



EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

A new political landscape: Europe after the elections

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Summary

From 6–9 June 2024 voters in the EU's 27 member states went to the ballot box to elect a new European Parliament. The outcome produced a shift to the right, both radical and mainstream, but a closer look reveals variations between member states. This analysis offers an early assessment of the elections and what they will mean for the European Union. It first looks at the overall distribution of seats in the European Parliament, highlights the main winners and losers, and identifies some key developments in the largest member states. Then the analysis turns to possible majorities and coalitions that can be formed in the new parliament. While centre-left forces have been weakened, a continuation of the super-grand coalition seems likely. The election of the next Commission President is set to be an important test for the new Parliament. The role of the EPP will be key, with politics inside that group potentially determining the direction of politics in the new Parliament.

Looking ahead, the analysis suggests that there may be continuity in relation to the field of security and defence whereas a new majority could lead to a less ambitious climate policy. In terms of discussions about the future of the EU, the impact of the elections might mean a less ambitious institutional reform agenda..

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The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors.

Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections have produced a shift to the political right. Radical right parties have been strengthened and so has the mainstream right. Liberals and Greens stand out as the main losers. Despite an increasing polarisation and fragmentation of the European Parliament, there is also continuity in the sense that the broad pro-European centre of the party system looks set to provide the basis for a centrist majority. The biggest party, EPP, will be even more pivotal to the politics and policies of the EU in the years to come. The internal dynamic inside EPP will also be a significant factor in the years to come.

Behind the aggregate numbers, there is significant variation across Europe. The overall political signal or message from the voters is not easy to identify. The results in the two biggest member states – France and Germany – stand out as the most significant: governing parties lost substantially, and the rise of the radical right is most clearly seen in these two countries. This has already had repercussions on domestic politics, with French President Emmanuel Macron dissolving the National Assembly and calling early elections. The outcome of those elections will have a profound impact on the functioning of the EU.

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On the direction of EU policies, we expect continuity in some areas: support for Ukraine, ramping up European defence capabilities, and economic issues in a broader sense. When it comes to areas such as climate and environmental policies, however, it will be harder to find majorities in favour of ambitious programmes such as the European Green Deal. That said, much legislation has already been passed and so a radical overhaul is perhaps unlikely. On migration, we expect the electoral outcome to increase support for stricter migration policies and an increased focus on extraterritorial arrangements for asylum processes.

The process of formulating a 'Strategic Agenda' is underway among the leaders in the European Council. In parallel, discussions about the next leadership of the institutions are taking place. As was the case in the previous European Parliament elections, European parties have advanced their lead candidates for the role of President of the European Commission. European public visibility for this process was, once again, relatively sparse. The EPP emerging as the biggest party group places incumbent Ursula von der Leyen as frontrunner for another stint at the helm. However, increasing fragmentation in the chamber, and unclear majorities in the EP, makes her vote of investiture uncertain. Most probably a broad centrist coalition will continue to be the power basis for the next Commission, but the strategic and political choices of the EPP will determine how stable such an arrangement will be. Parties in the centre and left will condition their support for von der Leyen and the policy agenda of the EPP on the continued existence of a form of *cordon sanitaire* at the European level. Most likely, domestic politics in key member states will be very important for the overall functioning of the EU and of the EP in the years to come.

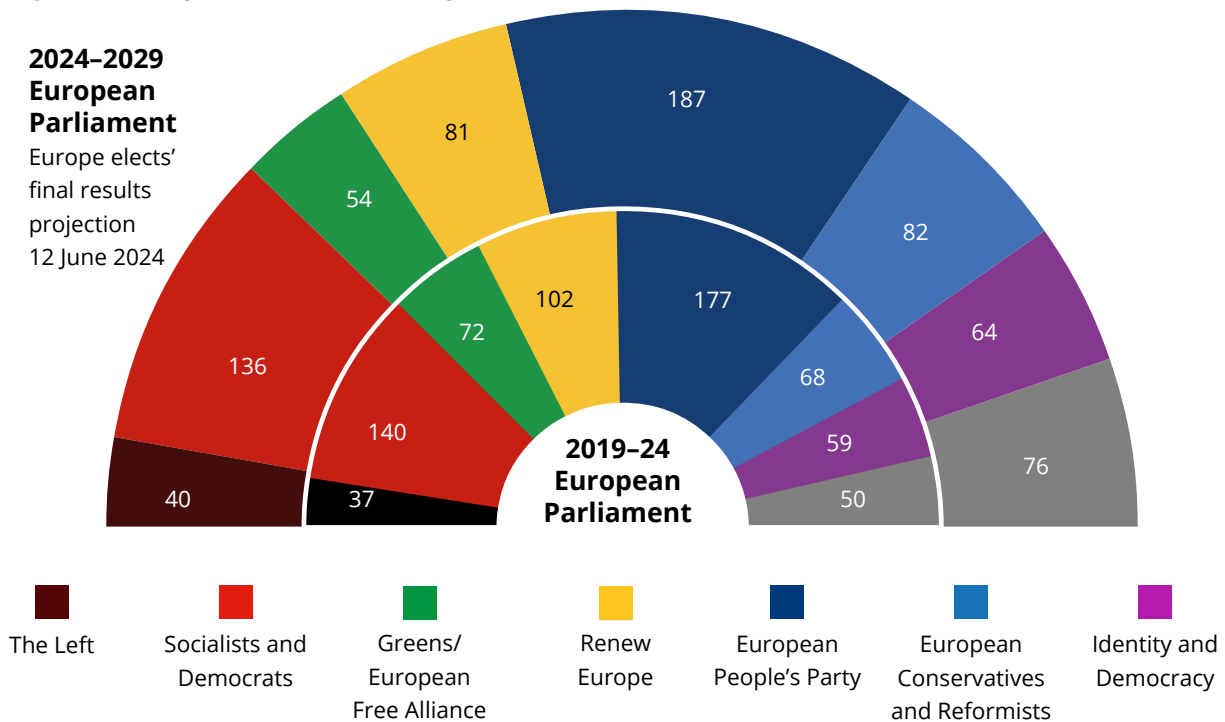
1. The big picture

1.1 Distribution of seats

The largest group in the new Parliament is EPP, which (based on current projections) has 187 seats, an increase of 10. The second largest is S&D, which has 136 seats, a decrease of four seats. The third position is then contested between ECR, with 82 seats (+14), and RE, with 81 (-21). ID currently holds 64 seats, an increase of five. The Greens/EFA have experienced a notable decline in representation, with a reduction of 18 seats to 54. The number of seats held by the Left has increased slightly, to 40 (+3), while the number of non-attached MEPs has risen to 76 (+26) (see Figure 1). It is likely that the number of non-attached MEPs will decrease during the group formation phase, as currently non-affiliated national parties join one of the existing groups or new groups, if they are formed.

In the new Parliament the EPP is the pivotal group; what is called by political scientists the "median MEP" clearly sits with the EPP. This means that the EPP are likely to be the kingmakers in the new Parliament, a role that RE has held in the previous

Figure 1. **Composition of the European Parliament**



Source: Own elaboration. **Data:** Europe Elects (13 June 2024, 12:30) and European Parliament.

few parliamentary terms. Much of the outcome is in line with forecast models developed ahead of the elections (e.g. Cunningham et al., Europe Elects). Compared to the forecasts, though, the EPP did slightly better than expected while ID has done slightly worse. Overall, though, the expected decline in the number of MEPs in the groups on the left and an increase in the number of MEPs in the groups on the right has materialised.

