

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2019: THE PARLIAMENT AND EUROPE TO COME



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Summary

The European Parliament (EP) elected on 26 May 2019 will not likely resemble the current one. These elections will occur in a context of internal tensions within the European Union, turbulence on the international stage, migration-related and social challenges, spreading fears, identitarian flare-ups, and populism. All these phenomena could lend a significantly more European, and less national tone to the campaign than usual.

Is extremism on the rise?

A rise in extremism is likely, but limited to the Parliament level: only major countries send sizeable quotas of MEPs, and the departure of British MEPs will shrink the size of the nationalist camp. Right-of-traditional-right groups already represent 20% of the current Parliament, and will likely remain divided.

A significant reconfiguration of the **radical left** is not expected, though it could win a few more seats.

Internal troubles in the two major traditional parties, the **EPP (European People's Party)**, and the **S&D (Socialists and Social-Democrats)**, could weaken them to the point of losing their current 55% majority.

In total, even if a majority hostile to European integration, or capable of tweaking the current programme, is less plausible than suggested, majorities will be harder to build in future, and inter-institutional relations could change.

As such, the **“centre” group** has an important role to play, regardless of the choices made by La République en Marche, as do the **Greens**, who are expected to gain new seats and be more influential than in the past.

Re-adjustments, or even a re-shuffle based around a **charnière** group, could have substantial consequences on the appointment of the new European Commission President, who is elected by the European Parliament and will, as a result, become the **leader of a parliamentary coalition which must be built**.

Habitually, European elections are first and foremost national elections, and attract low voter turn-outs (49.5% in 1999, 42.6% in 2014). The outcome may differ in 2019, however.

Various signs, be they political stances, or media opinions, indicate that these elections could occur under different auspices and in another context than previous ones: tensions within the European Union, turbulence on the international stage, migratory issues, social conflict, spreading fears, identitarian flare-ups and populism. All of which surpass the national framework.

1. A more “European” election?

The 2009 Lisbon Treaty has given the European Parliament greater legislative powers and growing political clout. In addition to its legislative role, the Parliament elects the Commission and its President (and can dismiss them as well). It auditions candidates for all leadership positions in Europe, including the Executive Board of the European Central Bank. It also ratifies international treaties such as the Brexit deal. Its role as a political sounding board is evident. The composition of the future Parliament, resulting from elections in 27 Member States, will have decisive consequences on the future functioning of the Union and its policy stances.

2. The likely emergence of new political balances

Trends observed over the course of the current term, combined with current survey results, suggest the possible emergence of several shifts, including the departure of British MPs, which will decrease the total number of members from 751 to 705, and the re-adjusted number of MPs from certain countries to correct imbalances and account for demographic changes. A simple majority will therefore require 353 votes.

It is often suggested that a Eurosceptic, or even Europhobic, majority could emerge which would contribute to paralysing the Union – in numerous domains at least. Though this scenario is unlikely at this stage, other results could be equally worrying for the future of European integration.

One possibility is an accentuation of troubles within the two major traditional political parties, the EPP and the S&D, which would weaken them to the point of losing their current 55% majority and deprive them of the ability to single-handedly implement a traditional policy of ongoing compromise (that is challenged internally by some). This policy concerns internal parliamentary matters and approaches to more political issues.

Currently, stable, centre-right majorities form on economic issues, and stable centre-left majorities form on social issues, with variable geometry alliances between the two biggest groups and the Liberals and Greens, and sometimes even the GUE.

These majorities will be harder to negotiate and more complicated to build in the future; inter-institutional relations could change as a result.

3. An increase in extremes and nationalist tendencies?

This is likely, and the parties concerned, which have successfully relied on proportional voting in the past, take European elections very seriously. This phenomenon will likely be limited to the European Parliament-level for several reasons, however.

Firstly, only the most populated countries send large numbers of MEPs: Germany (96), France (74 in 2014, 79 in 2019), Italy (73 in 2014, 76 in 2019) and Spain (54 in 2014, 59 in 2019). In comparison, Hungary has just 21 MEPs in total.

Secondly, the departure of British MEPs from the conservative and UKIP parties will weaken the nationalist camp, even if this departure will be amply offset by the arrival of a large number of Lega Nord MPs from Italy (currently 28 seats), as well as Alternative for Germany (AfD) MPs from Germany (15 seats).

