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**A National Moment of European
Democracy: The 2024 European
Elections in France, Poland and
Germany and Their Consequences**



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Preface

Democracy thrives through the various elections that define it within a given political framework; 2024 is a particularly election-rich year in France, Poland and Germany. In this context, the European elections on June 9, 2024, both revealed and shaped the balance of political power at both European and national levels. Despite numerous discussions in recent years - especially during the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022) - about the future development of a transnational European democracy, the impression persists that European elections still function primarily as “second-order national elections” and do not yet fully meet the requirements of a truly European democratic space. The national framework continues to shape electoral campaigns for the European Parliament, often resulting in domestic political concerns and power struggles taking precedence over European interests and narratives.

However, it would be overly simplistic to view European elections as purely national affairs. Since the introduction of direct universal suffrage for the election of the European Parliament in 1979, these elections have served as a crucial opportunity to discuss Europe. Every five years, they act as a magnifying glass, allowing us to closely and comparatively examine the interdependencies between the national and European levels, the priorities of European policy, the relevance of European issues for domestic politics, and the extent of Europeanization of political debates across member states. The complexity of the European construct as a political and democratic system is particularly rooted in this strong interweaving of multi-level trends and developments that respond to both internal and supranational dynamics. While a general Europeanization of debates remains a desirable long-term trend, political developments at the national level continue to play a decisive role in shaping the Union's future.

We invited three authors from France, Poland and Germany to retrospectively examine their countries' perspectives on the 2024 European elections during this

crucial period of political *rentrée* in Brussels as well as in Paris, Berlin, and Warsaw. They were asked to explore the impact of these elections on both European and national levels. In his article on France, Thierry Chopin illustrates how the interweaving of different political levels reached an extreme, with the European elections acting as a catalyst for early national legislative elections - a unique precedent in Europe. This almost transformed the legislative elections into a kind of “secondary European elections,” with the outcome (and the narrowly averted risk of the far right coming to power) potentially playing a decisive role in shaping France's future European policy. In Poland, the elections confirmed the renewal of Polish democracy following the parliamentary elections of October 2023, but also signaled a tentative new chapter, limited by the continued strong influence of the Law and Justice Party on both domestic and European policy as Melchior Szczepanik points out in his article. Lastly, in her article on Germany, Linn Selle reveals that while political parties conducted predominantly national campaigns, there is a strong interest in European issues among citizens. This disparity underscores the need to strengthen democratic procedures at the European level to better align with public interest.

In 2024, the European Union faces numerous geopolitical and strategic challenges that demand a united response. While there is still a pro-European majority in the new European Parliament (2024-2029), this should not overshadow the increasing societal and political fragmentation within national democracies, which could undermine the European project in the long run. The resilience of European democracy and the European political project must be strengthened at all levels, requiring the collective efforts of both political leaders and civil society.

Marie Augère

Une imbrication des échelles politiques poussée à son paroxysme : les élections européennes 2024 en France

Thierry Chopin

Les élections européennes avaient pour enjeux les équilibres politiques au niveau européen. Le Président de la République française a interprété le résultat de ces élections sous un prisme strictement national, faisant de sa décision de dissoudre l'Assemblée nationale l'issue du scrutin européen en France. Ce choix a paradoxalement fait des résultats des élections législatives françaises des élections tout aussi importantes que les élections européennes pour la direction politique de l'Europe.

Les élections européennes ont mis en évidence les dynamiques politiques à l'œuvre à l'échelle de l'UE et des Etats membres (fragmentation partisane importante et montée généralisée des partis populistes, en particulier à l'extrême droite) ainsi que leurs implications sur les équilibres et l'agenda politiques de l'Union européenne (UE) au cours de la prochaine législature¹. Les résultats des élections législatives anticipées en France dessinent également un paysage politique très fragmenté qui inscrit la vie politique française dans le droit fil des dynamiques à l'œuvre en Europe tant au niveau national qu'à l'échelle de l'Union. L'asymétrie est frappante entre d'un côté la relative stabilité des grands équilibres politiques au Parlement européen et l'investiture récente de la Présidente de la Commission européenne - qui dirigera pendant les cinq années qui viennent ce qui s'apparente aujourd'hui à un gouvernement - et de l'autre le chamboulement de la situation politique en France après les élections législatives anticipées.

La décision d'Emmanuel Macron de dissoudre l'Assemblée nationale à l'issue du scrutin européen en France a constitué un choc inattendu pour les partenaires européens de la France. Elle a suscité une incompréhension et une appréhension très fortes. Elle a créé en effet une double incertitude : d'une part quant à l'orientation

politique du prochain gouvernement et ses répercussions pour l'Europe dans son ensemble, d'autre part sur l'avenir de la politique européenne de la France - deuxième pays de l'Union par sa population et son économie.

Enjeux de campagne : quelles demandes, quels clivages ?

Pendant la campagne pour les élections européennes, les Français ont exprimé des préoccupations et des attentes recoupant assez largement celles des autres Européens et mettant ainsi certaines priorités politiques au cœur de leurs demandes : inquiétude et pessimisme très fort sur le plan socio-économique du fait de l'inflation et de la stagnation de l'activité qui ont résulté de la crise énergétique, défense de leur pouvoir d'achat, défense de leur sécurité, immigration et asile, lutte contre le changement climatique².

Dans ce contexte, le message politique dominant a été celui porté très tôt, avant même le début de la campagne, par le Rassemblement national (RN) incarné par la tête de liste Jordan Bardella, autour du triptyque immigration, sécurité et identité. Ce message s'est appuyé sur le discours de la « citadelle assiégée » et l'exploitation du sentiment d'appauvrissement et de détérioration des conditions de vie.

Face à ce narratif défendant le repli national, la plupart des [principaux camps politiques](#) en compétition ont commencé la campagne tardivement et se sont le plus souvent positionnés en réaction, se laissant imposer les termes du débat électoral par le RN. Dans un contexte marqué par l'instabilité du monde et par un degré de conflictualité inédit pour les Européens depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les questions internationales ont néanmoins occupé une place non négligeable

dans la campagne autour d'un certain nombre d'enjeux clés tels que : le positionnement stratégique de l'Union européenne (UE), notamment autour de la question de la « puissance européenne » et du rôle de la France à cet égard ; la guerre entre la Russie et l'Ukraine de la part de la majorité présidentielle et de Parti socialiste-Place publique, en opposition au RN ; le retour de la violence au Proche-Orient sous l'effet du conflit israélo-palestinien du côté de LFI (La France insoumise).

Il est enfin notable que la campagne électorale pour les élections européennes n'a pas été réduite au débat pour ou contre l'UE, mais qu'elle a été davantage centrée sur le [projet politique](#), y compris pour la gauche et la droite radicales qui ont cherché à transposer au niveau européen leurs priorités portant sur le projet d'une Europe à leur image : concentrée sur la lutte contre la pauvreté pour la gauche radicale, sur la lutte contre l'immigration pour la droite radicale. Le positionnement du RN reflète ce déplacement des termes du débat même s'il reste ambigu : à l'échelle nationale, depuis que le RN a renoncé à son opposition à l'euro qui inquiétait l'opinion, son discours ne relève plus d'une stratégie de l'« Exit » (Europhobie) ; il continue néanmoins de défendre en même temps un souverainisme juridique susceptible de conduire de fait à un Frexit et reste par ailleurs allié au niveau européen (au sein du nouveau groupe politique des « Patriotes pour l'Europe ») à certains partis ayant adopté il y a quelques mois encore (voir le PVV - Partij voor de Vrijheid, soit Parti de la liberté - de Gert Wilders aux Pays-Bas) une position radicale de rupture vis-à-vis de l'Union européenne.

Pourtant, ce début de « normalisation » des élections européennes ne peut masquer l'importance persistante des enjeux domestiques nationaux et notamment le vote sanction contre Emmanuel Macron sur lequel le RN a fortement capitalisé, comme le montre la dimension protestataire du vote. En effet, la dimension émotionnelle de ce dernier a été très forte, dans la mesure où celle-ci est liée chez beaucoup d'électeurs en France à un sentiment de peur, d'appauvrissement et de perte

d'influence dans un monde qui semble incontrôlé. Dans la mesure où bon nombre de citoyens considèrent que des réponses ne sont pas apportées à ces craintes, celles-ci se transforment en un sentiment d'impuissance qui se cristallise dans un sentiment de colère dont l'abstention³ et la montée de l'extrême droite constituent des expressions politiques majeures.

Des résultats des élections européennes en France à la décision de dissoudre l'Assemblée nationale

La victoire du RN aux élections européennes en France était attendue mais a été [impressionnante](#) : troisième victoire consécutive depuis 2014 ; 31,37% des suffrages en 2024 (contre 23% en 2019) soit un résultat plus de deux fois supérieur à celui de la liste de la majorité présidentielle « Besoin d'Europe »⁴ conduite par Valérie Hayer (14,6%) ; première délégation nationale (30 sièges), tous groupes politiques confondus, au Parlement européen ; au total, l'extrême-droite (RN et Reconquête) totalise près de 37% des suffrages exprimés ! Ces résultats sont d'autant plus impressionnants après un « septennat » d'Emmanuel Macron qui a placé la question européenne au cœur de l'ADN politique de son mouvement et qui a porté une ambition stratégique très forte à l'échelle de l'Union. Avant même le moment électoral récent - européennes et législatives -, il est notable que le [premier discours de la Sorbonne](#), prononcé quand l'agenda européen d'Emmanuel Macron était renforcé par sa dynamique politique nationale, a eu un poids et un impact que son [deuxième discours de la Sorbonne](#) n'a pas eu dans les circonstances actuelles et notamment en France. En outre, cette victoire du RN est à mettre en perspective avec le rapport de l'opinion publique en France vis-à-vis de l'UE. En effet, s'il n'y a pas d'europhobie majoritaire en France (qui se traduirait

¹ Chopin, T., Fraccaroli, N., Hernborg, N., Jamet, J.-F. (2024) « Political Dynamics ahead of the European Parliament Elections: Implications for the EU's Political Direction and Policy Priorities », Jacques Delors Institute, May - <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/political-dynamics-ahead-of-the-european-parliament-elections-implications-for-the-eus-political-direction-and-policy-priorities/>

² Cautrès, B. et Chopin, T. (2024), « ["Élections européennes : répondre aux attentes d'une opinion publique fragmentée dans un 'nouvel âge des incertitudes'"](#) : étude réalisée conjointement par le Cevipof (Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po) et l'Institut Jacques Delors.