1.2 Gains and losses

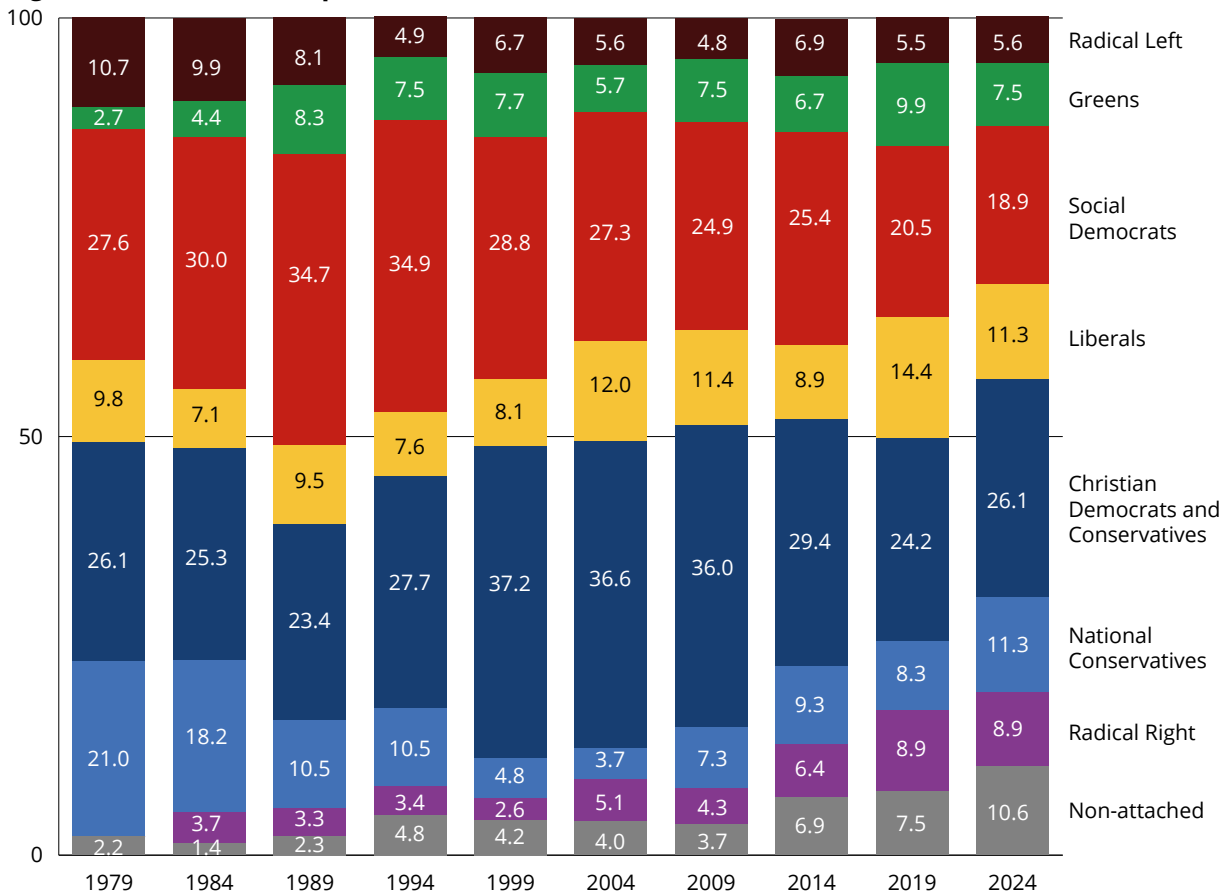
To illustrate the significance of the changes in 2024, Figure 2 shows the size of the political families in the European Parliament over time. The names of the groups have changed, but the broad political families have remained relatively stable.

The 2024 election clearly marks a significant shift rightwards compared to all the previous elected Parliaments. Except for 1989, the “median” member of the chamber (where the 50% line is indicated) is in the Liberal group. In 2024, in contrast, the median member is in EPP.

Another stand-out feature of the 2024 election is the continued decline in the combined size of the

two largest groups, down from a peak of 66% of the seats in the Parliament in 1999 to below 50% in 2019 and again in 2024. Meanwhile, the bloc of seats to the right of the EPP has risen steadily since 1989, back to where it was in 1979. In the early periods of the Parliament there was also a large number of MEPs to the right of the EPP, who at that time sat in several different groups. The EPP then pursued a strategy to expand rightwards, to bring as many national parties from their right into the group, so that they would become larger than S&D. Today, though, this incentive for EPP is weaker, as they are already larger than S&D and they find themselves in the central/pivotal position in the chamber. Also, many of their parties to their right are more extreme/radical than they were in the early 1980s.

Figure 2. Results of European Parliament elections from 2009 to 2024



Source: Own elaboration. Data: European Parliament. Shares of seats at the beginning of the term.

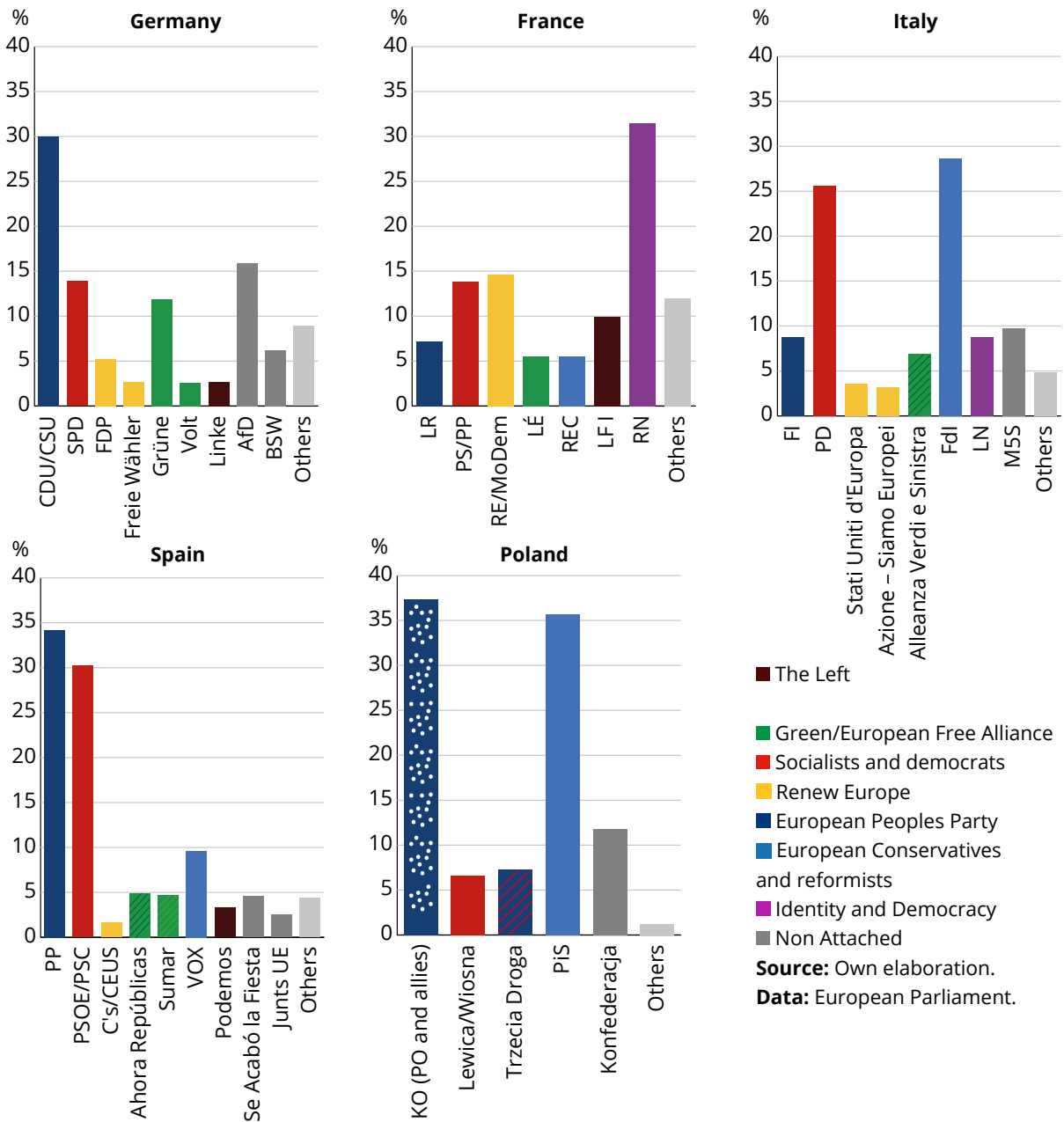
Regarding the largest member states – Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland – there is some variation in terms of the European political group affiliations of the parties that topped the polls (see Figure 3).

- In Germany, the radical right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) became the second largest party with 16% after the CDU/CSU with 30%, outperforming the SPD that had to settle for 14%. The Greens in particular experienced a decline to 12%. The three governing parties lost in total 11 points, to a combined vote share of 31% in 2024.
- In France, Rassemblement National (RN) won the highest share of the vote, nearly double that of Emmanuel Macron’s alliance. This represents a significant upheaval in the electoral landscape, prompting President Macron to dissolve the National Assembly. This is probably the politically most significant consequence of the entire European elections of 2024. The Socialists

have struggled for a number of years in France but performed better again.

- In Italy, Georgia Meloni’s Fratelli d’Italia (FdI) is leading the polls, but the PD is also performing well.
- In Spain, the two major parties were strong, with the centre-right opposition PP just beating the governing socialist party PSOE. The radical right Vox won 10% of the vote, slightly less than expected. The decline of Ciudadanos (RE) is significant and most likely contributed to the rise of PP. Compared to many other member states, the traditional centre-left and centre-right parties in Spain still hold a firmer grip on the electorate.
- In Poland, the coalition led by Donald Tusk, whose parties mainly belong to EPP, performed well, with the opposition party, PiS, coming in second. The radical right Konfederacja increased its vote share.