Right-of-traditional-right parties are currently divided into three political groups¹: ECR (the third biggest Parliamentary group, which includes the soon-to-disappear British conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice (PIS) party, with 71 members), the EFDD (which includes the British UKIP party and the Five Star Movement, currently with 45 members), and the ENF (which includes Marine Le Pen’s National Rally party and Matteo Salvini’s Lega party, with 35 seats, making it the smallest group in the EP). According to current and available estimates, ENF could progress from 35 to 59 members, EFDD from 45 to 53, and ECR could slip from 71 to 48, for a total of 160 members across the three groups, up from 151.

1. See the appendix for an explanatory note on the European Parliamentary groups.

In total, then, the rise would be limited in relation to the critical mass embodied by the furthest right-wing parties since 2014, given that some other populist parties belong to other groups (Orbán's party in the EPP or France Insoumise in the GUE).

Also, it is not likely that these political parties will work together or form a coherent unit. All signs point to these parties having more differences than similarities. They could, however, form an 'against' bloc, which has sometimes obliged other groups to form a coalition since 2014.

Even within the ECR, a group which currently includes 19 nationalities and is expected to survive despite the departure of British members, a more liberal right composed of Belgian and Dutch members co-exists with a more authoritarian right composed of the Polish PIS, which would become the biggest delegation. No one in this group is anti-Union, but all favour a 'confederalist' right over a federal approach. Divisions do exist within the group on important topics such as the European budget (an East/West split).

Concerning the EFDD, the Sweden Democrats party has left the group to join the ECR. The position of the very diverse Five Star Movement is uncertain, as is that of the AfD. Not able to find similar partners and unwelcome in other more left-wing groups, the Five Star Movement may join the ENF, one of its MPs has suggested. The AfD, originally an anti-Euro party and then an anti-immigrant one, has adopted more extreme ideological positions. Most of the national parties in the EFDD only have one member, making the group very fragile. Some predict it may even disappear, particularly if the Five Star Movement and AfD joined other groups.

At present, the ENF is primarily pro-Russian due to the large number of western European members, much unlike the two previous groups. As such, the western right prefers to find pro-Putin allies while the eastern right is generally anti Russia.

Beyond the fault line between the ECR and EFDD on one hand, and the ENF regarding

Russia on the other, more generally, the division between eastern and western rights is less clear: Orbán is generally pro-Putin, while the Slovaks (influenced by SNS, a member of the government coalition), the Czechs (the president Milos Zeman), the Bulgarians and Romanians are ambiguous to say the least. Another example, of course, are the orthodox candidate countries of Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Only the Polish and the Balts continue to employ a categorically anti-Russian political discourse (despite the very recent victory in Latvia's legislative elections of Harmony, a pro-Russian party).

All these countries have conflicting interests as a result.

As Denis McShane, a former minister of European Affairs from the UK, recently wrote in Politico, the Austrian chancellor announced a Vienna-Rome axis, but both countries disagree on how to manage the migratory situation: Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic derive 4% of their GDP from EU transfers and benefit from the free movement of workers. None wish to leave the European Union or NATO.

In this context, former American presidential advisor Steve Bannon has created a foundation in Brussels called The Movement, to federate nationalist and populist right-wing parties. The idea is to create a "super group" within the EP representing a third of all future MPs. The project, rooted in the behaviour of these groups over the current term, has been viewed with scepticism until now by those concerned and even rejected by the Swedish, Danish and Finnish parties. The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) has suggested punctual joint endeavours, while the AfD appears divided on the issue, as many view Trump and Bannon as deterrents. Viktor Orbán is not ready to break from the EPP and vice-versa, and even the Italian Lega has expressed doubts. Only Marine Le Pen's party has shown interest, though it has since taken some distance (expressed when Le Pen met with Salvini in Rome on 8 October). Last July, Matteo Salvini indicated his interest in a Pan-European, anti-immigration alliance and

proposes a Europe which protects its citizens over one which has no borders. He intends to use this issue to build bridges with the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), the Austrian FPÖ, or Orbán.