³ 24 millions de Français n'ont pas voté le 9 juin, soit un peu moins d'un Français sur deux - 48,5%.

⁴ La coalition « Besoin d'Europe » a réuni les partis suivants : Renaissance, Modem, Horizons, Parti Radical, Union des démocrates et indépendants.

par une volonté de quitter l'UE), la France se situe en revanche clairement parmi les trois pays les plus défavorables à l'intégration européenne. Un travail à l'échelle territoriale et locale visant à favoriser l'appropriation par les Français de l'échelle de l'UE comme cadre d'appartenance apparaît à l'évidence être [indispensable](#).

Au-delà de l'échec du camp présidentiel, le vote lors des élections européennes de 2024 marque une rupture avec la « révolution électorale »⁵ accomplie par Emmanuel Macron en 2017. Au-delà des 17 points d'écart qui séparent le RN du camp présidentiel au soir du 9 juin, la liste du camp présidentiel (14,6% contre 25% en 2019 si l'on cumule la majorité présidentielle de l'époque à l'Union des démocrates et indépendants (aujourd'hui rassemblées) a recueilli moins de suffrages que Parti socialiste-Place publique et les Verts réunis (20% au total). Du côté de la gauche, le succès de la liste PS-Place publique conduite par Raphaël Glucksmann (13,8% contre 6,2% en 2019) s'explique par l'échec – plus ou moins fort – des listes concurrentes à gauche – de LFI avec 9,9% mais surtout des Écologistes avec 5,5% des suffrages exprimés contre 13,5% en 2019. Enfin, cette rupture s'explique aussi et peut-être surtout en grande partie par l'échec de la stratégie d'Emmanuel Macron, ayant clairement fait évoluer son gouvernement vers la droite (avec comme symboles la réforme des retraites et la loi sur l'immigration en 2023/24), sans succès. Cela a ouvert un espace politique au centre-gauche social-démocrate qui a tenté de se reconstituer – le temps d'une campagne électorale – et porté un discours pro-européen offensif.

Quelques minutes seulement après l'annonce des estimations des résultats des élections européennes, le Président de la République a annoncé sa décision de dissoudre l'Assemblée nationale, reléguant au second plan du même coup, et de manière immédiate, les

⁵ Cautrès, B. et Muxel, A. (dir.) (2019), Histoire d'une révolution électorale (2015-2018), Classiques Garnier.

enjeux des résultats du vote des citoyens français et européens lors de ce scrutin. Appelant une « clarification politique » de ses vœux pour éviter de se trouver paralysé pendant les trois dernières années de son mandat et de devoir en porter la responsabilité, le Président de la République a ainsi interprété le résultat des élections européennes sous un prisme clairement national, faisant de sa décision de dissoudre l'Assemblée nationale l'issue des élections européennes en France. Cette décision d'Emmanuel Macron a constitué un choc inattendu pour les partenaires européens de la France. La dissolution de l'Assemblée nationale a suscité une incompréhension et une appréhension très fortes. Elle a créé en effet une double incertitude : d'une part quant à l'orientation politique du prochain gouvernement français et ses répercussions pour l'Europe dans son ensemble, d'autre part sur l'avenir de la politique européenne de la France – deuxième pays de l'Union par sa population et son économie.

[Les résultats](#) des élections législatives en France dessinent un paysage politique très fragmenté en dépit de la formation de trois blocs à gauche (Nouveau Front Populaire), au centre et à l'extrême droite. Cette fragmentation inscrit la vie politique française dans le droit fil des dynamiques à l'œuvre en Europe tant au niveau national qu'à l'échelle de l'Union. Mais son degré est inédit pour la Cinquième République et les formations politiques françaises y sont mal préparées du fait de l'absence de culture du compromis et de la brutalisation de la vie politique hexagonale. La principale conséquence de cette situation est évidente : en l'absence de majorité stable, la France sera difficilement gouvernable au-delà des affaires courantes et urgentes. Cette situation crée en outre la perspective d'une nouvelle dissolution dans un an augmentant l'incertitude du calendrier électoral. Il est difficile d'affirmer à ce stade si la nomination de Michel Barnier le 5 septembre 2024 à Matignon permettra d'emprunter une nouvelle voie possible permettant de surmonter les blocages de la situation politique actuelle en France. Le véritable test sera la capacité du

nouveau gouvernement de faire voter le budget à l'Assemblée nationale.

Impact national des élections européennes, impact européen des élections en France... Quel rôle pour la France à Bruxelles ?

Les élections européennes ont une conséquence directe⁶ : il semble d'ores et déjà clair que la France va perdre de l'influence au Parlement européen dès lors que le poids des élus français est relativement faible au sein des groupes politiques les plus importants (PPE et S&D) qui ont obtenu les principaux postes de responsabilités. Par ailleurs, il convient de noter le recul des libéraux (Renew), où siègent les députés du camp présidentiel ; relégués au rang de 5e groupe politique du Parlement européen, ils perdent leur rôle pivot de « faiseur de roi » ; leur stratégie semble être désormais de se concentrer sur quelques sujets, en particulier les affaires étrangères et la défense (avec Kaja Kallas comme Haute Représentante et possiblement un Commissaire en charge de la défense pour la France). Enfin, une large part des députés européens français ne feront pas partie des groupes politiques constituant la majorité soutenant la prochaine Commission. Cette perte d'influence générale affaiblit enfin la France pour les nominations à venir, non seulement aux postes clés des institutions européennes, mais aussi au sein des cabinets.

En outre, la lourde défaite du camp de la majorité présidentielle aux élections européennes a affecté le soutien domestique à la politique européenne portée par le Président de la République. Son influence sur la scène européenne est également amoindrie au Conseil européen par la défaite de son camp aux élections

⁶ Les développements qui suivent sont repris de Chopin, T. (2024), « Re-compositions hexagonales : la France et l'UE », Expressions, Institut Montaigne - <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/recompositions-hexagonales-la-france-et-lue>

législatives le 7 juillet dernier. La question que se sont posée les partenaires européens de la France au lendemain des législatives était celle de l'impact sur la politique européenne de la France du prochain gouvernement en fonction de la forme qu'il allait prendre. Le choix de Michel Barnier – ancien ministre des Affaires européennes puis des Affaires étrangères, ancien commissaire européen et négociateur du Brexit – comme Premier ministre laisse penser que les relations entre le Président de la République et le Premier ministre seront apaisées et non conflictuelles sur les sujets européens. Il existe une convergence forte entre les deux têtes de l'exécutif dans ce domaine et il ne devrait pas y avoir de clash majeur. Il convient toutefois de souligner un point de vigilance : que se passerait-il si Michel Barnier décidait d'aller dans le sens d'un souverainisme juridique, notamment en matière d'immigration, afin de donner des gages au Rassemblement national ? La décision récente du gouvernement allemand d'établir des contrôles à ses frontières afin de durcir sa politique d'immigration⁷, alors que le parti d'extrême droite de l'AfD a remporté les élections en Thuringe et en Saxe, montre que le retour au repli national est un risque réel.

Les élections européennes avaient pour enjeux les équilibres politiques au niveau européen. Mais le choix de la dissolution a paradoxalement fait des résultats des élections législatives françaises des élections tout aussi importantes pour la direction politique de l'Europe.

⁷ En 2021, dans le cadre de la primaire du parti Les Républicains, Michel Barnier avait affirmé qu'« il faut retrouver notre souveraineté juridique » et ne pas être « menacés en permanence d'un arrêt ou d'une condamnation de la Cour de Justice

An extreme interlocking of political scales: The 2024 European Elections in France

Thierry Chopin

Political balances across the European Union were a crucial issue of the European elections. The French President interpreted the outcome of the elections in strictly national terms, taking the decision to dissolve the French National Assembly in the wake of the European election results. Paradoxically, this move rendered the results of the French legislative election just as important as the European elections in terms of Europe's political orientation.

The European elections exposed the political dynamics at play on an EU level and within Member States, revealing considerable party fragmentation and the widespread rise of populist parties, in particular to the far-right. They also underscored the repercussions for the political agenda and balances of the European Union (EU) over the next parliamentary term⁸. The outcome of the snap legislative election in France also points to a highly fragmented political landscape, meaning that the political situation in France is consistent with the dynamics observed across Europe on both national and EU levels. There is a striking asymmetry between, on the one hand, the relative stability of the main political balances at the European Parliament and the new second term for the President of the European Commission, who will lead for the next five years what is now to all intents and purposes a government, and, on the other hand, the upheaval of the political situation in France following the legislative election that was brought forward.

Emmanuel Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly following the European election result in France was an unforeseen shock to France's European partners. It gave rise to strong feelings of disbelief and concern. The uncertainty it has fostered is twofold:

regarding the political orientation of the new government and its implications for Europe as a whole, and the future of France's European policy, given its position as the second EU Member State in terms of population and economy.

Campaign issues: what were the demands and dividing lines?

During the European election campaign, the French expressed their concerns and expectations which were broadly in line with other European citizens. A few political priorities formed the basis of their demands, such as major concerns and pessimism regarding the social and economic situation due to inflation and economic stagnation resulting from the energy crisis, safeguarding of their purchasing power, defence of their security, immigration and asylum and the fight against climate change⁹.

Against this backdrop, the prevailing political message was the one communicated very early on, even before the start of the campaign, by the National Rally (Rassemblement national - RN), spearheaded by its candidate Jordan Bardella. It focused on the triptych immigration, security and identity. This message was based on the "fortress under siege" rhetoric and exploited feelings of growing poverty and a deterioration of living conditions.