Figure 3. Results of the 2024 European Parliament elections in the five largest member states

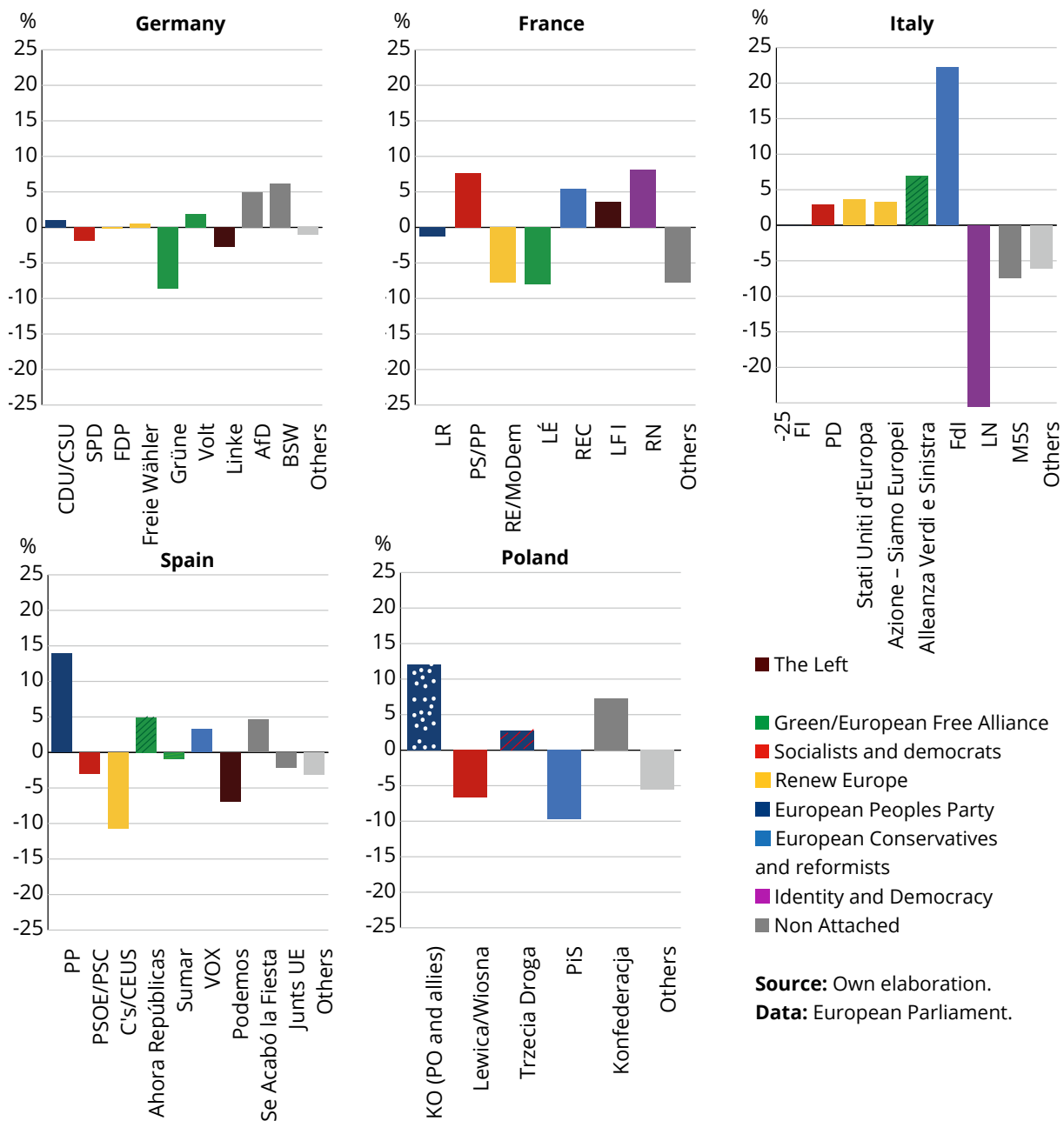


■ The Left
■ Green/European Free Alliance
■ Socialists and democrats
■ Renew Europe
■ European Peoples Party
■ European Conservatives and reformists
■ Identity and Democracy
■ Non Attached
Source: Own elaboration.
Data: European Parliament.

It is also important to compare this result with the previous election. Major shifts have occurred in the political landscape of Italy. It is evident that voters shifted from Matteo Salvini’s Lega to Giorgia Meloni’s FdI. In fact, this was an exchange of voters within the radical right political spectrum and the scale of the other shifts in Figure 4 is somewhat distorted by this switch. Shifts of 5 percentage points in Germany are also quite

significant as they have an impact of 5 MEPs. Additionally, shifts were observed in France, Spain, and Poland, which again appear to be relatively minor in comparison to the magnitude of the shifts observed in Italy (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Voter shifts in the 2019 European Parliament elections in the five largest member states



Source: Own elaboration.
Data: European Parliament.

1.3 Possible majorities and coalitions

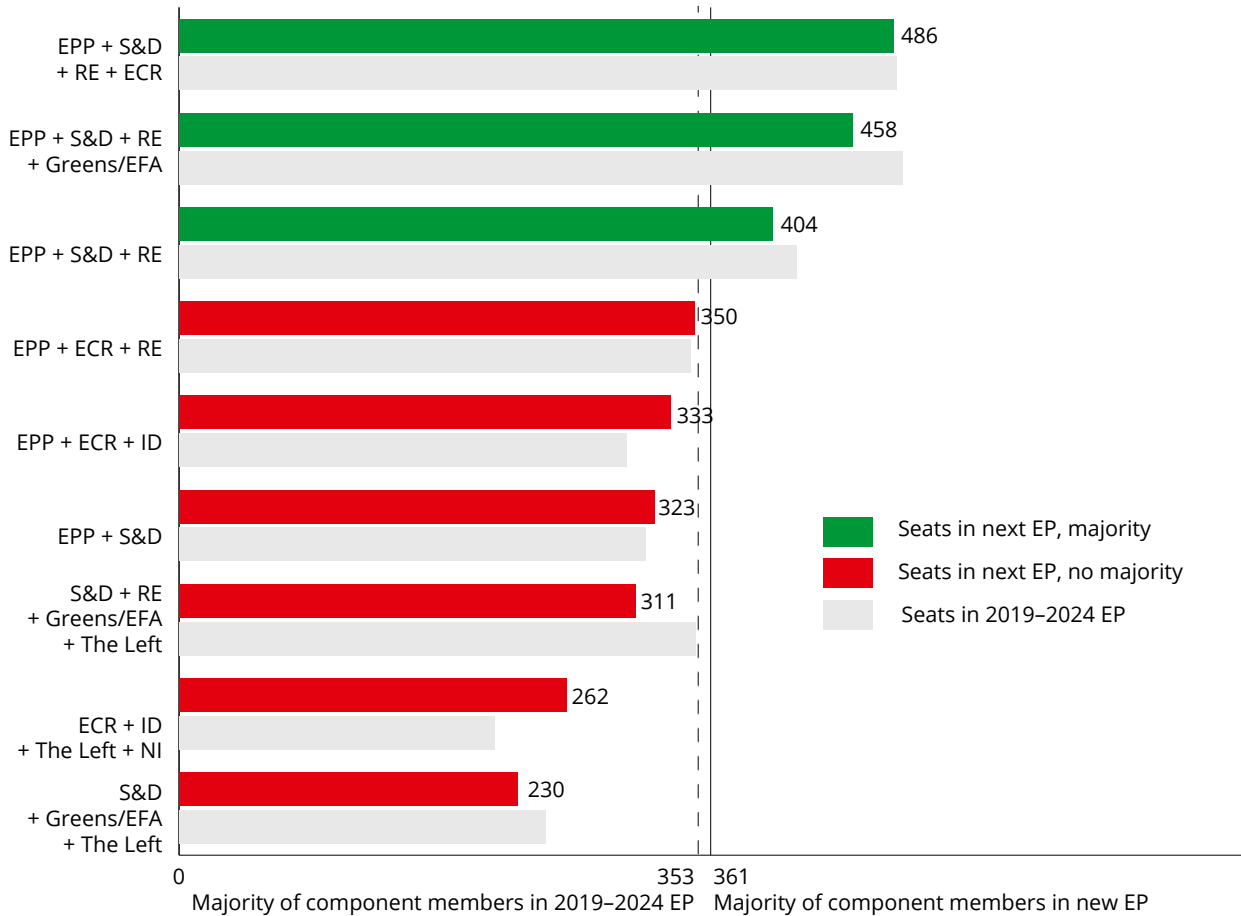
In terms of the possible coalitions and majorities, there is a lot of discussion about what might happen next. Three coalitions or majorities composed of the (existing) political groups reach the threshold for an absolute majority of 361 seats, in all three cases a grand coalition of EPP and S&D and with the addition of other groups:

- the biggest majority would be extending this coalition to RE and ECR,

- the second biggest one would be to extend it to RE and Greens/EFA,
- while adding only RE (the super-grand coalition) has 404 MEPs, which is comfortably more than 361, but this might not be enough considering a defection rate of 10% or more.