In total, at this stage, and though their number could increase significantly, populists will most likely hold **between 20–25% of seats in Parliament** (they hold 20% now). **Their relative influence could grow, however**, in a Parliament made smaller by Brexit and in which the two largest groups are weakened. It will be difficult for them to form a coherent group, except possibly a 'negatively cohesive' one. Reshuffles are possible too, either within all three groups, or among them.

In truth, the presence of populists is, and will be, more tangible on the Council than the Parliament, particularly due to voting rules. In a number of areas outside the scope of the Council/Parliament co-decision procedure, only the Council decides – often unanimously – with the participation of heads of government and even sectoral ministers having close ties to populist or extremist movements that block decisions.

The European Council, which defines overall political guidelines, adopts them by consensus. In its areas of competence, the Parliament can produce progress and/or compromise depending on applicable voting rules which sidestep or even exclude populist and extremist elements within it.

4.A restructuring of the radical left?

According to current estimates, the GUE could obtain a total of 58 seats, up from 51.

The Now the People movement was established in Lisbon in April 2018 by its three founders: Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise party, Spain's Podemos party, and Portugal's Bloco de Esquerda. Three additional parties have since joined: Finland's Left Alliance, Denmark's Red-Green Alliance, and Sweden's Left Party.

For Jean-Luc Mélenchon, three lines of action take precedence: the struggle against the

primacy of economic performance over social justice; the break from pro-war ideology as embodied by "Defence Europe" and NATO, and handling migratory flows by fighting what causes them (e.g. wars, 'unfair' free trade deals and climate change). Developments in Germany's Die Linke party, Benoît Hamon's Génération.s party, and Yánis Varoufákis's Diem 25 party are observed with interest by this movement. Since April 2018, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's positions have moved towards a more restrictive approach to managing migration.

It will be important to follow Jean-Luc Mélenchon's campaign in France as well as developments on the Spanish political scene (e.g. Podemos) to ascertain the impact of these movements, even though major changes within the GUE should not be expected, despite the possible emergence of major internal divisions between pro- and anti-European factions. Even within Die Linke, a new impetus has accompanied the creation of Sahra Wagenknecht's 'Aufstehen!' anti-immigration party.

The feasibility of an alliance between France Insoumise and its Spanish and Portuguese allies is therefore dubious. France Insoumise's leader has managed to impose an alternative to so-far unsuccessful attempts by Yánis Varoufákis and Benoît Hamon to unite 'left-of-the-left' federalists, ecologists and socialists around a Pan-European platform.

The transnational European movement launched in March 2018 in Naples by Benoît Hamon's Generation.s movement (the biggest member), Yánis Varoufákis' Diem 25, members of Poland's Razem party, members of Portugal's Free party and members of Denmark's Alternativet party, has not appeared to generate the momentum desired.

5. Weakened and divided central forces

Though it seems unlikely that an uptick in extremist party presence will result in major upheavals, important changes should not be excluded so long as weaknesses and divisions remain in central forces in Parliament.

The EPP group is tied up in the Orbán issue despite it being in the interest of all that

Fidesz remains part of the group. If the EPP wishes to remain the biggest Parliamentary group (and largest minority), all of its current member parties must remain present.

While only 57 EPP members voted against a resolution calling for an Article 7 procedure to be initiated against Hungary, the exclusion of Fidesz from the group is not expected.

Preserving the broad political spectrum which has powered the EPP until now will be difficult nonetheless due to a weakening of its original major cohorts, in Germany and Italy, for example.

The group's traditional "Christian-Democrat" component is increasingly outpaced by a harder right faction, even if Viktor Orbán poses as the "saviour of the European right", an heir of Helmut Kohl who fights against immigration and reconnects with supposedly Christian values. Within Austria's government, the conservative party is allied with the far right, though relations between them are not stellar.