Compared to this narrative championing a withdrawal into national self-interests, most of the main contending political parties belatedly started to campaign and more often than not positioned themselves in retaliation, leaving the RN free to dictate the terms of the electoral debate. In a situation marred by global instability and an unprecedented degree of conflict in Europe

since the Second World War, international issues were relatively important in the campaign, as attested by a number of key issues, namely the European Union's strategic position, particularly regarding its role as the "European power" and France's part to play in this, the war between Russia and Ukraine which featured in the campaigns of the presidential bloc and the 'Socialist Party-Place Publique' list, in opposition to the RN, and the renewed violence in the Middle East in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which was put forward by LFI (La France Insoumise).

Lastly, it is noteworthy that the European election campaign did not boil down to a debate for or against the EU. Rather, it focused on the political project, including for the radical left and right which attempted to transpose their priorities on a European level to pursue their agenda in Europe, focused on the fight against poverty for the radical left, and on the fight against immigration for the radical right. The RN's position reflects this shift in the debate, even though it remains ambiguous. On a national level, since the RN renounced its opposition to the Euro which worried public opinion, its rhetoric is no longer based on an "Exit" strategy (Europhobia). It does, however, continue to advocate for a legal sovereignty that could bring about a Frexit and also remains allied at a European level (within the new political group Patriots for Europe) with parties that only a few months ago adopted a radical position to break away from the European Union (see Gert Wilders' PVV - Partij voor de Vrijheid, Party for Freedom, in the Netherlands).

And yet this budding 'normalisation' of the European elections cannot overshadow the enduring importance of national domestic issues and in particular the protest vote against Emmanuel Macron on which the RN heavily traded. The emotional aspect of voting was very strong, as many voters in France made the connection with a feeling of fear, growing poverty and a loss of influence in a world that seems out of control. As many citizens feel that these fears have not been allayed, they

evolved into a feeling of powerlessness and growing anger that was politically expressed by abstention¹⁰ and the rise of the far right.

From the European election results in France to the decision to dissolve the National Assembly

The RN's victory at the European elections in France was to be expected, but was nonetheless remarkable: the third victory in a row since 2014; 31.37% of votes in 2024 (compared to 23% in 2019) with a result more than twice that of the presidential majority list "Besoin d'Europe"¹¹ headed by candidate Valérie Hayer (14.6%); the first national delegation (30 seats), across all political groups, at the European Parliament; in all, the far-right (RN and Reconquête) obtained around 37% of votes! These results are particularly striking after Emmanuel Macron's seven years in office as he placed European affairs at the political centre of his movement and has very strong strategic ambitions on an EU level. Even before the latest European and legislative elections, Emmanuel Macron's first Sorbonne address, presented when his European agenda was bolstered by his political momentum in France, had a greater importance and impact than his second Sorbonne address, given the current situation, in France in particular. Furthermore, the RN's win must be considered in the broader context of French public opinion regarding the EU. While Europhobia is not expressed by the majority in France (which would involve a desire to leave the EU), France is, however, clearly one of the three Member States which are the least in favour of European integration. Work on regional and local levels to foster a feeling of belonging and an endorsement of the EU among French citizens is clearly essential.

¹⁰ 24 million French citizens did not vote on 9 June, slightly less than one in two French citizens – 48.5%.

¹¹ The "Besoin d'Europe" coalition included the following parties: Renaissance, Modern, Horizons, Parti Radical, Union des démocrates et indépendants

⁸ Chopin, T., Fraccaroli, N., Hernborg, N., Jamet, J.-F. (2024) "Political Dynamics ahead of the European Parliament Elections: Implications for the EU's Political Direction and Policy Priorities", Jacques Delors Institute, May - <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/political-dynamics-ahead-of-the-european-parliament-elections-implications-for-the-eus-political-direction-and-policy-priorities/>

⁹ Cautrès, B. and Chopin, T. (2024), "European elections: meeting the expectations of a fragmented public opinion in a "new age of uncertainty"; study conducted jointly by the Cevipof (Sciences Po's Center for Political Research) and the Jacques Delors Institute –

Beyond the failure of the presidential bloc, votes in the 2024 European elections indicate a break from the “electoral revolution”¹² brought about by Emmanuel Macron in 2017. In addition to the 17-point difference between the RN and the presidential bloc on 9 June, the presidential list (14.6% against 25% in 2019 if we add together the presidential majority at the time and the Union des démocrates et indépendants which are now in the same bloc) won fewer votes than the ‘Socialist Party-Place Publique’ and the Greens (20% in total). On the left, the success of the Socialist Party-Place Publique list and its candidate Raphaël Glucksmann (13.8% compared to 6.2% in 2019) can be attributed to the relative failures of the competing left-wing lists (LFI with 9.9% and above all Les Écologistes with only 5.5% of votes, against 13.5% in 2019). Lastly, this break can also be attributed, perhaps to a large extent, to Emmanuel Macron’s failed strategy to shift his government to the right. The pension reform and the 2023/24 immigration act are indicative of this move. This created a political opening for the social-democrat centre-left which attempted to rebuild itself - for the duration of the election campaign - and made use of an aggressive pro-European narrative.

Only a few minutes after the projected European election results were announced, the French President declared his decision to dissolve the National Assembly, at a stroke upstaging the implications of the votes cast by French and European citizens in this election. Calling for a “political clarification” to avoid finding himself blocked for the remaining three years of his presidential term and having to take accountability, the French President interpreted the European election result in clearly national terms, taking the decision to dissolve the French National Assembly in the wake of the European elections. Emmanuel Macron’s decision was an unforeseen shock to France’s European partners. Dissolving the National Assembly triggered strong feelings of disbelief and concern. The uncertainty it has

¹² Cautrès, B. and Muxel, A. (eds.) (2019), *Histoire d’une révolution électorale (2015-2018)*, Classiques Garnier.

fostered is twofold: regarding the political orientation of the new French government and its implications for Europe as a whole, and the future of France’s European policy, given its position as the second EU Member State in terms of population and economy.

The results of the French legislative elections point to a highly fragmented political landscape, despite the creation of three blocs to the left (Nouveau Front Populaire, New Popular Front), the centre and the far-right. This fragmentation means that the political situation in France is consistent with the dynamics observed across Europe on both national and EU levels. Yet the extent of the fragmentation is unprecedented in the French Fifth Republic and French political groups are poorly equipped to deal with the situation as compromising is not a natural feature of politics in the country and political life in France has been hard hit. The main consequence of this situation is clear: if there is no stable majority, France will be difficult to govern beyond everyday issues and urgent matters. This also sets up the possibility of a further dissolution in a year’s time, which increases the uncertainty of the electoral calendar. At this point, it is difficult to state with any certainty that Michel Barnier’s appointment as Prime Minister on 5 September 2024 will open up a new avenue for breaking the current political deadlock in France. The real test will be the new government’s ability to get the budget passed in the National Assembly.

The impact of the European elections in France, the impact of the French election in Europe... What role will France play in Brussels?

The European elections had one direct consequence¹³: it is now clear that France will lose its influence in the European Parliament since the weighting of French MEPs is relatively low in the main political groups (EPP and S&D) which won the main leadership positions. In addition, the decline of the liberals (Renew), where the MEPs of the presidential bloc sit, is noteworthy. Relegated to the fifth place among political groups at the European Parliament, they have lost their pivotal ‘kingmaker’ role. Their strategy now seems to focus on a handful of issues, such as foreign affairs and defence (with Kaja Kallas as High Representative and possibly a Commissioner in charge of defence for France). Lastly, most of the French MEPs will not be part of the political groups that will make up the majority supporting the next Commission. This widespread loss of influence weakens France’s position for future appointments, not only for key positions in the European institutions, but also within cabinets.

Furthermore, the massive defeat of the presidential bloc at the European elections has affected domestic support for Emmanuel Macron’s European policy. His influence on the European stage has also diminished at the European Council due to his bloc’s defeat at the legislative election on 7 July. In the wake of the legislative election, France’s European partners were asking themselves how France’s European policy may change under the new government in whatever form it would take.

¹³ The following arguments are taken from Chopin, T. (2024), “Recompositions hexagonales : la France et l’UE”, *Expressions*, Institut Montaigne - <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/recompositions-hexagonales-la-france-et-lue>

With the choice of Michel Barnier, former French Minister for European Affairs and subsequently Foreign Minister and former European Commissioner and Brexit negotiator, as Prime Minister, we can assume that the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister will be consensual and not conflictual regarding European issues. There is a high level of convergence between the two heads of executive power in this area, which does not hint at any major clashes. There is one question, however, that requires attention: what would happen should Michel Barnier decide to lean towards legal sovereignty, particularly as regards immigration, in order to reassure the RN? The German government’s recent decision to introduce border checks in a hardening of its immigration¹⁴ policy, just as the far-right AfD party won the elections in Thuringia and Saxony, shows that there is a real risk of a new withdrawal into national self-interests.

Political balances across the European Union were a crucial issue of the European elections. Paradoxically, the move to dissolve the National Assembly rendered the results of the French legislative election just as important in terms of Europe’s political orientation.

¹⁴ In 2021, during the primary elections of the Les Républicains party, Michel Barnier claimed that “our legal sovereignty must be restored” and that France must not be “permanently threatened with a ruling or condemnation from the European Court of Justice or the European Convention on Human Rights, or an interpretation of our own judicial institution”.

Między sporami wewnętrznymi a konfrontacją wizji przyszłości UE – Wybory europejskie 2024 w Polsce

Melchior Szczepanik

Choć wybory do Parlamentu Europejskiego (PE) odbyły się w atmosferze ostrych sporów wewnętrznych, problematyka międzynarodowa i europejska była wyraźnie obecna w kampanii, w której widoczne było starcie odmiennych wizji przyszłości Unii. Zwycięstwo wyborcze wzmocni premiera Donalda Tuska na arenie UE, ale w obliczu silnej eurosceptycznej opozycji rząd będzie rzecznikiem ostrożnych, stopniowych reform w UE, a w komunikacji z wyborcami będzie kładł nacisk na asertywną obronę polskich interesów.