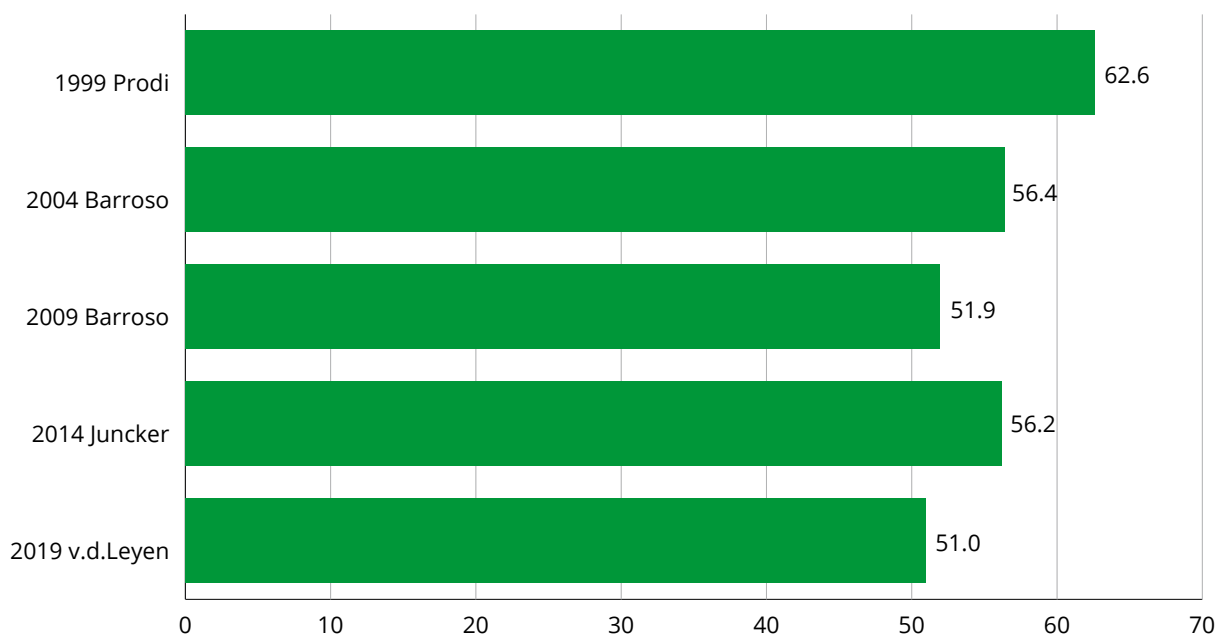
Other coalitions do not reach the majority of 361 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Possible majorities and coalitions



Source: Own elaboration. Data: Europe Elects (13 June 2024, 12:30).

Figure 6. Electing the Commission President – the major test for a coalition/majority



Source: Own elaboration. Votes in favour of the candidate for President of the Commission as a share of the component members of the European Parliament. Data: European Parliament.

The major test for any coalition and majority will be electing the Commission President. It has always worked in the past: the candidates for the post have always been successful when they were put forward to the European Parliament, including Ursula von der Leyen in 2019 who had a majority of just 9 votes which corresponded to 51% of the component members of the European Parliament in line with Article 17(7) TEU (see Figure 6). The super-grand coalition (EPP + S&D+ RE) with its 404 seats is well above the 361 votes needed for an absolute majority. However, cohesion is also an important factor, and many S&D parties and MEPs may be reluctant to support von der Leyen if she expects to set out a more right-leaning political agenda in the next Commission. The secret ballot vote on the Commission President allows for more defections. This was clearly the case already in 2019 and it may be that the situation is even more difficult this time.

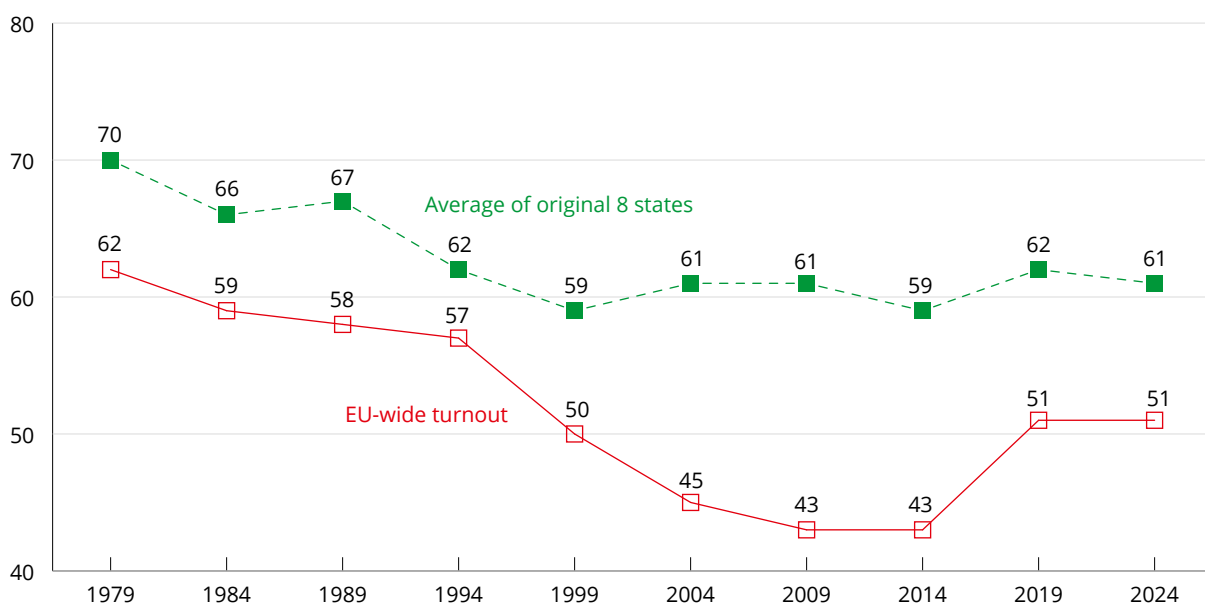
Von der Leyen has a good chance of being elected if S&D can be persuaded to support her, for example if her appointment as Commission President is combined with an S&D politician as President of the European Council and at least one major portfolio in the new Commission for an S&D Commissioner (for example from Spain and/or Denmark). Nevertheless, even if S&D support the

appointment of von der Leyen and the investiture of the Commission as a whole, we expect to see a gradual erosion of support from S&D as the Parliament progresses – given that the new Parliament, the next Commission and the current European Council will be right-leaning with S&D very much in a minority in all three governing institutions in Brussels.