Noteworthy, then, is an interview with Hungary's Prime Minister in the 27 July 2018 edition of *Bild*, and the speech delivered the next day to the minority of Hungarians living in Romania. In it, he presents himself as the head of a new generation of Eastern European leaders, who came of age in the 1990s and best embody the future of European construction. Orbán calls for the "removal of 68s-era elites" and says that the European Commission's days are numbered. European Parliamentary elections therefore play a decisive role, with migration issues – the only subject potentially capable of "toppling the liberal elite" – as a necessary focus. He also criticises France, which seeks to impose a French leadership "financed with German money". Setting himself apart from other Eastern leaders, he wants a friendlier approach to Russia and highlights the stability afforded to Turkey by Erdoğan. According to the Hungarian researcher Szentpéteri Nagy Richard, however, "it's a minority position; Orbán is using the European elections to consolidate his power and position in Hungary".

In any case, there is little chance that the EPP, overly concerned with its strength in numbers,

will give that up for greater coherence within the group. While it is likely at this stage that Viktor Orbán's party will remain part of the EPP, it is also probable that neither the Polish PiS nor Salvini's Lega party will join the EPP. The latter is pursuing a relatively centre-oriented position within the right to avoid being overshadowed by extreme-leaning parties, as this would lead to a significant number of departures.

According to current estimates, the EPP may hold on to only 178 of the 219 seats it holds.

The state of **European S&D parties** in Member States, with the exception of Spain and Portugal, is a cause for concern. Furthermore, the departure of Labour MPs will shrink the group considerably. The future within the group of Italy's Democratic Party (PD), which became the group's main delegation in 2014, is under discussion. The PD could possibly split in the next few months. If this occurs, Matteo Renzi's new party could potentially join ALDE, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats. Another question mark is the possible arrival of Greece's SYRIZA party, which would reinforce the left-leaning side of the new group. This is not likely however, given that Alexis Tsípras prefers to act as a 'bridge' between different left-wing parties. As for the SPD and the French Socialist party, both are in difficulty. A re-shuffle in favour of Eastern countries – Romania, for example – could also occur.

EPP members point out that 'Orbán's' exist in other groups too, and view the leaders of the Slovak, Romanian and Maltese socialist parties as equally unsavoury. They also stress that the current downward slide of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and its resulting withdrawal is counter-productive to cooperation and compromise.

According to current estimates, the S&D group may only retain 137 of its 188 seats.

The EPP and PES are expected to remain, respectively, the largest and second-largest groups in the European Parliament, but without securing an absolute majority together, they are likely to offer a more heterogeneous political structure than in the past, and hold less weight.

An entire political generation only familiar with this predominant situation will disappear, from other EU institutions as well.

Coalitions aimed at securing majorities will no doubt become more fluid, more volatile and less predictable. The traditional “European establishment”, which made nearly every decision, including major nominations (not least of which the Commission presidency), will lose power. The EP could become a permanent arena of negotiation, with variable majorities and toe-to-toe stand-offs on amendments to texts, without the compromises of the past. For some, such an outcome would be somewhat positive to the extent that it re-establishes a clearer political struggle. For others, it would lead to a form of “Dutchification”, in reference to the 13 political parties and groups in the country’s parliament, four of which are needed to form a majority.

6. An essential centre?

Centrists will no doubt weigh heavily in the elections. Regardless of the score obtained by Emmanuel Macron’s La République en Marche (LREM) party (estimates predict 21 seats), the issues addressed above will likely bestow a key role on the party at pivotal moments. For some analysts, **Macron could “lose in France”, but “win in Europe”.**

The LREM’s European ambitions took form in an appeal entitled “Réveillons l’Europe”, launched on 27 September 2018 and signed by Christophe Castaner (La République en Marche), Guy Verhofstadt (former Prime Minister of Belgium), Matteo Renzi (former Prime Minister of Italy), Albert Rivera (President of the Citizens party), Joseph Muscat (Labour Prime Minister of Malta), Alexander Pechtold (of the Democrats 66 party in the Netherlands) and Dacian Cioloş (former Prime Minister of Romania and President of Romania Together).

The French President is very partial to a “neither right nor left” line and in his speech to the Parliament on 17 April 2018 stated: “At the moment I do not belong to any political family represented here”. Paradoxically, the “neither right nor left” stance is difficult to take

in a Parliament nevertheless accustomed to “right and left both” approaches.

He has two options:

1. Succeed in forming an independent parliamentary group, which requires a minimum of 25 MPs of at least 7 different nationalities. This involves finding partners in other – politically compatible – countries. In due course, this would allow him to adopt joint positions, and be an organised partner, vis a vis other groups.