Wybory europejskie w Polsce odbyły się w kontekście silnych napięć politycznych związanych z polityką wewnętrzną – w następstwie zmiany władzy po wyborach parlamentarnych w 2023 r. – i konsekwencjami rosyjskiej napaści na Ukrainę. Okoliczności te sprzyjały debacie wyborczej, w której zarówno dorobek UE ostatnich lat, jak i wyzwania, którym Wspólnota będzie musiała stawić czoła w przyszłości były poddane ocenie, choć przede wszystkim z punktu widzenia ich wpływu na pozycję Polski.

Wybory w nowym kontekście polityki wewnętrznej.

Wybory do PE w Polsce były trzecimi na przestrzeni ośmiu miesięcy (informacja na temat wyników wyborów w tabeli poniżej). Wybory parlamentarne z października 2023 r., mimo zwycięstwa partii rządzącej – Prawa i Sprawiedliwości (PiS) – doprowadziły do zmiany władzy. Trzy ugrupowania opozycyjne – Koalicja Obywatelska (KO), Trzecia Droga i Lewica – uzyskały większość mandatów i utworzyły rząd, na którego czele stanął Donald Tusk (premier w latach 2007-2014). Obiecywał on poprawę relacji z partnerami w UE i zapowiedzi te zrealizował. Nowy rząd przedstawił plan działania dotyczący wymiaru sprawiedliwości, którego celem było wyeliminowanie zmian wprowadzonych przez poprzedników i uznanych przez Trybunał Sprawiedliwości UE za niezgodne z prawem unijnym.

W odpowiedzi Komisja Europejska (KE) i Rada UE wyraziły zgodę na wypłatę środków z unijnego funduszu odbudowy i zamknęły procedurę z [art. 7 Traktatu o Unii Europejskiej](#), uruchomioną w związku z zarzutami naruszenia zasad praworządności przez poprzedni rząd. Polska odnowiła również współpracę z Francją i Niemcami w formacie Trójkąta Weimarskiego. Zaowocowała ona przyjęciem [Agendy weimarskiej](#), w której zadeklarowano „wzmocnienie europejskiej odporności i suwerenności”.

W kwietniu 2024 r. odbyły się wybory samorządowe. Specyfika kalendarza wyborczego sprawiła, że partie dość późno zaczęły podkreślać kwestie związane z UE w swojej komunikacji. Można również przypuszczać, że następujące po sobie kampanie przełożyły się na demobilizację części elektoratu, zmęczonego politycznym wzmocnieniem, w wyborach do PE. Frekwencja w wyborach europejskich wyniosła 40,7%, podczas gdy w [badaniu Eurobarometru](#), przeprowadzonym w lutym 2024 r., 70% respondentów utrzymywało, że prawdopodobnie weźmie udział w wyborach (dla porównania różnica między deklaracjami i rzeczywistym udziałem we Francji i Niemczech wyniosła odpowiednio 16 i 14 punktów procentowych). Należy jednak podkreślić, że 40,7% to wynik znacznie wyższy od frekwencji odnotowanej w Polsce w trzech pierwszych edycjach wyborów europejskich (2004, 2009 i 2014), która oscylowała na poziomie 21-25%.

Problematyka unijna obecna w kampanii, lecz postrzegana przez pryzmat interesów narodowych.

W miesiącach poprzedzających wybory debata publiczna była zdominowana przez spory związane z rozliczaniem dokonań poprzedników przez nowy rząd i większość parlamentarną. Poczesne miejsce zajmowała również problematyka międzynarodowa. W centrum uwagi była rosyjska wojna przeciwko Ukrainie i jej różnorodne konsekwencje, m.in. niekontrolowany import

Wyniki wyborów w Polsce w latach 2019-2024

	Wybory do PE maj 2019		Wybory parlamentarne październik 2023		Wybory samorządowe kwiecień 2024		Wybory do PE czerwiec 2024	
	Odsetek głosów	Liczba głosów (mln)	Odsetek głosów	Liczba głosów (mln)	Odsetek głosów	Liczba głosów (mln)	Odsetek głosów	Liczba głosów (mln)
Koalicja Obywatelska	38.4	5.2	30.7	6.6	30.6	4.4	37	4.3
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	45.4	6.2	35.4	7.6	34.3	4.9	36.1	4.2
Trzecia Droga			14.4	3.1	14.2	2	6.9	0.8
Lewica			8.6	1.8	6.3	0.9	6.3	0.74
Konfederacja	4.5	0.6	7.1	1.5	7.2	1	12.1	1.4
Wiosna	6	0.8						
Frekwencja	45.7%		74.4%		52%		40.6%	

plodów rolnych z Ukrainy oraz utrzymująca się presja migracyjna na granicy z Białorusią. Manifestacje rolników, które miały miejsce w pierwszych miesiącach 2024 r., podobnie jak w większości państw członkowskich, sprawiły że na znaczeniu zyskała zielona transformacja, szczególnie planowane przez KE nowe wymagania dotyczące ochrony ekosystemów i nadania rolnictwu bardziej zrównoważonego charakteru. We wspomnianym wyżej badaniu Polacy wskazywali, że głównymi tematami kampanii powinny być obronność i bezpieczeństwo (37%, średnia UE – 31%) oraz zdrowie publiczne (36%/32%).

Zgodnie z oczekiwaniami wyborców, KO – najsilniejszy podmiot w koalicji rządzącej – postawiła obronność i bezpieczeństwo w centrum swojej kampanii. Liderzy tego ugrupowania podkreślali zagrożenie rosyjskie, konieczność kontynuowania unijnego wsparcia dla Ukrainy i lepszego przygotowania Wspólnoty do zapewnienia własnego bezpieczeństwa. Krytykowali PiS za niezdolność do osiągnięcia kompromisu z rządem

Ukrainy w sprawie napływu produktów rolnych z tego państwa i zaznaczali, że nieliczni sprzymierzeńcy poprzedniego rządu – m.in. partie Viktora Orbána i Marine Le Pen – to ugrupowania będące sojusznikami Rosji. PiS kontrował te zarzuty wskazując na działania wspierające Ukrainę, które realizował będąc u władzy.

Ostra krytyka Zielonego Ładu i unijnej polityki migracyjnej była z kolei na pierwszym planie kampanii ugrupowań krytycznych wobec UE: PiS oraz konserwatywno-nacjonalistycznej Konfederacji. Partie rządzące unikały dyskredytowania zielonej transformacji, ale zaznaczały, że projekt wymaga korekt i lepszego wsparcia najbardziej wrażliwych grup obywateli.

W kampanii obecny był również wątek optymalnego modelu integracji w przyszłości. Choć partie rządzące obejmując władzę podkreślały pozytywny stosunek do UE, to w czasie kampanii tylko jedna z nich – Lewica – silnie akcentowała potrzebę zdecydowanego zacieśnienia integracji. W programie tej partii wspomniano o

potrzebie przyjęcia konstytucji dla Europy. KO i Trzecia Droga – sojusz konserwatywno-liberalnego ugrupowania Polska 2050 i zakorzenionego przede wszystkim na wsi Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego – prezentowały się jako zwolennicy ostrożnych zmian, ograniczonych do niektórych polityk (np. wspólnej obrony). Partie eurosceptyczne utrzymywały natomiast, że ściślejsza integracja polityczna, zwłaszcza eliminowanie jednomyślności, zagraża suwerenności Polski. Jednak ani PiS ani Konfederacja nie kwestionowały polskiego członkostwa w UE.

W czasie kampanii deklaracje i dyskusje koncentrowały się na konsekwencjach jakie wydarzenia międzynarodowe i związane z nimi decyzje podejmowane na poziomie wspólnotowym niosą dla Polski. Zabrakło natomiast szerszego spojrzenia na przyszłość UE jako projektu politycznego. Polska nie jest w tej kwestii wyjątkowa – podobny charakter przedwyborczych debat odnotowano w wielu państwach członkowskich. W deklaracjach wyborczych Unia pojawiała się najczęściej nie jako Wspólnota, której los Polska tworzy wspólnie z partnerami, lecz jako arena rywalizacji, na której dzięki sprawności negocjacyjnej można uzyskać ustępstwa partnerów. W przypadku KO akcentowanie tego aspektu wynikało najpewniej z chęci kontrowania oskarżeń o ustępliwość wobec partnerów, płynących ze strony partii eurosceptycznych. Ilustracją tej asertywności był m.in. sprzeciw rządu wiosną 2024 r. wobec reformy polityki migracyjnej i azylowej UE oraz rozporządzenia o odbudowie zasobów przyrodniczych. Decyzje te pokazują, że mimo poważnych różnic w zakresie ogólnego stosunku do integracji (podkreślanych w kampanii), w przypadku niektórych ważnych polityk stanowisko nowego rządu nie odbiegało znacznie od prezentowanego przez poprzedników.

W sytuacji silnej polaryzacji i stabilności poparcia dla głównych sił politycznych, działania partii koncentrowały się na mobilizacji własnych elektoratów. Czyniły to koncentrując przekaz na zagrożeniach

związanych ze zwycięstwem przeciwnika. Kampanie negatywne były silnie obecne zwłaszcza w mediach społecznościowych. Warto odnotować rosnące znaczenie działań w sferze cyfrowej, które uzupełniały standardową kampanię opartą na wiecach wyborczych i umieszczaniu wizerunku kandydatów w przestrzeni publicznej. Partie przeznaczyły na ten cel znaczące środki finansowe rządu kilkuset tysięcy złotych.

Sukces Koalicji Obywatelskiej, opozycja zachowuje mocną pozycję. Konsekwencje w polityce europejskiej i wewnętrznej.

Zwycięstwo KO – choć skromne – miało duże znaczenie symboliczne, kładło bowiem kres serii wyborczych triumfów PiS, trwającej od jesieni 2015 r. Jednak słaby wynik partnerów KO oznaczał, że w porównaniu do wyborów parlamentarnych z 2023 r. przewaga proeuropejskiej koalicji rządzącej nad ugrupowaniami krytycznymi wobec UE zmalała z 11 do 2 punktów procentowych. Partie rządzące uzyskały zaledwie jeden mandat więcej niż eurosceptycy, podczas gdy sondaże sugerowały, że przewaga może sięgnąć 4-5 mandatów. Nie udało im się utrzymać bezprecedensowej mobilizacji społecznej, która wyniosła je do władzy kilka miesięcy wcześniej. Szczególnie wśród środowisk bliskich Lewicy widoczne było rozczarowanie brakiem realizacji jej postulatów (m.in. dotyczących ułatwienia dostępu do aborcji). Dobry wynik uzyskała Konfederacja, która przyciągnęła najbardziej eurosceptycznych zwolenników PiS. Wydaje się, że ogłoszona na kilka dni przed wyborami wiadomość o śmierci żołnierza ranionego nożem na granicy z Białorusią przez jednego z agresywnych migrantów mogła zmobilizować elektorat niechętny rządowi.

