the working class have turned away from "their" parties and are carried away by mobilisations either of the right-wing populist and nationalists against the EU or through the left-Liberal and Green promises in the reformability of the EU, as well as the ecological question. The failure of the trade unions, social democracy and left-wing parties has meant that those workers and youth who oppose nationalism and the shift to the right turned to the Greens and other left bourgeois forces.

What to do?

For a radical, anti-capitalist and/or socialist left, this is an immense challenge. We must present a clear class-struggle alternative to this EU, we must not chase after populist or reformist illusions, but need an orientation towards European class-struggle.

If "we" really want to stand up to this EU's right-wing shift, austerity, neoliberalism, then we need a perspective for a socialist Europe and must break with the reformist and populist forces. That is the task, regardless of the election results. In order to build up such a revolutionary alternative, however, not only struggle and movement are needed but, above all, a programme of action to mobilise the working class throughout Europe.

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