The months ahead will reveal whether these intentions translate into a commitment to working together in a new group (note: Italian democrats and Maltese Labour MPs are currently members of the S&D), or whether the “poaching” of figures from other groups is possible.

Even if the latter occurs, a new group created this way would likely lack a solid foundation: in the case of the EPP, for example, ‘catches’ would be limited to individuals.

In the absence of positive signals, the plausibility of this option is decreasing over time.

2. Join ALDE with the goal of strengthening it, reforming it, and negotiating an updated agenda. This option presents the advantage of creating a strong group which weighs in on decisions and nominations, is likely to have significant influence on the formation of future coalitions, and, according to some, may even become the second biggest group in the EP. Some expect the emergence of new ties with the Greens.

The problem here is the expectation this creates to agree to compromises with an already established political family whose parliamentary group is headed by a strong figure: the former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. This Parliamentary group has been formed by two political parties since 2004: The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the European Democratic Party (EDP), created at the time by François Bayrou and Francesco Rutelli based on a common agenda.

The third option would be to join the Non-Attached Members (NA), which would preclude any possible influence and be absurd.

Therefore, a Parliament controlled by a broad, pro-European centre remains purely hypothetical at this stage. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Centre (LREM and MODEM parties as far as France is concerned) will play a bigger role within a Parliament forced to transition from bipartisan condominium to multipartisan balance.

Timing remains an issue: some wonder whether it is best to choose one of these two options before or after the elections. The speed with which negotiations will begin in the days following the elections in order to prepare July's "inaugural" session means that choices should be "considered", if not "made", even before the polls.

Given current estimates, and uncertainties surrounding LREM's position, the two biggest delegations of the ALDE group are likely to be Spain (Citizens) and Germany (Free Democratic Party). Surveys suggest that the future centre-leaning group will have some 93 MPs if LREM members join them.

With a small quarter of populists, and a quarter EPP, there will be no absolute majority on the left in Parliament: this is an opportunity for this centre group to play a pivotal role (no centre-left, or centre-right majority without the ALDE).

It should be noted that the liberal/centrist family already wields certain clout on the Council, with eight liberal prime ministers (the French President excluded).

The three largest groups, with support from the Greens, could be forced into a structural cooperation arrangement to move past obstruction from extremist parties.

7. The Greens and new pro-European-movements

Forecasts indicate stability at least for **the Greens**. Despite the loss of British MPs, an increase is expected in Germany and possi-

bly France. Very promising results in recent regional elections in Bavaria, Belgium and Luxembourg are noteworthy.

In Bavaria, the CSU lost nearly as many votes to the Greens as it did to the AfD. This trend will only be of significant interest if similar outcomes are observed in other regional elections, notably the one in Hesse on 28 October 2018.

In any case, the Green Party is resolutely pro-European (even if it seeks change). It wishes to mobilise 'dormant' pro-European votes, among young voters, for example. In principle, the party wouldn't refuse alliances with other pro-European forces in order to focus on the three challenges of safeguarding democracy, climate change and migratory issues. A detailed manifesto will be approved at the 22-24 November congress in Berlin.

In any case, alliances will only be an issue after the elections.

The question also remains as to whether **new pro-European citizen movements and trans-European parties** will break through: one example is Volt Europa, launched in March 2017 and driven by an ample base of young pro-Europeans opposed to the Europhobic attacks of certain governments or parties and who consider themselves 'progressive' rather than on the right or left. They hope to secure elected members in at least seven countries in order to form a parliamentary group.

They claim to have 15,000 members in 30 countries (the European Union, Albania, Macedonia and Switzerland) and kicked off their programme at a summit organised in Amsterdam on 27–28 October.

This movement draws its strength from an ability to mobilise and organise young voters on the ground and on social media with a resolutely trans-European approach. "National parties are powerless against the challenges we face: these cross national borders and must be met by us, the people", the movement states.

It remains to be seen whether other pro-European, non-political forces such as the singer Bono or the NGO Avaaz, will succeed, as ex-

pected, in playing a role in the election campaign to highlight and influence it in line with the values they defend.

