



## The Outcome of the 2019 European Parliament elections

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### Introduction and context

Elections to the European Parliament in the past have seen the paradoxical outcome that turnout of voters has continuously declined at the same time as the European Parliament has steadily increased its role and powers. In 2019, the stakes for the European Parliament elections seemed greater than ever before with the European Union itself facing unprecedented challenges; immigration issues, problematic relations with Russia and even with the United States, the impasse over Brexit, challenges to European values even within certain EU Member States, increasing concerns about climate change and the rise of Eurosceptic and populist parties and movements taking issue with the very idea of closer integration of the EU.

How would EU voters respond to these challenges? Would they remain indifferent or be increasingly mobilised? Would the European Parliament elections continue to be primarily second-order elections, or would they become more truly pan-European in nature? What type of European Parliament would they elect to face up to these various challenges, would the European Parliament still have a clear governing majority of pro-European forces and which other trends would emerge?

This paper makes an initial assessment of the outcome of these elections, and of their likely implications for the future workings of the European Parliament. It concludes with the run-up to the constitutive session of the new European Parliament on 2 to 4 July 2019 and on the immediate actions that have to be taken by the new European Parliament. An annex looks more specifically at the outcome in Ireland, and how the newly elected Irish MEPs are likely to fit into the structures of the new European Parliament.

### EU-wide results

The most immediate conclusion about the 2019 European Parliament elections was their apparent increase in saliency for European voters, and that they did appear to have a more

pan-European character than in the past. The rise in overall EU turnout was very striking, rising by over 8% from 42.6% in 2014 to almost 51% in 2019. Turnout had previously declined in every election since the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. 2019 was also the first time since 1994 that turnout exceeded 50%, a remarkable figure for so-called second order elections.

Turnout rose significantly in most of the larger European countries; from 48% to 61% in Germany, from 42% to 50% in France, from 44% to 64% in Spain, from 24% to 46% in Poland and from 32% to 51% in Romania. Many smaller Member States also saw similar increases, from 56% to 66% in Denmark, from 29% to 43% in Hungary, from 45% to 59% in Austria. This trend was also replicated in countries which had hit records for non-participation in 2014; Czechia from 18% to 29% and Slovakia from 13% to 23%. Even the UK, which had been due to leave the EU at the end of March and thus, only took part at the last minute, saw a slight rise in turnout from 36% to 37%, with the latter the second highest UK turnout since the first direct elections in 1979.

The gender balance in the new European Parliament has also changed in the positive sense. The new figure of around 40% of female MEPs compares to one of 37% in 2014 and only 16% in the first direct elections in 1979. The new figure is also considerably higher than the 30% average in the national parliaments of the EU Member States.

The extent of turnover of MEPs, and the respective proportions of re-elected and new MEPs is very important in terms of continuity and experience. It has typically been much higher in the European Parliament elections than in most national elections, and it has been rare that over 50% of outgoing MEPs have been re-elected, although there have been considerable fluctuations from election to election. The 2019 elections, however, have beaten all previous records, with the percentage of new MEPs standing at 61%.



The impact of the elections on political families within the European Parliament is assessed in more detail below, but the numbers at the constitutive session of the new Parliament for each political group were as follows:

The European People's Party (EPP) secured 182 seats (down from 216 in 2014), the Socialist Group (S&D) 154 (down from 190), the renamed Liberal Group Renew Europe 108 (up from 70), the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA) 74 (up from 50), the right wing Identity and Democracy Group (ID, the former Europe of Nations and Freedom Group or ENF) 73 (up from 38), the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) 62 (down from 75), and the left wing GUE/NGL Group (Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left) 41 (down from 52). The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Groups (EFDD), whose main components were UKIP and the Five Star Movement, which had previously held 45 seats, has not been reconstituted. 57 MEPs, largely but not exclusively from the former EFDD Group, are thus unattached. Renew Europe, the Greens, and the ID Group are thus the main apparent winners, while the EPP, S&D, GUE/NGL and to a lesser extent the ECR are the main losers.

An important factor that would modify the above results is, of course, the impact of Brexit, now scheduled for 31 October 2019, although this is still uncertain. The figures above are based on the current total of 751 MEPs. When (or even if) Brexit happens, the 73 elected UK MEPs would then leave, with an immediate but variable impact on almost all of the political groups. The EFDD, for example, would lose 29 Brexit Party MEPs, Renew Europe would lose 17 MEPs, the Greens/EFA would lose 11 and the S&D 10. Groups that would be less affected include the ECR which would only lose four, the GUE one and the EPP none.