Zwycięstwo wzmacnia pozycję premiera Donalda Tuska na forum UE, szczególnie w kontekście dotkliwych wyborczych porażek liderów największych państw człon-

kowskich Emmanuela Macrona i Olafa Scholza. Podczas negocjacji dotyczących obsady najważniejszych stanowisk w Unii Tusk wraz z premierem Grecji Kyriakosem Mitsotakisem był głównym negocjatorem z ramienia centroprawicowej Europejskiej Partii Ludowej (EPL). Rząd będzie starał się wykorzystać tę pozytywną dynamikę na rzecz promocji swoich priorytetów w UE, szczególnie w kwestii wzmocnienia potencjału obronnego Unii. Poważniejsze modyfikacje unijnej strategii Polski są jednak mało prawdopodobne. Istnienie silnej opozycji, kontestującej zacieśnianie integracji, sprawi, że rząd utrzyma sceptyczne stanowisko wobec nowych zobowiązań w polityce klimatycznej czy propozycji reform instytucji UE.

Polacy stworzą drugą co do wielkości (po niemieckiej) delegację we frakcji EPL – największej w PE. Dzięki temu mogą uzyskać znaczny wpływ na jej działania oraz dostęp do ważnych stanowisk. Są jednak bardzo nieliczni w dwóch ponadnarodowych sojuszach partyjnych, które wraz z centroprawicą będą odgrywać największą rolę w izbie: frakcji Socjalistów i Demokratów (3 posłów) oraz frakcji Odnowić Europę (1).

Na arenie krajowej z kolei może dojść do pogorszenia relacji w koalicji rządzącej. Osłabieni mniejsi partnerzy będą zabiegać o realizację swoich postulatów, nie zawsze zgodnych ze stanowiskiem KO.

Wybory hybrydowe, krajowo-europejskie.

Analiza przedwyborczych aktywności partii politycznych w Polsce pokazuje, że choć nie była to kampania zasługująca na miano europejskiej par excellence, to wyborów do PE nie można już opisać jedynie jako „drugorzędnych wyborów krajowych” (second-order national election). Kondycja UE stanowiła ważną część debaty wyborczej, a partie sformułowały dość wyraźne preferencje dotyczące polityk wspólnotowych (a przynajmniej pewnych ich aspektów) i głównych zasad,

które powinny rządzić procesem integracji. Względnie wysoka frekwencja sugeruje, że poszerzył się krąg obywateli zdających sobie sprawę ze znaczenia Parlamentu Europejskiego.

W kontekście silnego poparcia społecznego dla integracji dobry wynik ugrupowań prezentujących krytyczny stosunek do UE może wydawać się zaskakujący. [Badanie Eurobarometru](#) pokazuje jednak, że niemal połowa obywateli negatywnie ocenia reakcję Unii na kryzysy, które dotknęły ją w ostatnich latach. Można również zakładać, że dla części wyborców to czynniki związane z polityką krajową, nie stosunkiem do UE, pozostają głównym kryterium. Zarówno siła eurosceptycznej opozycji, jak i względna popularność krytycznych opinii dotyczących działań UE w ostatnich latach ograniczą pole manewru rządu w negocjacjach na forum UE i będą stanowiły zachętę do koncentracji na wzmacnianiu wizerunku zdeterminowanego obrońcy interesu narodowego.

Between internal strife and a clash of opposing visions for the future of the EU: The 2024 European Elections in Poland

Melchior Szczepanik

Even though the European Parliament (EP) elections occurred in the context of high tensions around domestic politics, international and European themes featured prominently in the campaign in which a clash of different visions for the future of the EU was manifest. The electoral success will strengthen Prime Minister Donald Tusk in the EU arena, but in the face of strong Eurosceptic opposition, the government will advocate cautious, gradual reforms in the EU, while emphasising, especially to the domestic audience, assertive defence of Polish interests in relations with partners.

The 2024 European Parliament elections in Poland took place in a period of high political tensions related to domestic politics on the one hand – after a change in power following the parliamentary elections of October 2023 – and the challenges stemming from the Russian aggression against Ukraine on the other. These circumstances favoured an electoral debate in which both the recent achievements and the future challenges for the EU were scrutinised but chiefly from the point of view of their impact on Poland’s status.

Elections in a new political context

Elections to the European Parliament in Poland was the third one in a span of 8 months (see information on the outcome of elections in the table at the end of this section). Parliamentary election of October 2023, despite the victory of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) Party—a conservative bloc critical of the EU—led to a change in power. Three opposition groups — the centre-right Civic Coalition, centrist Third Way, and the Left – won the majority of parliamentary mandates and formed a government headed by Donald Tusk (Prime Minister in 2007–2014). He pledged to improve the relations with EU partners and kept his promise. The new government presented an action plan concerning the judiciary, tailored to abolish the changes introduced by its predecessors and deemed incompatible with the EU law by the Court of Justice of the EU. Consequently the

European Commission (EC) and the Council of the European Union authorised disbursement of funds from the EU Recovery Fund and closed the [Article 7](#) procedure of the Treaty on European Union which had been triggered in relation with allegations of rule of law violations by the previous government. Poland also renewed cooperation with France and Germany in the Weimar Triangle format. This resulted in passing the [Weimar Agenda](#) which called for ‘strengthening European sovereignty and resilience.’

Local elections were then held in April 2024. The chronological order of the elections meant that parties were rather late in stressing EU-related matters in their communications. It can also be assumed that the subsequent campaigns translated into the demobilisation of part of the electorate—tired with the political agitation—in the EP elections. Although 70% of respondents to the [Eurobarometer survey](#) conducted in February 2024 claimed that they were likely to take part in the EP elections, the actual voter turnout was 40,7% (for comparison, the difference between declarations and actual voter participation in France and Germany amounted to 16 and 14 percentage points respectively). Nevertheless, it must be stressed that 40,7% is a much higher turnout than in the first three EP elections in Poland (2004, 2009, and 2014), where it oscillated in the range of 21-25%.

EU issues perceived from the angle of national interest

In the months preceding the EP elections, public debate was dominated by disputes over the achievements of the Law and Justice government as the new parliamentary majority condemned some key decisions made by their predecessors. However, international issues were also prominent. The centre of attention was the Russian war against Ukraine and its various consequences, e.g. the uncontrolled import of agricultural produce from Ukraine and the persistent migration pressure on the

Election results in Poland 2019 – 2024

	EP election May 2019		Parliamentary election October 2023		Local elections April 2024		EP elections June 2024	
	Percentage of votes	Number of votes (millions)	Percentage of votes	Number of votes (millions)	Percentage of votes	Number of votes (millions)	Percentage of votes	Number of votes (millions)
Civic Coalition	38.4	5.2	30.7	6.6	30.6	4.4	37	4.3
Law and Justice	45.4	6.2	35.4	7.6	34.3	4.9	36.1	4.2
The Third Way			14.4	3.1	14.2	2	6.9	0.8
The Left			8.6	1.8	6.3	0.9	6.3	0.74
Confederation	4.5	0.6	7.1	1.5	7.2	1	12.1	1.4
Spring	6	0.8						
Voter turnout	45.7%		74.4%		52%		40.6%	

border with Belarus. Farmers’ protests that took place in the first months of 2024, similarly as in most member states, put the green transition at the centre of discussions, the new requirements planned by the EC to protect ecosystems and make agriculture more sustainable in particular. In the above-mentioned survey, Poles indicated that defence and security (37%, EU average: 31%) as well as public health (36/32%) should be the main themes of the campaign.

In accordance with voters’ expectations, Civic Coalition (KO)—the strongest entity in the ruling alliance—put defence and security at the heart of its campaign. The party’s leaders emphasised the Russian threat, the necessity to continue EU support for Ukraine and to better prepare the Union to be able to guarantee its own security. They condemned the Law and Justice for their inability to find a compromise with Ukraine on the imports of their agricultural produce and stressed the fact that the few allies of the previous government—

especially the parties of Viktor Orban and Marine Le Pen—have very close ties to Russia. PiS contradicted these allegations stressing the substantial support for Ukraine that it provided while being in power.

On the other hand, severe criticism of the Green Deal and the EU migration policy formed the core of campaigns of parties critical of the EU: PiS and the conservative-nationalist Confederation. Members of the ruling majority avoided discrediting the green transition, but they emphasised that the plan required corrections and better support for the most vulnerable social groups.

The theme of the optimal integration model for the EU was also present in the electoral campaign. Although the ruling parties emphasised their positive attitude towards the EU when they had assumed power, only one of them, the Left, firmly stressed the need to decidedly deepen integration. The party’s programme

mentioned the need to adopt a constitution for Europe. KO and the Third Way—an alliance of the conservative-liberal party named Poland 2050 and the Polish People's Party—presented themselves as advocates of careful changes, limited to certain policies (e.g. common defence). Eurosceptic parties claimed that stronger political integration, especially eliminating unanimity, poses a threat for Poland's sovereignty. However, neither PiS nor Confederation questioned the country's membership in the EU.

Declarations and discussions in the campaign focused on the consequences that international events, and Community decisions related to them, have for Poland. What was missing was a wider look at the future of the EU as a political project. Poland is no exception in that matter: pre-election debates of similarly narrow character could be observed in many member states. In electoral declarations, the European Union was most often presented not as a community whose fate is created jointly by Poland and its partners but as a competition arena where negotiation skills may help to win concessions from other members. In the case of KO, the emphasis on this aspect resulted probably from the desire to counter accusations of submissiveness to partners formulated by the Eurosceptic parties. The government's objection to the migration policy reform and to the regulation on nature restoration in the spring of 2024 may serve as an illustration of this assertiveness. These decisions demonstrate that despite significant differences regarding the general attitude towards integration (emphasised during the campaign), on a number of important policies the new government defended a position quite close to that of its predecessors.