8. A broader and immediate issue: the appointment of the European Commission and its President

The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 gave the European Parliament the role of formally electing the Commission. Prior to 2014, the European Council alone took this decision behind closed doors. In 2014, with the introduction of the “*Spitzenkandidaten*” process (a term designating the leaders of European political families), it was clear that the next Commission President would belong to one of the two major political parties, with the EPP expected to have an advantage. Jean-Claude Juncker was elected on this basis with additional support from other groups.

The situation will be very different in 2019. The choice of the Commission President will be determined to a lesser degree by the respective weight of the two major political forces, and more so by a broader parliamentary coalition. The President of the Commission will become the leader of this parliamentary coalition by default, with a veritable coalition agreement similar to those seen in many Member States with a parliamentary system.

Should none of the candidates designated by the various political families be elected Commission President, in the absence of a majority, and/or due to reluctance on the part of the Council (the French president and German chancellor are critical of the procedure followed in 2014), the sudden appearance of one (or more) outsiders cannot be excluded.

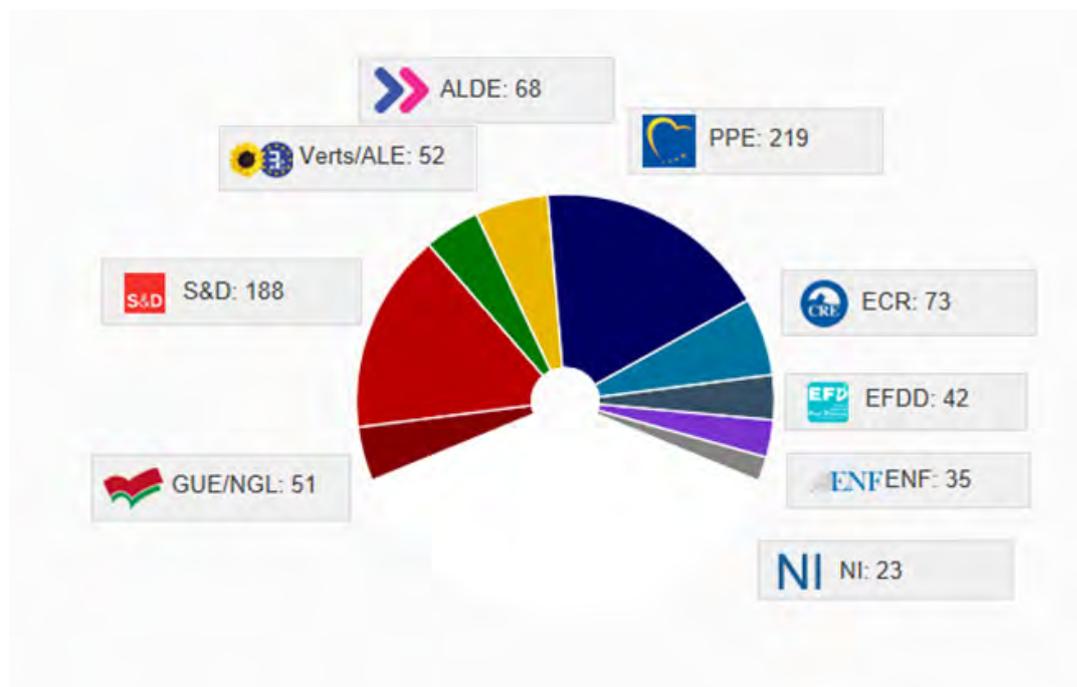
In these conditions, the full version of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system would have been short-lived (the candidate of the winning party the evening of the election will become Commission President, an outcome which the Council must accept) and this system would be replaced by the parliamentary model predominant in Europe, in which party lead-

ers are tasked with building, on the basis of an agreement, a coalition led (or not...) by one of them. This may even require negotiation between both chambers: the lower chamber (European Parliament) and the upper chamber (European Council).

While party candidates will be announced this fall at “primaries” organised by most European political parties, in which Manfred Weber will compete with Alexander Stubb in the EPP, and Frans Timmermans with Maroš Šefčovič for the PES, the liberal family is asking itself questions about the utility of using such a procedure again. It is considering a proposal to establish a “team” headed by the Danish Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, though the modalities of such a formula are not clear at this stage.