Moreover, the total size of the European Parliament would not go down to 678 MEPs but to 705, with the balance of 27 MEPs being re-allocated to those Member States who were felt to be currently under-represented in the European Parliament. 27 MEPs who have been elected, including Barry Andrews and Deirdre Clune in Ireland, cannot take up their seats until after the UK has left the EU. This too will have an impact on the composition of the political groups, with some, such as the EPP, gaining more than others.

The only certainty is the impact of Brexit on individual Member States. France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands would be the most affected Member States as they would obtain 16 of the 27

re-allocated seats (five each of France and Spain, and three for Italy and the Netherlands). Ireland, as mentioned, would receive two extra seats and a further nine Member States would receive one extra MEP. On the other hand, 13 Member States would be unaffected by the re-distribution.

The likely result of this for the political groups would also be very variable, but some initial estimates have now been made. The balance between the EPP and S&D would shift slightly in the former's favour, as the EPP would gain four members and lose none, whereas the S&D would lose ten MEPs and only gain five. Renew Europe (ex ALDE) would also have a significant net loss (losing 16 and gaining six), as would the Greens/EFA Group (loss of 11 and gain of four). The European Conservative and Reform Group (ECR) would have a net loss of two (four losses and two gains). The left wing GUE group would remain at around the same level. The right-wing ID Group would have a gain of two seats. In the absence of the former EFDD Group, the non-attached members would be reduced from 57 to 27 seats, with the other large party within this category, the Italian Five Star Movement, being forced to look for a new group affiliation or remain unattached.

## Analysis of EU-wide results

The run-up to the 2019 European Parliament elections included much speculation on the potential weakening of pro-European forces and the rise of populist parties of the right and left. The actual outcome was less dramatic than had been predicted, with right wing populists performing very well in some countries but not in others and left-wing populists generally having little success.

On the other hand, the 2019 elections were distinctive in a number of ways. As pointed out above, overall turnout went up sharply (for the first time since 1979), the two largest groups (EPP and S&D) lost their overall majority for the first time in the direct elections era, the Greens had great success in some countries and the Liberals were reinforced by Macron's party "En Marche". The left generally performed poorly. Moreover, Brexit tore apart traditional political allegiances in the UK, and new support for independence was seen in Scotland, Wales, Flanders and Catalonia. New movements advocating political reform also had considerable success in certain central and eastern European countries.



The situation in each of the 28 Member States is very different. As a result, the paper will concentrate instead, on a few general points arising from the European Parliament elections.

### The rise in turnout

It is too early to outline all the reasons for the major increase in turnout, but there does seem to have been a reaction to two points, in particular. The first potential factor was the publicity given to the mooted rise of right-wing populism and Eurosceptics (which may have both mobilised some of its supporters but perhaps even more those who felt that this was the wrong direction for Europe). The second factor may have been the greater attention paid to the risks of climate change.

- i. The loss of the governing EPP, Socialist majority within the European Parliament and the need for a broader governance coalition

Both of the large political groups had difficult elections. The EPP lost about 39 seats, doing poorly in a number of large countries, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, where it lost 27 seats in these four countries alone. These losses were compensated by gains in only a few countries, such as Austria, Greece and Romania. Besides the UK they also have no seats in Estonia, with their largest delegations in Germany (29), Poland (17), Romania (14) as well as Hungary (13) and Spain (12).

The Socialists also lost 37 seats from a lower starting point than the EPP, again losing large numbers of seats in France, Germany and Italy. These losses were only very partly compensated by relative successes in countries like Spain, Portugal, Malta and the Nordic countries and to an unexpected degree in the Netherlands. They have no seats in the Czech Republic or in Ireland, and their biggest national delegations are from Spain (20), Italy (19) and Germany (16). The group also won 10 seats in the UK, but after Brexit these seats will be lost and thus, the S&D group will be more badly affected by Brexit than the EPP.

The combined effect of all this is that the EPP and the Socialists currently only have 44.7% of the total seats in the European Parliament, meaning that for the first

time that they have lost their overall majority since direct elections were introduced. In 1989 for example, they collectively held almost 70% of the seats. After Brexit, their share of seats would increase to around 47.5%, but this still falls well short of 50%. The governance structures of the European Parliament will thus have to change, and the two big groups will have to reach out to other groups, particularly Renew Europe and perhaps to other groups as well, notably the Greens.