1.4 Turnout

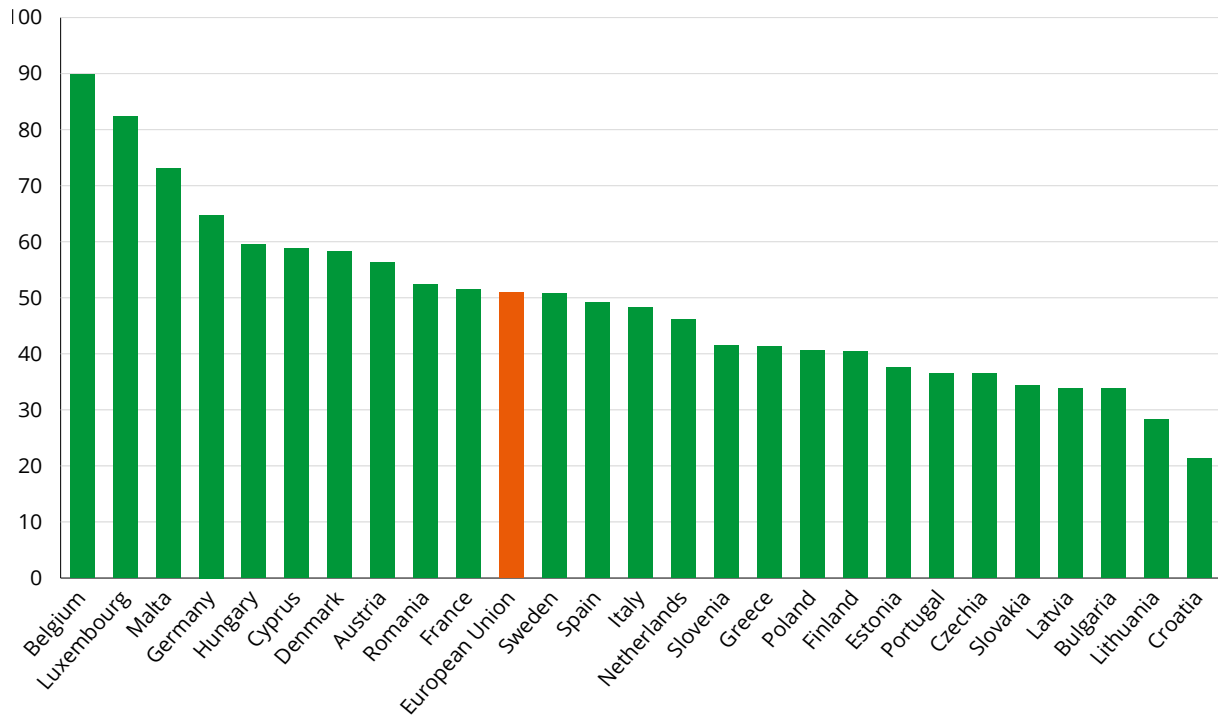
Overall, electoral turnout hardly changed between the last elections in 2019 and the current elections in 2024 – as Figure 7 shows. However, the 2019 and 2024 EU-wide turnout figures are not really directly comparable: the UK did not vote in the 2024 elections, the franchise was extended to 16-year-olds in Germany, and the 2024 elections were held in June rather than May (as they were in 2019) – and elections in June, particularly in northern Europe, tend to have lower turnout. More generally, it might seem that turnout in EP elections has declined dramatically over time. However, this apparent decline in EU-wide turnout is largely a result of the changing membership of the EU – the enlargement of the EU to member states in Central and Eastern Europe who generally have lower turnout in EP elections than the original member states. As a result, in Figure 7 we also show the average turnout in the 8 countries

Figure 7. Turnout in European Parliament elections 1979–2024



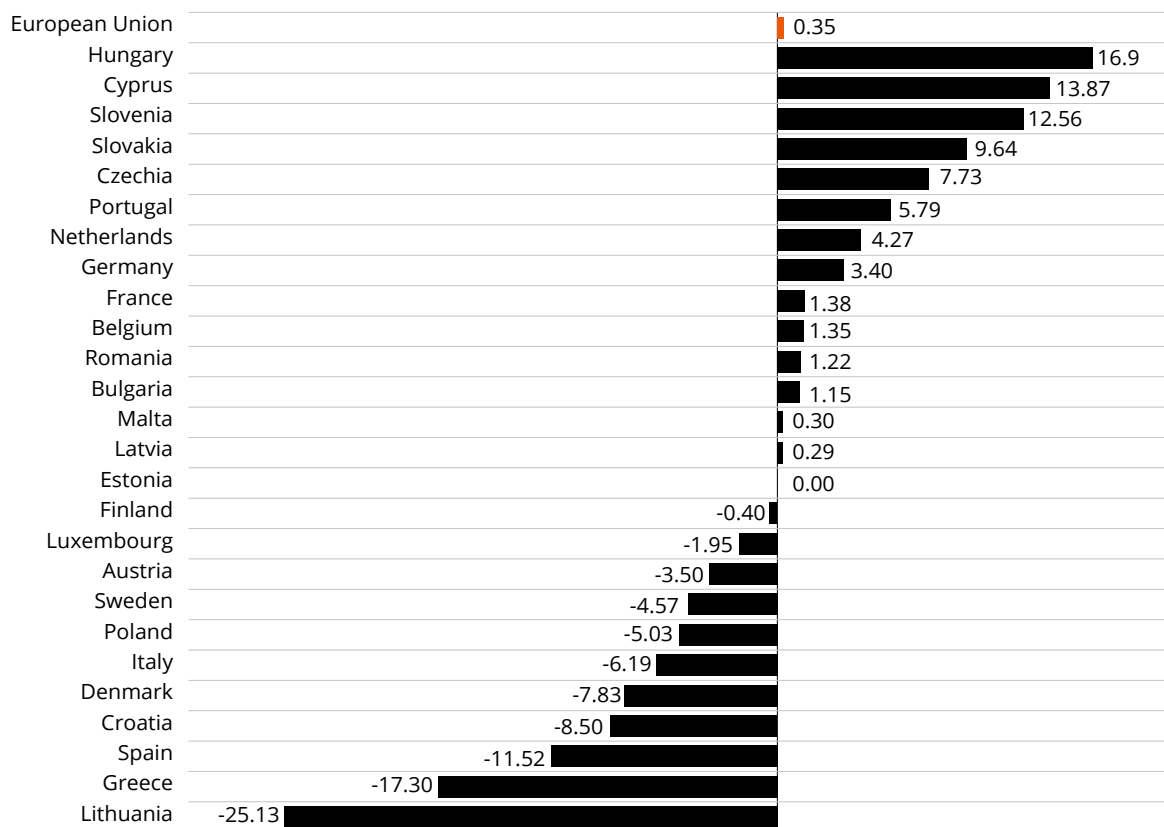
Data: European Parliament (13 June 2024, 09:00). Average turnout of original 8 states = the 8 countries that have participated in all 10 rounds of elections (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands).

Figure 8. Turnout in European Parliament elections 2024



Data: European Parliament (12 June 2024, 14:58). Ireland not available yet.

Figure 9. Turnout change in the 2024 European Parliament elections compared to 2019



Source: Own elaboration. Data for 2024: European Parliament (12 June 2024, 14:58). Ireland not available yet.

that have participated in all 10 rounds of elections (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands). The pattern for these states reveals that there has been a slight decline in turnout, but the trend has remained relatively stable since 1999, although with a slight increase between 2014 and 2019.

However, given the salience of European issues in recent years – the European Green Deal, the EU’s response to the COVID pandemic, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the farmers’ protests in many member states, and so on – why were voters not more mobilized in 2024 than in 2019? Approximately half of European citizens now vote in EP elections. On the one hand, this seems relatively low, and a challenge for the legitimacy of the European Parliament. On the other hand, there was a turnout of only 46% in the 2022 midterm elections to the United States Congress, which are perhaps the most comparable elections to the European Parliament (i.e. a parliament on a continental scale and where the “main” election is for another institution: national parliaments in Europe, and the President in the United States). From this perspective, then, having half of all eligible voters across Europe participate in the elections is a good achievement for Europe’s Parliament.

In 2024, as in all previous elections, there was significant variation in turnout across the EU. Croatia exhibited the lowest turnout, with 21%, and the next five member states with the lowest turnout are also from Central and Eastern Europe (see Figure 8).

Lithuania, where in 2019 presidential elections were held together with the European Parliament elections, experienced a notable decline in turnout in 2024 (-25 points). Greece also exhibited a relatively big decline (-17 points), but in Hungary, turnout increased (+16 points), and the opposition to Viktor Orbán gained significantly. Finally, in Cyprus with a very radical right party performing well, turnout also increased (+14 points). Slovakia and Slovenia are other examples of member states of the 2004 enlargement with a significant rise in turnout (see Figure 9).

2. A closer look

Beyond the broader patterns, what happened inside the groups – in the relative sizes of the national parties? Some of the national parties may decide to change political groups in the new Parliament, which could lead to a different composition of the current groups, or the creation of new groups and the disappearance of others. These changes usually occur in the weeks after the elections, but they can also happen at any time during a parliamentary term. In the following, we look the largest national party delegations, and potential changes of political groups.