Whatever turns the upcoming campaign takes, a more traditionally parliamentary regime for the European Union is taking shape, beginning with the creation of a multiple nomination ‘package’, the day after the elections (Commission presidency, Council presidency, EP presidency, the choice of the High Representative of Common Foreign and Security Policy, and possibly the European Central Bank presidency). Only time will tell if these trends contribute to the legitimacy of the Union and its institutions in the eyes of Europeans.

Appendix 1 . Political groups in the European Parliament (2014-2019)



Appendix 2 . Political groups in the European Parliament

The European People's party (Christian Democrats) Group (EPP)

The group formed by the European People's Party (EPP group) is the largest of eight political groups in the European Parliament. It has 219 MPs, or 29% of all parliamentary seats.

From 1999 to 2009, the group was named the "European People's Party – European Democrats EPP-ED group" and was composed of two European political parties: the European People's Party and the European Democrats. Now, its members are from the European People's Party only; the European Democrats (the British conservative party and Czech Republic's Civic Democratic Party) split off to form a new group: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

Viewed as the EP's centre-right group, it has been led by Manfred Weber, a German MEP and CSU member, since June 2014.

The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats European Parliamentary Group (S&D)

The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats European Parliamentary Group is composed of members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and includes Italy's Democratic Party (PD).

It brings together EP members from socialist, social-democratic and labour parties as well as Italian democrats.

The S&D group is led by Udo Bullmann of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. With 188 MPs, it is the second-largest group in the EP.

European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR)

The European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR) brings together a series of right-wing and right-leaning nationalist parties. Founded in 2009, the ECR has 73 MPs from 19 different countries. It is the EP's third-largest group.

The ECR is known for being an anti-federalist centre-right group. Its members support economic

liberalism but are critical of EU institutions. Unlike certain members of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD), however, they do not support the withdrawal of their countries from the European Union. The group is led by Syed Kamall of the Conservative Party.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group (ALDE)

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) parliamentary group, formed in 2004, is composed of two European political parties: the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE, previously called European Liberal Democrats and Reformists, ELDR) and the European Democratic Party (EDP). With 68 MPs from 22 EU Member States, it is the fourth-largest political group in the European Parliament. It is led by the Belgian Guy Verhofstadt.

This centrist group defends economic liberalism and European values.

Greens–European Free Alliance group (ALE)

The Greens–European Free Alliance group is composed of two different European parties: the European Green party and the European Free Alliance group, formally part of two distinct groups: the Green group and the European Radical Alliance. Since the 2014 elections, it has held 52 seats. It is led by Ska Keller of Alliance 90/The Greens, and Philippe Lamberts of the *Ecologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales* (ECOLO). It is the EP's fifth-largest group.

The European United Left–Nordic Green Left group (GUE/NGL)

The European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) group brings together left-leaning, socialist, anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, eco-socialist and communist parties. It primarily includes groups within the Party of the European Left (PEL), as well as the Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA), the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL) and non-affiliated members. Members come from radical left-wing and extreme left parties.

This group of 51 MEPs, presided by Gabriele Zimmer of The Left party, is the sixth-biggest political force of the EP by number of seats held.

Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD)

The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD) is a European parliamentary group composed of 42 MEPs. Composed of populist and Eurosceptic parties, it is the seventh-largest group.

Initially, it was mainly composed of Britain's UKIP party and the Italian Lega Nord party. The latter left the group in May 2014 to join the Europe of Nations and Freedom group.

Europe of Nations and Freedom group (ENF)

Europe of Nations and Freedom is a European parliamentary group created in June 2015. It positions itself on the right, to extreme-right, of the European political spectrum. The Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENL) is the party associated with the group.

With 35 MPs, the ENF is the smallest parliamentary group (only 4.7 % of MPs).

After the 2014 elections, members of the European Alliance for Freedom, with Marine Le Pen of National Rally (RN), Geert Wilders of the Party for Freedom (PVV) and Matteo Salvini of Lega Nord created this extreme-right parliamentary group. It is co-presided by Nicolas Bay of the National Rally and Marcel de Graaf of the Party for Freedom (PVV).

Non-attached Members (NA)

This group is composed of 23 MPs.

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