Against the background of strong polarisation and stable support for the main political forces, the parties' concentrated on motivating their own electorates. To this end, they focused communication on threats associated with the victory of the opponent. Negative

campaigns were strongly present, particularly in social media. The growing importance of activity in the digital sphere is worth taking note of. It complemented the standard campaign, based on election rallies and placing candidates' posters in the public space. Parties committed significant financial means to this goal: in the order of several hundred thousand zloty.

Civic Coalition wins but opposition remains strong: Implications for EU and domestic politics.

KO's victory—though modest—was of great symbolic importance because it put an end to a series of PiS's electoral triumphs that had lasted since autumn 2015. However, the disappointing results of KO's allies meant that in comparison to the parliamentary election of 2023, the advantage of the pro-European ruling coalition over parties critical of the EU decreased from 11 to 2 percentage points. The ruling parties won only one mandate more than the Eurosceptics, while polls had suggested that their advantage may amount to 4–5 mandates. They were unable to maintain the unprecedented social mobilisation that had brought them to power several months earlier. In circles close to the Left, disappointment at the lack of implementation of its demands (e.g. easier access to abortion) was particularly visible. Confederation achieved a good result, having attracted PiS's most Eurosceptic supporters. It seems that the news of the death of a soldier wounded with a knife by an aggressive migrant on the border with Belarus – announced a few days before the election – may have mobilised opponents of the government.

The victory strengthens the position of Prime Minister Donald Tusk in the EU, especially in the context of severe electoral defeats of the largest member states' leaders, Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz. In the negotiations concerning the selection of candidates for top positions in the EU, Donald Tusk—together with

the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis—was chief negotiator on behalf of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP). The government will use this positive momentum to promote its priorities in the EU, especially as regards boosting the Union's defence potential. However, major modifications of Poland's EU policy are unlikely. Owing to the existence of a strong opposition that rejects closer integration, the government will maintain a sceptical stand on new commitments in the climate policy or regarding EU institutional reforms.

Poles will form the second (after Germany) biggest delegation in the EPP political group, the largest in the EP. Consequently, they may gain significant influence on its actions as well as access to important positions. However, there are very few Polish parliamentarians in the two supranational party alliances that—together with the centre-right—will play the most important role in the house: the group of the Socialists and Democrats (3 members) and the Renew Europe group (1 member).

On the domestic stage, relations in the ruling coalition may deteriorate. The weakened smaller partners will strive to have their demands—not always harmonious with KO's stand—implemented.

A hybrid, national-European elections

The analysis of pre-election activity of political parties in Poland shows that although the campaign did not deserve to be called European par excellence, the EP elections can no longer be described only as a 'second-order national election'. The condition of the EU constituted an important part of the electoral debate, and parties formulated fairly distinct preferences for EU policies (or at least certain aspects of those) and the guiding principles for the integration process.

The relatively high voter turnout suggests that the group of citizens who are aware of the significance of the European Parliament has grown. In the context of strong social support for integration, good results of parties representing critical attitude towards the EU, like the PiS, may seem surprising. [Eurobarometer survey](#) shows, however, that almost half of citizens negatively view the Union's response to crises it has faced in the last years. It may also be assumed that for a significant number of voters factors related to national politics—not the attitude towards the EU—remain the main criterion. Both the strength of the Eurosceptic opposition and the relative popularity of critical assessments of the Union's recent actions will limit the government's room for manoeuvre in EU negotiations and encourage its leaders to focus on maintaining the image of resolute defenders of national interest.

Nationale Nabelschau der Parteien in einem proeuropäischen Land: Die Europawahlen 2024 in Deutschland

Linn Selle

Die Europawahl in Deutschland zeigt, dass die Wahl bei politischen Entscheidungsträgerinnen und Entscheidungsträgern sowie ihren Parteien weiterhin die Bedeutung einer „second order election“ hat. Dies spiegelt sich jedoch nicht in der Gesamtbevölkerung wider: Knapp zwei Drittel der Deutschen gingen zur Wahl und wählten mit überwiegender Mehrheit proeuropäische Parteien – auch wenn ebenfalls in Deutschland die Polarisierung im Parteienspektrum zunimmt.

Der Europa-Wahlkampf 2024 in Deutschland zeigte eine besonders dominante nationale Orientierung der Parteien auf – trotz deutscher Kommissionspräsidentin und Wahlkampfthemen wie Friedenssicherung und Zuwanderung, die genuin europäische Themen sind. Eine Analyse der dominanten Themen und Strategien des deutschen Europawahlkampfes sowie der Wahlergebnisse zeigt erneut, wie wichtig es ist, die Kluft zwischen nationaler und europäischer Politik zu überbrücken.

Der Wahlkampf in Deutschland: Themen, Strategien und deren Einfluss auf die Wählerinnen und Wähler

Blickt man auf die [Themen](#), die für die Deutschen die größte Rolle bei der Wahlentscheidung spielten, so sind dies Friedenssicherung (26 %), soziale Sicherheit (23 %) und Zuwanderung (17 %). Während der Klima- und Umweltschutz bei der Wahl 2019 in Umfragen noch das dominierende Thema darstellte, findet er sich bei der vergangenen Wahl zum Europäischen Parlament nur noch auf Platz vier wieder.

Angesichts dieser Prioritätensetzung in der Bevölkerung ist es interessant zu beobachten, dass der Wahlkampf sich in großen Teilen um das Thema Zuwanderung und Migration drehte, während Fragen der sozialen Sicherheit eher am Rande diskutiert wurden.

Der Krieg in der Ukraine spielte zwar eine Rolle, stand aber nicht unmittelbar im Zentrum der Wahlkampfdebatten (jenseits nationalpopulistischer Ausreißer mit Blick auf „Friedensverhandlungen“). Stattdessen waren seine indirekten Auswirkungen auf Fragen der sozialen Sicherheit, wie beispielsweise Wohnraum und Inflation, ein Thema. Obwohl dies in direktem Zusammenhang mit dem russischen Angriffskrieg gegen die Ukraine steht, wurde dieser Kontext nur von den wenigsten politischen Beobachtern als solcher benannt. Auffällig war, dass im Vergleich zur Europawahl 2019 das Interesse an Klima- und Umweltschutzthemen deutlich geringer war. Diese wirkten bei der Wahl offenbar erheblich weniger mobilisierend, was sich am schlechten Abschneiden der Grünen mit 11,2 % (minus 8,6 Prozentpunkte) zeigt.

Insgesamt war der Europawahlkampf jenseits der flächendeckenden Plakatierung im öffentlichen und medialen Diskurs in Deutschland wenig präsent. Das lag sicher auch daran, dass die Regierungsparteien mit ihrem nationalen Spitzenpersonal in den Wahlkampf zogen. Die EU-Spitzenkandidatinnen und -kandidaten wurden zwar auch plakatiert, ein strategisches Zuschneiden auf die jeweiligen „europäischen Gesichter“ fand aber nicht statt. Somit wurde die Wahlentscheidung willentlich – insbesondere von den Grünen und der SPD – zu einer Abstimmung über die Bundesregierung gemacht. Doch auch vonseiten der Opposition wurde die Spitzenkandidatin Ursula von der Leyen durch die CDU nicht in der Breite sichtbar gemacht. Einziger Unterschied: Manfred Weber, Spitzenkandidat der CSU in Bayern, der in der Fläche Bayerns ausgebreitet präsent war (und mit 39,7 % auch ein besseres CSU-Ergebnis als bei der Landtagswahl erreichen konnte).

Die Europabilder, die die Parteien im Wahlkampf nutzten, unterstrichen allerdings die breite und proeuropäische Verankerung der deutschen Gesellschaft, auch wenn sich der Wahlkampf im Großen und Ganzen nicht um konkrete Reformvorschläge der Europäischen

Union drehte. „Europa stark machen“ war parteiübergreifend ein zentrales Motiv, das mit Blick auf verschiedene Politikfelder ausbuchstabiert wurde. Selbst die rechtsextreme und nationalistische „Alternative für Deutschland“ (AfD) spielte populistisch mit vermeintlich positiven Narrativen („Demokratie bewahren“, „Europa neu denken“). Dies steht im klaren Gegensatz zum AfD-Wahlprogramm, in dem sich die Partei faktisch für eine Demontage der EU ausspricht. Eine Äußerung der Parteivorsitzenden Alice Weidel Anfang 2024 zu einem deutschen Austritt aus der Europäischen Union („Dexit“) blieb die Ausnahme, wohl wissend, dass dies auch unter AfD-Sympathisanten nicht mehrheitsfähig wäre.

Gleichwohl spiegelte sich in den gesetzten Themen auch die national gefärbte Schwerpunktsetzung, etwa bei den Forderungen nach mehr bezahlbarem Wohnraum oder kostengünstigem ÖPNV. Beides sind allerdings keine EU-Kompetenzen.

Im Großen und Ganzen glich der Europawahlkampf 2024 deutlich mehr einer nationalen Nabelschau als noch 2019, als mit der Wahrnehmung der Klimakrise als unmittelbar europäischer Herausforderung deutlich „europäischer“ debattiert wurde. Dennoch ist es angesichts der geopolitischen Lage erstaunlich, dass entsprechende Narrative in Anbetracht des Angriffskriegs Russlands gegen die Ukraine nicht stärker im Wahlkampf thematisiert und europäische Lösungen hervorgehoben wurden.