To put this in numerical terms, a coalition of EPP, S&D and Renew Europe would hold 59% of the total seats (61.4% after Brexit, whereas one extended to the Greens as well would have 69% of the seats—and over 71% after Brexit).

- ii. The green “wave” and its geographical limitations

The Greens/EFA Group has done very well in the elections and has pulled far ahead, for example, of the left wing GUE/NGL Group. The Greens became the second largest party in Germany (pulling well ahead of the Social Democrats) and were the third most voted list in France, becoming the largest group on the left of the French political spectrum. They also polled very well in the Nordic countries (especially Finland) and in Benelux. Their successes were geographically contained, however, and they made a minimal impact in Mediterranean and in Central and Eastern Europe. The Group will also be severely hit after Brexit, losing seven UK Greens and four Scottish and Welsh Nationalists.

- iii. The liberal advance

The Liberal Group, now called Renew Europe, has held up well in many countries but the main reasons for its substantial gains are linked to the recruitment of Macron’s En Marche with 20 MEPs, and to a lesser extent the success of new liberal reform lists in Romania and in Slovakia (with eight and four MEPs respectively). The group also benefited from the Remainer surge to the Liberal Democrats in the UK, where they won 16 seats, plus an additional seat for the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland. The loss of these 17 seats after Brexit would thus have a substantial impact.



#### iv. Weakness on the far left and the failure of left-wing populism

An unheralded feature of the election has been the rather poor performance of left-wing parties in a considerable number of EU countries. Moreover, left wing populism has fared far worse than that on the right. Syriza is now only the second political force in Greece and Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany and Mélançon's La France Insoumise have all flat-lined. The far left has disappeared in countries like Italy and the Netherlands (in 2014 the Dutch Socialist Party had the same percentage vote as the Labour Party but has now lost all its seats). The Danish People's Movement against the EU, a permanent fixture since 1979, is out of the European Parliament for the first time. A few parties have bucked the trend, such as the Parti du Travail in Wallonia, but they are very much exceptions. An initial calculation made by the author is that, far from advancing, left populists have lost seats compared to the 2014 elections.

A special case is that of the Italian Five Star Movement, a governing party in Italy, which can be considered populist and is allied to Nigel Farage's former group in the European Parliament. However, it is not easy to place on the left/ right or pro or anti-European spectrum, although they would consider themselves to be left of centre. They are still the third largest Italian party and topped the poll in the south of Italy, but they ended up with fewer European Parliament seats than in 2014.

#### v. The progression but not surge of Eurosceptic and right-wing populists

The anticipated major advance of these parties was the most publicised issue in the run-up to the 2019 European Parliament elections. They certainly made an advance but not to the extent that some had wished for and others feared. They performed very well in some countries, had limited advances in others and in some countries actually went backwards. In fact, if you exclude Italy, where the Lega gained 23 seats compared to 2014, they made few gains. An initial calculation found a net

advance of around three seats, although a more detailed analysis would be useful.

As previously mentioned, their biggest success was that of the Lega in Italy, which became by far the largest Italian party, with its share of the vote increasing from 6% in 2014 to over 34% in 2019, corresponding to a rise from five seats to 28 seats. In the special circumstances in the UK, the new Brexit Party did outstandingly well. Marine Le Pen's National Rally won more votes and seats than any other French party, but went down in both votes and seats compared to 2014. Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice in Poland did well. The Flemish far right party Vlaams Belang also had a major success in Belgium. The AfD in Germany and the Sweden Democrats both won more seats than in 2014 but actually went down compared to the most recent German and Swedish national elections. VOX in Spain entered the European Parliament for the first time, but again won fewer votes than in the recent national elections. The Freedom Party in Austria went down in votes and seats compared to 2014, although it held up surprisingly well in view of recent scandals. On the other hand, the far right did very badly in Denmark and in the Netherlands. The Bulgarian far right and the German Neo-Nazis disappeared from the European Parliament.

A key point is that these parties are not homogeneous. One major division is between those that are already or have been dominant or junior coalition parties of government (like Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice in Poland, the Lega in Italy, the Freedom Party in Austria and the less well-known Conservative People's Party in Estonia) and those that have remained pure parties of opposition. Most of these parties are against non-EU immigration, are socially conservative and place a strong emphasis on defence of their national identity and traditions, but their wider economic policies vary greatly from liberalism to protectionism and anti-globalisation, as do their attitudes towards Putin's Russia. A number of these parties put a strong emphasis on instruments of direct democracy like initiatives and referendums, whereas others do not. Their views on the EU are also very different. Most of them can be described as Eurosceptic but some parties would like their country



to leave the EU, whereas others would simply like to weaken or at least reform the EU from within. Moreover, far from accelerating EU disintegration, the Brexit process in the EU has made some of these parties more cautious than before.