2.1 Largest national party delegations

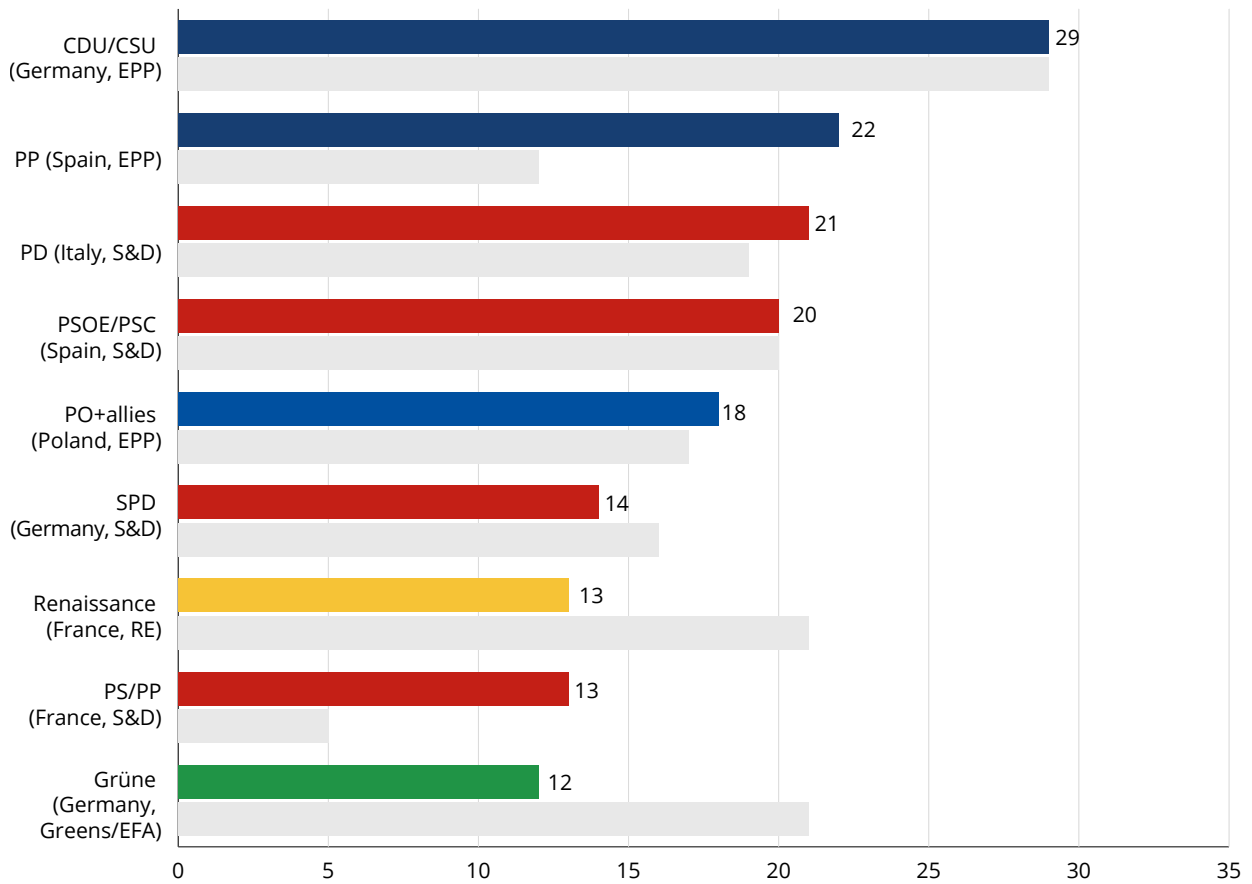
The formation of political groups in the European Parliament is a process that is initiated by national parties, and the size of these parties is a significant factor. The formation of groups is informed by domestic political practices, facilitates the overcoming of collective-action problems, and allows for a division of labour and competition along ideological lines, as is the case at the national level. In addition to size, the internal cohesion of political groups is a significant factor in determining their influence in the European Parliament. Nevertheless, national party delegations within the political groups constitute an essential component of the European Parliament’s power structure. Individual parties have strong incentives to belong to a political group as being a member of a group brings certain advantages, such as committee positions and resources. The three largest national party delegations in the EPP are from Germany, Spain, and Poland. In S&D, the Italian, Spanish, and German delegations are particularly strong and the French Socialists have caught up in 2024 (see Figure 10).

Among the two groups most to the right and the non-attached MEPs, French RN will have 30 MEPs and will also be the biggest national party in the new EP, with more MEPs than CDU/CSU together (29 MEPs). RN will control nearly half of the seats in the ID group making them a clearly dominant party. In Italy, FdI obtained 24 seats, an increase of 19 seats, while the 5 Star Movement and the League both lost a significant number of MEPs.

2.2 Re-alignment of the political groups

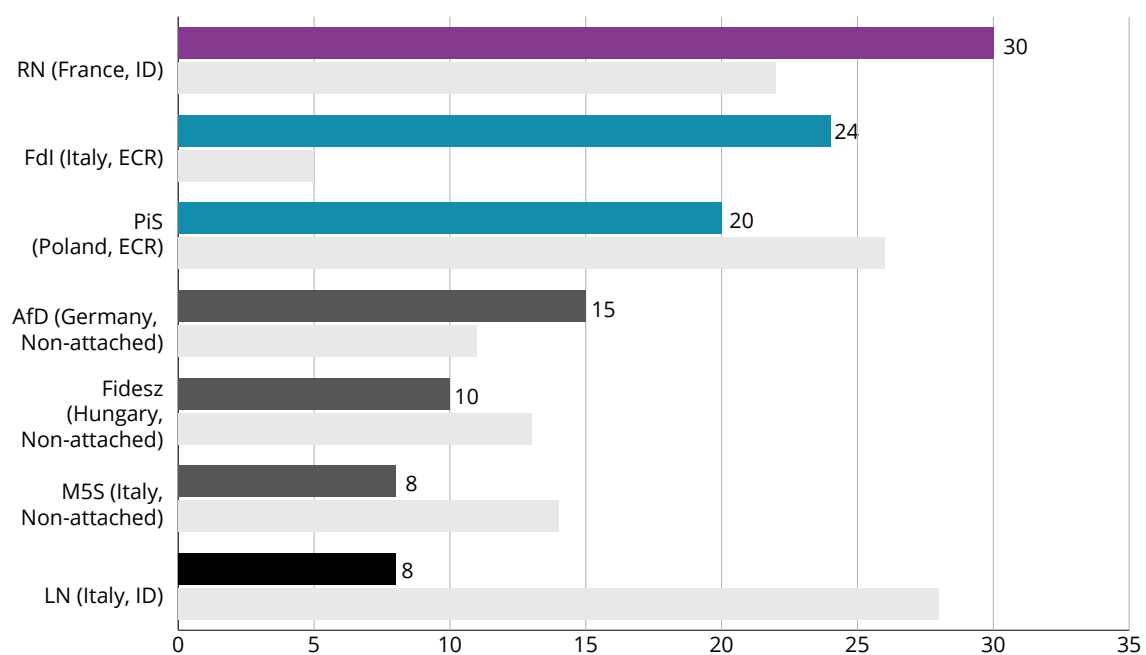
In 2024, a significant number of new MEPs from new national parties were elected. Their future group affiliation is unclear at this stage.

Figure 10. National parties and European political groups: EPP, S&D, RE, Greens/EFA



Source: Own elaboration. Data: European Parliament.

Figure 11. National parties and European political groups: ECR, ID, non-attached



Source: Own elaboration. Data: European Parliament.

Table 1. A selection of possible changes in political groups

	Possible seat losses from national party delegations leaving the group	Possible seat gains from national party delegations joining the group
EPP 187 MEPs		Fratelli d'Italia joins (+24 MEPs)
S&D 136 MEPs		
RE 81 MEPs	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) gets excluded (-4 MEPs)	
ECR 82 MEPs	Fratelli d'Italia leaves (-24 MEPs)	Rassemblement National joins (+30 MEPs) Fidesz joins (+10 MEPs) Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie joins (+4 MEPs)
Greens/EFA 54 MEPs		5 Star Movement joins (+8 MEPs)
The Left 40 MEPs		Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht joins (+6 MEPs)
ID 64 MEPs	Rassemblement National leaves (-30 MEPs)	Fidesz joins (+10 MEPs) Alternative für Deutschland re-joins (+15 MEPs) Konfederacja joins (+6 MEPs) Vazrazhdane/Revival joins (+3 MEPs)
Non-attached 76 MEPs	Fidesz joins a group (-10 MEPs) 5 Star Movement joins a group (-8 MEPs) Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht joins a group (-6 MEPs) Alternative für Deutschland joins a group (-15 MEPs) Smer joins a group (-5 MEPs)	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie Deutschland does not join a new group (+4 MEPs)
New group on the left (non-existent)*		5 Star Movement joins (+8 MEPs) Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht joins (+6 MEPs) Smer joins (+5 MEPs)

Source: Own elaboration. **Data:** EuropeElects (projection as of 13 June 2024, 11:00 for the political groups) and European Parliament. *Note: the requirement for forming a group is that it consists of at least 23 MEPs from 7 member states.

Fidesz MEPs from Hungary have been non-attached since they left the EPP in 2021 because of the long-running dispute about the rule of law. This switch had the biggest effect on the strength of the political groups in the previous term. Slovakian Smer and Hlas were ousted from the S&D group on partly similar grounds in 2023. Meanwhile, the German AfD and Italian 5 Star Movement are other large national party delegations who currently sit as non-attached.