Wahlergebnisse in Deutschland: Verschiebungen im Parteienspektrum und neue Herausforderungen

64,78 %: Das ist die höchste [Wahlbeteiligung](#) in Deutschland bei einer Europawahl seit 1979 – der damals ersten Wahl zum Europäischen Parlament. Mit Blick auf den oben beschriebenen wenig ambitionierten Wahlkampf der Parteien ist dies insofern bemerkenswert, als es

zeigt, dass trotz mangelhaften parteipolitischen Engagements die Bedeutung der Europäischen Union in der Wahrnehmung der deutschen Bevölkerung gestiegen ist. Jedoch zeigt sich im Vergleich mit Frankreich und Polen ein durchwachsendes Bild: Während die Wahlbeteiligung in Deutschland schon bei den Europawahlen zuvor auf einem vergleichsweise hohen Niveau lag und nochmals merklich angestiegen ist, lag sie in Frankreich mit 51,5 % auf einem deutlich niedrigeren Niveau, wenngleich sie auch dort leicht gestiegen ist. In Polen hingegen ist die Wahlbeteiligung nach einem enormen Sprung bei der Europawahl im Jahr 2019 (45,7 %) wieder deutlich zurückgegangen: Gerade einmal 40,7 % der Polinnen und Polen sind bei der Europawahl 2024 an die Urnen gegangen, freilich nach vielen Wahlen in wenigen Monaten. Diese Entwicklungen zeigen, wie divers die Herausforderungen in den einzelnen Mitgliedstaaten sind.

In Deutschland zeigen die [Wahlergebnisse](#) eine deutliche Verschiebung einerseits hin zu nationalistischen und teils rechtsextremen Kräften und andererseits hin zu Klein- und Kleinstparteien. So wurde die AfD mit 15,9 % zweitstärkste Kraft – erstmals in einer bundesweiten Wahl. Ebenfalls holte das national ausgerichtete, populistisch agierende Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) aus dem Stand heraus 6,2 % der Stimmen – eine Partei, die erst im Januar 2024 gegründet wurde. Gleichzeitig vereinten Klein- und Kleinstparteien zusammengekommen 14 % der Stimmen auf sich.¹

Diese beiden Verschiebungen unterstreichen deutlich den Vertrauensverlust in die Parteien der Mitte insgesamt. Besonders deutlich wurde die Bestrafung der Parteien der Ampelkoalition (SPD, Grüne und Liberale), die zusammengenommen 10,7 Prozentpunkte im Vergleich zu 2019 verloren (am meisten davon die Grünen). Doch auch die oppositionelle Union kann sich nicht als Siegerin fühlen: Zwar gewann sie mit 30 % die Wahl,

¹ Tagesschau.de (16.08.2024), <https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2024-06-09-EP-DE/index.shtml> (zuletzt abgerufen am 09.09.2024)

konnte aber nicht von den Verlusten der Regierungsparteien profitieren. Dies gelang Parteien an den Rändern des politischen Spektrums, ebenso wie (freilich oft proeuropäischen) Kleinstparteien, die in den Augen vieler Wählerinnen und Wähler als vermeintlich „ehrlichere Akteure“ galten.

Auch wenn die CDU/CSU nach der Wahl Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz dazu aufforderte, die Vertrauensfrage im Bundestag zu stellen, waren die konkreten politischen Folgen auf Bundesebene im Gegensatz zu Frankreich überschaubar. Dies galt allerdings auch vor dem Hintergrund, dass nach den Europawahlen alle politische Aufmerksamkeit auf den Wahlen in den drei ostdeutschen Bundesländern Brandenburg, Sachsen und Thüringen im September dieses Jahres lag². Insgesamt wird die Europawahl keinen Wechsel in der deutschen Europapolitik bedeuten, auch wenn ihr Ergebnis einen starken Dämpfer für die regierenden Parteien der Ampelkoalition darstellt. Vor allem das Abschneiden der FDP mit 5,2 % sichert zunächst einen gewissen Koalitionsfrieden in europapolitischen Fragen, zumindest bis zu den Bundestagswahlen im September 2025, wenn der (inoffizielle) Wahlkampf zu Beginn des kommenden Jahres Fahrt aufnehmen wird. Auch im Europäischen Parlament wird – im Gegensatz zu Frankreich – die deutsche Position durch die Europawahlen nicht grundsätzlich beeinträchtigt, da die deutschen pro-europäischen Parteien der Mitte trotz ihrer Verluste relativ stark vertreten bleiben, insbesondere in der Europäischen Volkspartei (EVP).

Europaweite Implikationen: Ein proeuropäisches Parlament trotz nationaler Verschiebungen

Auch wenn es auf nationaler Ebene in den Mitgliedsstaaten vielerorts deutliche Verschiebungen hin zu

² Bei den Landtagswahlen in Thüringen und Sachsen am 01.09.2024 konnten die AfD und das BSW erneut einen Stimmzuwachs verzeichnen (Sachsen: AfD: 30,6 %, BSW: 11,8 %; Thüringen: AfD: 32,8 %, BSW: 11,8 %).

rechtsextremen und nationalistisch-autoritären Parteien gab, spiegelt sich diese nationale Perspektive nur sehr bedingt beim aggregierten Blick auf die Zusammensetzung des Europäischen Parlaments wider. Denn trotz der gestiegenen Anteile der euroskeptischen, nationalistischen und rechtsextremen Parteien besteht weiter eine deutliche proeuropäische Mehrheit, die die alte und neue Kommissionspräsidentin Ursula von der Leyen am 18. Juli 2024 mit 404 (von 720 Stimmen) Stimmen im Amt bestätigte.

Auch offenbarten die Wahlkämpfe eine Diskrepanz zwischen europäischen und nationalen Debatten. Während die Friedenssicherung und soziale Sicherung nicht nur in Deutschland ganz oben auf der Agenda standen, wurde die Wahl gleichzeitig von vielen Menschen lediglich als ein „Denkzettel“ für ihre nationalen Regierungen verstanden. Die Europawahl 2024 verdeutlichte, dass die (Un)Zufriedenheit mit der nationalen Politik weiterhin ein entscheidender Faktor für das Wahlverhalten vieler Bürgerinnen und Bürger ist. Um diesem Trend entgegenzuwirken und das Vertrauen in die europäische Demokratie zu stärken, sollten nationale Parteien ihre Rolle im europäischen Mehrebenensystem kritisch reflektieren.

Notwendige Reformen: Stärkung des Europäischen Parlaments zur Förderung demokratischer Teilhabe

Das Thema Migration lag bei den Menschen in Deutschland tatsächlich nur auf Platz drei der wichtigsten Themen für ihre Wahlentscheidung. Das mag überraschend sein, aber es zeigt auch, wie sehr der Diskurs durch manche laute Stimme in der öffentlichen Debatte verschoben wird.

Gleichzeitig reflektiert das Wahlergebnis aber auch die überwiegend nationalen Wahlkämpfe der europafreundlichen Parteien. Dementsprechend liegt es auch im

Auftrag der proeuropäischen gesellschaftlichen Organisationen, hier den Finger in die Wunde zu legen.

Konkrete Schritte für pro-europäische Reformen liegen schon seit langem auf dem Tisch und sollten in dieser Legislaturperiode endlich ernsthaft diskutiert werden: etwa ein Initiativrecht für das Europäische Parlament und die Einberufung eines Europäischen Konvents zur Einleitung längst überfälliger Vertragsänderungen zur Straffung europäischer Kompetenzen und einer Stärkung der europäischen Handlungsfähigkeit. Denn klar ist, dass die Europäische Union nur durch energische Reformen ein glaubwürdiger und machtvoller Akteur nach innen und außen werden kann. Und ein glaubwürdiges und machtvolleres Europäisches Parlament kann dann auch von den nationalen Parteien nicht so einfach ignoriert werden.

Die EU steht vor großen Herausforderungen. Eine zentrale Frage wird sein, ob die neue Europäische Kommission in ihrem Regierungsalltag auf einer demokratischen und proeuropäischen Parlamentsmehrheit fußen wird, oder ob Kompromisse mit euroskeptischen Kräften eingegangen werden. Die Anhörungen der Kommissarinnen und Kommissare durch das Europäische Parlament bieten eine erste Möglichkeit, diesbezügliche Einblicke zu gewinnen. Auch deshalb kommt dem Europäischen Parlament eine zentrale Rolle zu, und deshalb braucht es ausgeweitete Befugnisse als einziges direkt gewähltes EU-Organ, wie z. B. ein eigenes Initiativrecht. Eine solche demokratische Einbeziehung des Europäischen Parlaments in europäische Gesetzgebungsprozesse könnte vielen für die Bürgerinnen und Bürger wichtigen Anliegen neuen Schwung verleihen.

Die Europawahl 2024 hat gezeigt, dass die EU-Bürgerinnen und -Bürger die Bedeutung der europäischen Integration zunehmend erkennen. Gleichzeitig offenbarte sie die Notwendigkeit, die Kluft zwischen nationaler und europäischer Politik zu überbrücken und die

demokratischen Strukturen der EU weiter zu stärken. Nur so kann die Europäische Union den Herausforderungen der Zukunft erfolgreich begegnen und das Vertrauen ihrer Bürgerinnen und Bürger festigen. Gleichzeitig müssen auch die Parteien ihrer europäischen Verantwortung gerecht werden und sich für die notwendige Europäisierung unserer Demokratie (auch der Wahlkämpfe und Ressourcen) einsetzen.

National navel-gazing of the parties in a pro-European country: The 2024 European Elections in Germany

Linn Selle

The European elections in Germany have shown that they continue to be a “second order election” for political decision-makers and their parties. This is not reflected in the population as a whole, however. Just under two thirds of the German electorate went to the polls, voting overwhelmingly for pro-European parties. This was in spite of the fact that polarisation in the party spectrum is increasing also in Germany.

The 2024 European election campaign in Germany revealed a particularly dominant national orientation of the parties – in spite of a German President of the Commission and election campaign issues such as peacekeeping and immigration, which are genuinely European issues. An analysis of the dominant issues and strategies of the German European election campaign and the election results shows once again how important it is to bridge the gap between national and European politics.

The election campaign in Germany: issues, strategies and their influence on voters

The issues that played the biggest role in Germans' voting decisions were peacekeeping (26%), social security (23%) and immigration (17%). While climate and environmental protection were the dominant focus in the 2019 election, these issues only came fourth in the most recent elections to the European Parliament.