A final question relates to the degree of cohesion that these disparate parties will manage to achieve within the new European Parliament. In the outgoing Parliament, these parties were contained within three separate groups, the ECR, the ENF and the EFDD (where UKIP and the arguably left-of-centre Five Stars were located) as well as in the non-attached group. Salvini in Italy spoke of unifying these parties within one large group, but in the end two separate groups were created, the ID Group, which is indeed almost double the size of its ENF predecessor and the ECR Group, which is still very substantial but has lost seats compared to 2014. The old EFDD Group has disappeared. Besides the Brexit Party, only 5 right wing populist parties are unattached and the Hungarian Fidesz Party, while suspended, is still within the EPP, (and is indeed its 4th largest component party).

The right-wing populist and Eurosceptic parties are thus still fragmented, and their combined total of the seats is under 25% of the current total, even if the Brexit Party and Fidesz are included and under 20% once the Brexit Party has left, provided Fidesz remains in the EPP. Their advance compared to 2014 has been extremely limited but it will be interesting to see whether the ID Group (dominated by the Lega, the Rassemblement National and the AfD) will achieve much internal cohesion and how they will work together with the ECR, now dominated by Law and Justice.

#### vi. Advocates of independence

A relatively minor but interesting point relates to the performance of parties advocating independence within existing EU Member States. This has become an issue in Spain, in particular, where Catalan and Basque parties advocating independence or far greater autonomy did well in the European Parliament elections. Particular controversy related to Carles Puigdemont and Toni Comin of the former Catalan government who had fled to Belgium. They were initially barred from running for

the European Parliament by the Spanish electoral body but this was later overturned by a Spanish court. After being elected they sought to gain access to the European Parliament buildings in Brussels but were prevented from entering on the grounds that Spain had not yet sent the list of elected members and a temporary pass was not considered appropriate because of the ongoing controversy over their status. They were still not allowed to take their seats for the constituent session (and thus have not joined any political group). What will happen to them will be an important test of the new European Parliament. Interestingly Sinn Fein's re-elected Matt Carthy, made their democratic plight the focus of his first point of order within the new European Parliament.

Another big victory for advocates of an independent or much more autonomous Flanders came within Belgium, where both the Vlaams Belang and the New Flemish Alliance polled well. Finally, the SNP and the Welsh Nationalists also did well in the Parliament elections in the UK.

#### vii. Eastern European dimension

A further interesting dimension concerns the performance of parties in the post-Communist EU countries. Turnout had been very low in most of these countries, but went up sharply in 2019, not least in Poland where it almost doubled. Law and Justice in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary polled very well, but other populist parties of the far right and far left didn't fare so well, with a significant exception being the German AfD in the former East German Lander, where it was the largest party in Saxony, in particular.

An important feature of the elections is the considerable weight of some of these countries within the European Parliament political groups. Polish MEPs, for example, are by far the largest delegation within the ECR, the second largest within the European Parliament and the seventh largest within the S&D. Romanian MEPs are the third largest delegation in both the European Parliament and in Renew Europe and the joint fourth largest within the S&D.

The EPP remains the largest group in the EU even if the currently suspended Fidesz were to change group, and



the S&D and Renew Europe Groups have a significant presence in many countries. The ECR Group also did well, and even provided (unlike in 2014) a lead candidate, Jan Zahradil, who took part in debates with the other lead candidates, and argued forcefully that the EU should not disappear, but instead should do more in fewer areas and give Member States a greater role.

Another encouraging sign was the aforementioned trend of the emergence of new reform parties in Romania, which provided the new leader of the Renew Europe Group as well as Slovakia and in Hungary.

### viii. Brexit

Brexit was obviously the dominant issue in the UK European Parliament elections, where traditional political geography was overturned. The Brexit Party, which was created weeks before the elections, won 29 of the 73 seats. Meanwhile the main governing Conservative party only won four of the 73 seats and the main opposition Labour party secured only 10 seats. The Liberal Democrats and Greens on the other hand, had their best ever elections, along with the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists.

Elsewhere, however, and even in Ireland, Brexit did not become one of the key issues in the elections, and it is hard to point to any direct discernible impact on the performance of individual parties, although the chaotic Brexit process may have led in some countries to a greater appreciation of the value of the EU, and to a consequent increase in voter participation.