Two main factors could lead to a change in the composition of the groups in the Parliament. First, there could be a shift in parties between ECR and ID or some new formation on the right. What is mainly driving this is that EPP regards ECR as a potential partner in the Parliament but sees ID as

beyond a 'cordon sanitaire'. This means that parties on the radical right who are either currently in government or who may soon be in government with centre-right parties, have the possibility of joining ECR rather than remaining in ID. Second, the large number of non-attached parties means that there could be new party group formations between these parties, either on the right or the left. To form a group in the Parliament, there must be 23 MEPs from at least one quarter (7) of member states.

Over the course of the last parliamentary term, some groups lost more members (ID -18 MEPs, EPP -9 MEPs) than others (S&D -5 MEPs), while some groups gained (ECR +5 MEPs, RE +3 MEPs, Greens/EFA +3 MEPs), and more MEPs were

non-affiliated at the end of the term than at the beginning (+22 MEPs).

Table 1 shows some of the potential changes in the political groups that could take place in the next few weeks and months. There are many unknowns in this process and many other alternative scenarios are also possible. On the right of the Parliament, there could be significant shifts: AfD and Fidesz, who currently sit in non-attached, will probably join one of the existing groups, with AfD most likely to be re-admitted to ID and Fidesz most likely to join ECR. Meanwhile, a major change could occur if RN moves from ID to ECR – this could potentially happen if RN win the French National Assembly elections and form a government in France. This would then allow AfD to re-join ID, as it was RN who led the movement to eject them from that group. Another potential change could be FdI leaving ECR and joining EPP, which could, in turn, make it easier for RN to join ECR, and so on.

On the left side of the Parliament, there is talk of a new group forming between parties who have left-wing positions on economic issues but right-wing positions on social issues and are more sympathetic towards Russia and Putin than other left-wing parties. The leading party here would be Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht from Germany, which could be joined by 5 Star Movement from Italy, Smer from Slovakia, and several other parties or individual MEPs on the left who are currently non-attached or perhaps even are members of the current Left group.

There could also be changes in group membership elsewhere in the Parliament. For example, there is discussion of whether the Dutch VVD MEPs will be expelled from RE for forming a government with Gert Wilders. If so, VVD could potentially join ECR or sit as non-attached.

3. Prospects

3.1 Political signals from the election: a mixed picture

While the overall shift to the right gives a slightly different make-up of the new European Parliament, it is harder to clearly conclude what the general political signal from the European electorate was in these elections. Compared to the elections of 2019, when the increase in votes for the pro-European Greens and Liberals indicated a demand for more

ambitious European policies, particularly measures to tackle climate change, these two groups were the main losers of the 2024 elections. Instead, a number of parties with Eurosceptic stances, as well as more critical positions towards the EU's ambitious environmental policy agenda, increased their vote shares in 2024. At the same time, the centre-right EPP, with its pro-European position and its emphasis on policy continuity, increased their number of MEPs.

The signals of course varied across Europe. The rise of the radical right, a main expectation ahead of the election, was most clearly visible in France, Germany and Austria. However, there was declining support for radical right parties in the Nordic countries as well as in some Central and Eastern European countries. The decline of the Greens and Liberals was most clearly seen in Germany and France, and the same was true for the Liberals in Spain. However, Green parties won seats for the first time in some other countries, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe.

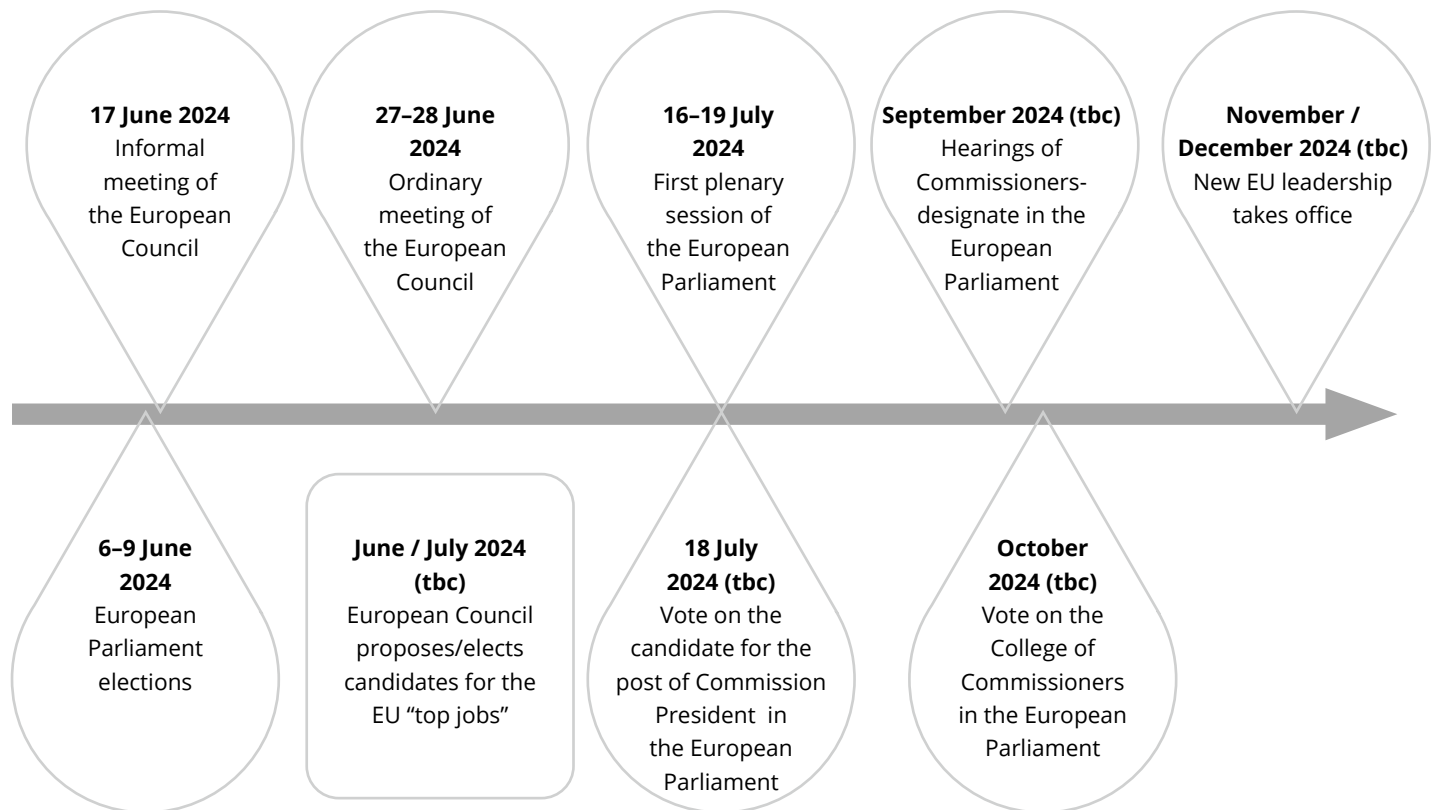
Meanwhile, in some countries there was a clear move against parties in government, of all political colours: in Germany, France, and Hungary in particular. In contrast, in other countries, governing parties performed very well in the elections, for example in Italy, Poland and Spain. And, as always, new parties emerged in different places across Europe, such as Ethnikó Laikó Métopo (ELAM) in Cyprus, BSW in Germany, and Se Acabó la Fiesta (SALF) in Spain.

Overall, though, whereas in 2019, the main signal from the election was a shift towards pro-environment parties and policies, the main trend in 2024 – as indicated by the overall make-up of the new chamber – is a shift to the right compared to 2019, particularly in rural areas across Europe. This pattern continues a trend that we have seen in national elections in many countries in recent years, and this pattern has now emerged at the European level.

3.2 The next steps for the top jobs

The connection between the outcome of the elections and the executive branch of EU governance, the European Commission and its President, is spelled out in Article 17(7) TEU of the Lisbon Treaty:

Figure 12. **The fastest possible timeline**



Source: Own elaboration.

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.

European leaders are now holding these consultations in various formats. The European political parties are venues for coordination and priority-setting. The European Council has set an ambitious timetable for discussing the alternatives there. Given the electoral outcome, the EPP lead candidate and incumbent Ursula von der Leyen is clearly the frontrunner. However, having been proposed by the European Council she will need the support of an absolute majority of the European Parliament (361/720) in a secret ballot. The threshold is relatively high set. As we have seen, EPP-RE-S&D control a majority; smaller than last time but still comfortable. However, there is no room for major defections if support is

only found among these groups. What could be foreseen is a majority backing the proposal which is based on the three groups plus a number of individual parties (such as Fratelli d’Italia) and/or individual MEPs from a variety of parties. There are also discussions inside the Greens/EFA group on whether they should support von der Leyen this time. They did not support her in July 2019 but went on to vote for the Commission in the vote of consent, and they are understood to have grown increasingly positive towards her over time.