In view of these priorities among the population, it is interesting to note that the election campaign largely revolved around immigration and migration, while social security issues were discussed more on the fringes. Although the war in Ukraine played a role, it was not right at the centre of the election campaign debates (beyond national-populist outliers concerning “peace negotiations”. Instead, the focus was on its indirect impacts on questions of social security, such as housing and social security. All of this is directly linked

to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, although only very few political observers have acknowledged this connection. It was striking that there was significantly less interest in climate and environmental protection issues as compared with the 2019 European elections. These issues apparently had much less of a mobilising impact in these elections, which is clearly reflected in the poor performance of Alliance 90/The Greens, which captured 11.2% (minus 8.6%) of the votes cast.

Overall, the European election campaign did not play a major role in the public and media discourse in Germany beyond the posters up and down the country. This was certainly also due to the fact that the governing parties campaigned with their national leaders. Although the top EU candidates were also displayed on posters, they were not strategically tailored to the various “European faces” on display. As a result, the decision on who to vote for was deliberately turned into a referendum on the German Government – especially by the Greens and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). However, also on the part of the opposition, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) did not draw widespread attention to lead candidate Ursula von der Leyen. The sole exception was Manfred Weber, lead candidate of the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria, who enjoyed a high level of publicity across Bavaria (and with 39.7% was also able to achieve a better result for the CSU than in the elections to the Regional Parliament).

However, the images of Europe employed by the parties in the election campaign emphasised the broad-based pro-European orientation of German society, even if the election campaign did not, on the whole, revolve around concrete reform proposals for the European Union. The motif of “strengthening Europe” was a central theme across all parties, one that was spelled out with regard to various policy areas. Even the far-right, nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) struck a populist tone with seemingly positive narratives (“preserving democracy”, “rethinking Europe”).

This is in clear contrast to the AfD's election programme in which the party effectively calls for the EU to be dismantled. A statement made by party chairperson Alice Weidel at the beginning of 2024 regarding Germany's exit from the European Union (“Dexit”) remained the exception, in full knowledge that this would not command a majority even among AfD sympathisers.

Nevertheless, the issues on the agenda also reflected a national focus, such as calls for more affordable housing and low-cost public transport, both of which are not EU competences.

It is therefore clear that the 2024 European election campaign was much more of a national navel-gazing exercise than was the case in 2019, when the climate crisis was perceived as a distinctly European challenge and the debate was much more “European”. Nevertheless, given the geopolitical situation, it is surprising that corresponding narratives were not more widely addressed in the election campaign in light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and that European solutions were not emphasised.

Election results in Germany: shifts in the party spectrum and new challenges

Some 64.78% of the electorate went to the ballot box in what was the highest voter turnout in a European election in Germany since 1979 – the first election to the European Parliament. In view of the parties' unambitious election campaign described above, this is remarkable because it shows that, despite a lack of party-political engagement, the European Union's importance has increased in the perception of the German population. A comparison with France and Poland reveals a mixed picture, however. While voter turnout in Germany was already comparatively high at the previous European elections and has risen signifi-

cantly once again, it was at a much lower level in France at 51.5%, although turnout rose slightly there, too. In Poland, on the other hand, voter turnout fell again considerably after a huge leap in the 2019 European elections (45.7%). Just 40.7% of Poles went to the polls in the 2024 European elections, admittedly after a spate of elections within the space of just a few months. These developments show how diverse the challenges are in the individual member states.

In Germany, the election results show a clear shift towards nationalist and, in some cases, far-right forces on the one hand and towards small and micro-parties on the other. For example, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) became the second-strongest party with 15.9% – for the first time in a nationwide election. The nationalist- and populist-leaning Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) – a party that had only been founded in January 2024 – secured 6.2% of the vote in its first showing at an election to the European Parliament. At the same time, taken together, small and micro-parties received 14% of the ballots cast.³

These two shifts clearly underline the loss of confidence in the centrist parties as a whole. The penalisation of the parties in the governing coalition (the SPD, the Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP)) was particularly evident, with a combined loss of 10.7% compared to 2019 (with the Greens losing the most votes). However, the opposition party the CDU/CSU cannot think of itself as a winner either. Although it won the election with 30%, it was unable to capitalise on the losses suffered by the parties in government. Meanwhile, the parties on the fringes of the political spectrum did benefit, as did (admittedly often pro-European) micro-parties, which were perceived as being “more honest players” in the eyes of many voters.

Even though the CDU/CSU called on Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz to hold a vote of confidence in the

³ Tagesschau.de (16 August 2024), <https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2024-06-09-EP-DE/index.shtml>

Bundestag after the election, the concrete political fallout at federal level was manageable in comparison with France. However, this was also in light of the fact that political attention was, after the European elections, fully focused on the elections taking place in the three eastern German Länder of Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia in September this year⁴. Overall, the European elections will not lead to a change in Germany's European policy, even if their results represent a major setback for the ruling parties of the governing coalition. Above all, the FDP's showing of 5.2% will initially ensure a certain degree of harmony in the coalition on European policy issues, at least until the elections to the Bundestag in September 2025, when the (unofficial) election campaign picks up speed at the beginning of next year. In contrast to France, Germany's position in the European Parliament will also not be fundamentally affected by the European elections as the German pro-European centrist parties, in particular the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), will continue to be relatively strongly represented, despite their losses.

Europe-wide implications: a pro-European parliament despite national shifts

Even though there were clear shifts towards far-right and nationalist-authoritarian parties in many quarters at national level in the member states, this national perspective is only reflected to a very limited extent in the aggregated view of the European Parliament's composition. Despite the increased share of eurosceptic, nationalist and far-right parties, there is still a clear pro-European majority, which confirmed the old and new President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in office on 18 July 2024 with 404 (out of 720) votes.

⁴ In the elections to the Regional Parliament in Thuringia and Saxony on 1 September 2024, the AfD and the BSW once again recorded an increase in votes (Saxony: AfD: 30.6%, BSW: 11.8%; Thuringia: AfD: 32.8%; BSW: 11.8%).

The election campaigns also revealed a discrepancy between European and national debates. While peace-keeping and social security were at the top of the agenda, not only in Germany, the election was also seen by many merely as a "warning shot" for their national governments. The 2024 European elections made it clear that (dis)satisfaction with national politics continues to be a decisive factor in the voting behaviour of many citizens. In order to counteract this trend and strengthen trust in European democracy, national parties should critically reflect on their role in the EU's multi-level system.

Necessary reforms: strengthening the European Parliament in order to promote democratic participation

Migration was actually only the third-most important issue for people in Germany in their decision on who to vote for. While this may come as a surprise, it also shows the extent to which the discourse is being shifted by certain influential voices in the public debate.

At the same time, however, the election result also reflects the predominantly national campaigns conducted by pro-European parties. With this in mind, it falls to pro-European social organisations to speak up here.

Concrete steps towards pro-European reform have been on the table for a long time and should, at long last, be the subject of serious discussion in this legislative term. These include, for example, a right of initiative for the European Parliament and the convening of a European Convention to initiate long-overdue treaty amendments with a view to streamlining European competences and strengthening Europe's ability to act. After all, it is clear that the European Union can only become a credible and powerful player both internally and externally with vigorous reform. What is more, a credible and powerful European Parliament cannot simply be ignored by the national parties. The EU faces major

challenges. A key question will be whether the new European Commission will be founded on a democratic and pro-European parliamentary majority in its day-to-day governance, or whether compromises will be made with eurosceptic forces. The hearings of the Commissioners by the European Parliament present a first opportunity to gain an insight into this. This is another reason why the European Parliament plays a key role and why it requires extended powers as the only directly elected EU institution, for instance its own right of initiative. Such democratic involvement in EU legislative processes on the part of the European Parliament could inject fresh impetus into many issues that are important to citizens.

The 2024 European elections have shown that EU citizens are increasingly acknowledging the importance of European integration. At the same time, they have revealed the need to bridge the gap between national and European politics and to further strengthen the EU's democratic structures. Only in this way can the European Union successfully address the challenges of the future and strengthen its citizens' trust. At the same time, the national parties must also live up to their European responsibility and commit to the necessary Europeanisation of our democracy – including of election campaigns and resources.

The Genshagen Foundation

Germany, France and Poland for Europe

The Foundation

The Genshagen Foundation evolved from the Berlin-Brandenburg Institute for Franco-German Collaboration in Europe, which was founded in 1993 by historian Rudolf von Thadden and Brigitte Sauzay, who later became an advisor to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Since 2005, the Foundation has been run as a non-profit foundation under German civil law. Its founders and main sponsors are the German Government, represented by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, and Land Brandenburg. The most important third-party donor is the Federal Foreign Office.

Profile

The Genshagen Foundation aims to strengthen Europe's cultural diversity, political capacity to act, social coherence and economic dynamism. At the interface between civil society, the state and the business world, the foundation operates in two working sections: Art and Cultural Mediation in Europe and European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe. We focus on promoting and intensifying Franco-German and German-Polish relations, as well as facilitating the dialogue within the Weimar Triangle, which was founded in 1991 by the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland. As a forum for consultation and conversation, we seek to foster dialogue between the three countries as well as promote European integration as a whole. The location of the Foundation, Genshagen Castle, offers a space for encounters and exchanges between actors from the worlds of art, culture, politics, business, science and the media. Through its varied events and publications, the Foundation helps to identify new approaches and solutions to current and future challenges in society and politics – always within the context of Europe.

European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe

Convinced that European integration must be preserved and deepened in order to secure peace, freedom, solidarity and prosperity in Europe in a sustainable manner, the Genshagen Foundation is committed to the political dimension of Europe's future in the working section European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe. Its projects promote reflections on the internal cohesion of the European Union, its political capacity to act and its role in the world. A solution-based exchange takes place between experts and decision-makers from politics, diplomacy, business and society in public and closed formats. Furthermore, the Foundation is focused on civil society in order to give young people in particular an understanding of Europe and to offer them a platform where they can articulate their own ideas.

Genshagener Papiere

The »Genshagener Papiere« paper series addresses general topics of European politics as well as bi- and trilateral cooperation between Germany, France and Poland.

The series' objective is to make the results of the Foundation's work available for a broader public. Thanks to the format's flexibility, the series comprises both policy-oriented texts and more scholarly articles and essays. Its authors include both established and younger academics, as well as experts in European politics and journalists. The Genshagener Papiere are published several times a year. They are available online, and in some cases also in a printed version.

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