## Aftermath of the elections

### a. Developments between the elections and the end of the constituent session of the new European Parliament from 2 to 4 July 2019

The immediate aftermath of the European Parliament elections has already seen a number of important developments as regards political group formation and choice of their leaders, the allocation of MEPs to their new Committees, and the election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors of the new Parliament.

These have already provided some important indications of how the new European Parliament might function.

### Political group formation

The impact of the elections on the new political groups within the European Parliament have been described in detail above, with the creation of seven groups within the new European Parliament, as compared to eight in the outgoing Parliament. Five groups have kept the same titles as in the outgoing Parliament; the EPP, S&D, ECR, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL. A further two have been expanded and rebranded; Renew Europe instead of ALDE, and ID instead of ENF. The former EFDD Group has disappeared.

The seven groups have all chosen their leaders, the EPP have selected Manfred Weber (as before), the S&D Iratxe Garcia (instead of Udo Bullmann), Renew Europe Dacian Ciolos (in the place of GuyVerhofstadt), the Greens/EFA Group Philippe Lamberts and Ska Keller, the ID Group Marco Zanni, the ECR Ryszard Legutko and Raffaele Fitto and the GUE/NGL Martin Schirdewan (at least on an interim basis).

An interesting development relates to the statements of purpose that have to be provided by each newly constituted group, a requirement of the European Parliament Rules (Rule 33) that was introduced to prevent the creation of merely technical groups without common objectives. These were submitted by the groups during the July constitutive session and vary greatly in length and degree of detail.

The EPP statement has very few specifics, mainly referring to national party membership of the EPP and conformity with its electoral programme, although it does refer to pursuing “the process of federal unification and integration in Europe”, as well as “accordance with principles such as freedom and democracy, as well as the rule of law, respect for human rights and subsidiarity.” The Greens also have a short statement of principles.

The S&D statement, on the other hand, is much more detailed and contains three extensive paragraphs on policy objectives and aspirations. Renew Europe’s statement is even longer, with more direct language on



such matters as “the fight against xenophobia and firm rejection of “the nationalist or illiberal movements that are surging in some parts of Europe.”

The GUE group declares that it is a “confederal group that works to build another Europe of cooperation, social progress, equality, feminism, climate justice, environmental protection and sustainable development, rejecting neoliberal dogma.” It also calls for an end to tax havens, solidarity with refugees and migrants, and the fight against racism and xenophobia, anti-Roma prejudice and islamophobia.”

Of particular interest are the statements provided by the ID and ECR Groups, both lengthy but very different in tone. The ECR Group’s statement is much more sober in tone, supporting, for example, “the sovereign integrity of the nation state, opposition to EU federalism and a renewed respect for true subsidiarity”, as well as “effectively controlled immigration.”

The ID’s statement is much more populist in tone, referring to “Europe’s Greek Roman and Christian heritage as the pillars of European civilisation”, the right to “control, regulate and limit immigration”, the rejection of a European superstate, the right of Member States “to take back parts of the sovereignty they lost to the EU”, to “oppose any attempt to impose a Eurozone budget and direct EU taxes” and to bring an end to enlargement negotiations with Turkey. They also support the development of more direct democracy.

Neither group calls for countries to have the right to secede from the EU, or for the EU to collapse or for a return to national currencies.

#### Allocation of MEPs to their new committees

MEPs have now been given their different committee assignments. The European Parliament has also decided to keep all of its existing 20 committees and two subcommittees, and to keep their existing names. They have, however, modified the size of certain committees, with the biggest winners being the Environment Committee (up from 69 to 76 members and now the largest committee) and the Civil Liberties Committee up from 60 to 68. The Internal Market and Industry

Committees are also up five and Agriculture and Fisheries both up three members. The Development and Economic and Monetary Committees have, however, both lost members, the first by two and the second by one.

#### The election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors of the new Parliament

The first election at the constituent plenary in July was that for the President. The European Council called for the European Parliament to vote for a Socialist and the European Parliament duly did so, choosing Davide Maria Sassoli of the centre-left Italian Democratic Party, although not with an overwhelming majority, even in the absence of a heavyweight EPP or Renew Europe candidate.