Given the dominance of the EPP in Council and European Council, we would expect the next Commission to have a strong EPP presence (based on the established precedent that heads of state or government normally nominate someone from their own party to the Commission). This would put the other party groups, in particular S&D, in a challenging position (Krelinger 2024). Their votes are needed for von der Leyen to be re-elected, and they will bargain on policy, procedures and positions in order to give their support. What kind of guarantees can be given by the President-

designate in this respect will most likely be a key issue. This will also mean that S&D (along with RE and Greens/EFA) could seek significant political concessions. This could lead to a new agreement that provides the basis for the next Commission's mandate. Nevertheless, it could be that the groups to the left of EPP overplay their hand and push von der Leyen and the next Commission closer to the parties in government in ECR and further right. And, over time, given that the next Commission will be composed mainly of politicians from national parties in EPP and to their right, the support of the RE, S&D, and Greens/EFA groups in the European Parliament may gradually erode throughout the term of the Parliament – as we saw on the other side, with the EPP increasingly voting against the Commission in the previous Parliament.

3.3 Institutional power of the Parliament

So what do the results of the 2024 elections tell us about the institutional role of the EP? The outcome of European Parliament elections can have a major influence on the direction of policies in the areas where the EP has legislative power, such as regulating the single market, social policies, environmental policies, refugee policies, and so on. However, in previous years, this has only tended to happen when there has been a stable majority in the chamber. This majority was originally a grand coalition between the two largest groups, EPP and S&D. After these two groups lost their majority in 2019, the dominant coalition on most issues in the Parliament was extended to include RE, and also Greens/EFA (on environmental issues) (Hix and Noury 2024).

That said, the institutional role of the EP in the previous term was rather mixed. On the one hand, Parliament successfully influenced the legislative agenda. Short of a formal right of initiative, the political agreements that were behind the vote of support for von der Leyen and later the entire Commission in 2019 pushed the Commission to respond and advance legislative dossiers that the EP demanded. On the other hand, the intergovernmental and executive branches of the EU – in the Council and Commission – also took steps to by-pass the Parliament. This was seen, for example, on the crisis management during the COVID as well as in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The use of Article 122 TFEU

is one example of this as well as the decisions surrounding the Next Generation EU recovery fund (Johansson et al. 2022).

'The high level of fragmentation of the groups in the new Parliament could mean that the Parliament is an even less reliable partner for the Commission and the Council.'

The high level of fragmentation of the groups in the new Parliament could mean that the Parliament is an even less reliable partner for the Commission and the Council. The super-grand coalition of the three centrist groups, will still command a majority of seats, as we showed. However, as in the previous Parliament, on some issues, various national parties within these groups will not support the coalition's position. In the previous Parliament, the three groups had enough seats in the chamber to still be able to command a majority even when their voting cohesion was relatively low. This time, however, with fewer seats overall, lower cohesion in these groups could mean that they lose their majority. As a result, we expect coalitions in the new Parliament to be more flexible, with the three centrist groups looking for partners elsewhere in the chamber issue by issue – sometimes to their left (for example from Greens/EFA), but also to their right (from ECR and perhaps even ID).

3.4 Policy consequences: environment, defence and security, Future of Europe

In terms of what these changes could mean for the direction of EU policies, based on patterns from the outgoing 2019-2024 Parliament (for more details, see Hix and Noury 2024) we highlight three areas: environment, defence and security, and the debate about the Future of Europe.

The one policy area where there could be significant changes is **environment**. The previous Commission, backed by the European Parliament, set out an ambitious raft of policies under the framework of the European Green Deal. This package was initially supported by a left-leaning majority in the Parliament, of EPP, S&D, RE, and Greens/EFA. Over time, however, the support of EPP for this ambitious agenda gradually eroded,

with the German CDU, in particular, withdrawing their support. As a result, by the end of the Parliaments term, the final pieces of legislation in the package passed with very narrow majorities in the chamber, based on a clearly left-wing majority, of S&D, Greens/EFA, RE, and the Left, and without EPP support. In the new Parliament, this ‘ambitious environment bloc’ will no-longer command a majority of seats. As a result, this could mean that the EPP could push the Commission to back-pedal on some of the most ambitious goals, for example to protect the interests of farmers and the car industry. The core elements of the European Green Deal are likely to remain, particularly as the main pieces of legislation have already been adopted. However, in the implementation of the legislation, the majority in the new Parliament is likely to support the extension of the timetables on some key issues. They will also be ‘control stations’ for a number of decisions, which will be important moments for revising, and possibly lowering, ambitions and/or postponing implementation.

‘On defence and security policy there is likely to be a large majority in the new Parliament in favour of continuing EU support for Ukraine and a tough stance on Russia [...]’

On **defence and security policy**, in contrast, there is likely to be a large majority in the new Parliament in favour of continuing EU support for Ukraine and a tough stance on Russia – despite an increase in the number of MEPs from parties on the radical right and radical left who are more sympathetic towards Russia and Putin. The majority in the new Parliament in this policy area – stretching from S&D to ECR, and with even some support from Greens/EFA – is also likely to support more ambitious EU defence policies. For example, there has been some discussion around a new Defence and Industry Commissioner, to set out and lead the integration of EU defence industries and EU-level support for further defence spending. This direction of travel is likely to command clear majority support in the new Parliament. One field that may become more contentious relates to the questions regarding increased spending.

In terms of the overall institutional reform of the EU, around the **Future of Europe** agenda, the majority in the new Parliament is likely to be less ambitious. The EPP was always more sceptical than S&D and RE about the need for Treaty reform, and the EPP is likely to be supported in this position by ECR and the other parties to their right. Related to this issue is whether the EU will move forward with the plans to enlarge the EU to the countries in the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. An enlargement deal will inevitably be done at the level of the heads of state and government in the European Council. However, the increase in the influence of parties who are more sceptical towards enlargement – such as the French RN – could make it more difficult to build a broad coalition across the Council, the Commission and the Parliament in support of an ambitious enlargement plan.

4. Looking Forward

In terms of where EU politics and policies are heading as a result of the 2024 European Parliament election, we expect the following:

The **shift to the right** in the composition of the Parliament is likely to mean a strengthening of the centre-right parties and parties further to the right across all three EU institutions: the Parliament, the Commission, and the Council. The European Council already has a strong majority on the right. This is likely to lead to the next Commission being more right-leaning than the previous one, and this right-wing bloc in the Council and Commission is likely to be supported by a right-leaning majority in the European Parliament.

That said, the overall **signal from these elections is mixed**. The success of radical right parties in some of the larger member states suggests a mandate for tougher EU immigration policies, a break on deeper European integration, and watering down ambitious environmental policies. However, the success of the mainstream centre-right, and declines in support for the radical right in Northern Europe, suggests a mandate for stability and continuity.

The **fragmentation of the Parliament**, with a weaker ‘grand coalition’ between the three centrist groups – EPP, S&D, and RE – is likely to make the Parliament a less reliable partner for the Commission and the Council. Whereas there have

been stable majorities in previous Parliaments across a range of policy issues, majorities in the new Parliament are likely to be unpredictable, built issues-by-issue and with different groups and national parties supporting policy initiatives. There is also likely to be policy gridlock on some key policy portfolios, which will occur when EPP, S&D and RE find themselves on different sides.

That said, the **EPP group will be in a powerful position**. Unlike in previous Parliaments, it will be almost impossible to form a winning majority without the EPP. This will mean that the EPP will be pivotal; deciding whether to seek a grand coalition (with S&D and RE), a left-leaning coalition (with the addition of Greens/EFA), or a right-leaning coalition (with RE, ECR and other parties on the right). As a result, politics inside the EPP is likely to be key, with agreements between the large national delegations in the group (German CDU/CSU, Spanish PP and Polish PO) deciding the direction of the EPP, and in turn the direction of the Parliament as a whole.

The first test of the new coalition in the Parliament, and the pivotal role of the EPP, will be **the election**

of the Commission President. We expect the EPP to secure the support of RE, most of S&D and some parties in ECR, to deliver an EPP Commission President in the secret vote. Greens/EFA might join this coalition to vote for the Commission as a whole, once the direction of the new Commission is decided and the policy portfolios are allocated. However, because the Commission will be considerably more right-leaning than the current Commission, support for the Commission from the groups on the left (S&D and Greens/EFA) is likely to erode over the course of the Parliament.

Finally, in terms of **policies**, these new patterns are likely to mean a different direction on environmental policy, with compromises to address the concerns of key industries. The new Parliament is likely to be less ambitious on institutional reform and promoting deeper political integration, and may also be reluctant so support rapid enlargement. However, on defence and security there is likely to be a strong majority for continuity of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia and in support of new policies to promote a common defence policy and consolidation of the European defence industry.

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