The European Parliament then voted on its 14 Vice Presidents and 5 Quaestors. Mairead McGuinness won by far the most votes and was re-elected as the European Parliament’s first Vice President and thus next in seniority to the President of the European Parliament. An important feature of the election was that the two groups who fared least well were the ECR, with just one Quaestor and no Vice-Presidents and the ID with neither a Vice-President nor a Quaestor, in spite of being the fifth largest group with 73 members. On the other hand, the GUE/NGL Group, by far the smallest group with 41 members, did gain a Vice President. Moreover, the Five Star Movement in Italy, which is in no group at all, did obtain a Vice-Presidency, a very rare if not unique example of a Vice President from the non-attached members.

#### b. Some key forthcoming events

The most important forthcoming decisions are the election of the committee chairs and vice-chairs and then the question of how to treat the European Council’s nomination of Ursula von der Leyen as their nominee for the Commission Presidency. The European Parliament will then have to hold its confirmation hearings for the individual Commissioners and vote on the Commission as a whole. They will then be confronted with what to do on Brexit and only after this process, will the Parliament be able to get back to normal legislative business.



The election of the committee chairs and vice-chairs

This will take place between now and the summer break. These decisions will primarily be taken on the basis of D'Hondt proportional principles. The key point to watch will be the nominations from the ID Group, in particular, and from the ECR to a lesser extent. The ID Group, for example, is in theory entitled to the Agriculture and Legal Affairs Committees (the latter dealing, *inter alia*, with the sensitive subject of MEPs immunities), but the other groups within those committees may support other members instead. This could also apply to committee vice-chairmanships, although these are less sensitive in nature. The chairmanship of certain delegations, however, could also be very problematic.

#### Selection of Commission President

The key question, likely to be determined during the next plenary session from 15 to 18 July 2019, is how the European Parliament will react to the European Council's rejection of all the Spitzenkandidat nominees, in particular Manfred Weber and Frans Timmermans and their nomination of Ursula von der Leyen. On the one hand, the European Council has thrown the gauntlet down to the European Parliament, on the other hand the European Council consists mainly of leaders from the European Parliament, S&D and Renew Europe, who will have significant influence on their European Parliament political group counterparts.

It is likely that the European Parliament and Renew Europe will support her nomination but the position of the S &D and Greens/EFA Group will be very important. The majority she requires is 376, which may not be easy to achieve. The Greens, in particular, are not part of the European Council package of nominations and have little to lose.

If the European Parliament does reject her nomination a difficult phase of European Parliament-European Council negotiations will then have to open, and the whole timetable could be significantly delayed.

Another factor concerns the proposed political programme for the next five years. The European Council has put forward its own Strategic Programme for 2019 to 2024. The European Parliament is preparing its own version (significantly on the basis of preparations by two "sherpas" from each of the EPP, S&D, Renew Europe and Greens/EFA Groups). The Greens, for example, are placing a special emphasis on this point.

#### The phase of European Commission confirmation

Once the Commission President-elect is in place, the Member States have to nominate their proposed Commissioners (some have already given their indications on this), and the European Parliament will have to assess the composition of the Commission as a whole, such as whether there is sufficient gender balance. Once the nominees have been allocated their proposed portfolios, they will have to go through their European Parliament Committee hearings, a process likely to take place in late September or early October. Before voting on the Commission as a whole, the European Parliament will have to decide on whether the nominees have passed their committee appearance and what to do in the case of "failing" nominees. This too could lead to delays.

After this process, the new Commission is meant to take up office on 1 November 2019.

#### Brexit

Brexit is now meant to take place on 31 October 2019, the day before the new Commission is in place. How will the European Parliament react in the case of a "no deal" Brexit? How will it vote (it has to give its formal consent, and thus has a veto power) in the case of UK-EU agreement either on the current or modified deal? How will the European Parliament organise itself to prepare for Brexit, not least at a time when there is a "lame duck" Commission, and when some of the key Commission players, such as Barnier's former deputy, Sabine Weyand, have already moved on?



The phase of legislative “normality”

Once the above phases are completed probably only by November, normal legislative business can then resume. One of the first key challenges for the new European Parliament will be that of the agreeing new Multiannual Framework Programme (MFF), on which decisions will have become urgent.

## Annex: the Irish European Parliament elections results

### Irish results

Ireland has been allocated an additional two seats in the event of Brexit, going up from 11 to 13, with the Dublin Constituency going up from three to four seats, the South Constituency from four to five seats (and gaining Laois and Offaly from the North Constituency) and the North Constituency remaining at its existing figure of four seats. These additional seats only come into play when Brexit has taken place, currently rescheduled for 31 October 2019, but still a matter of great uncertainty in practice.

Unlike in Europe as a whole, turnout in the Irish European elections went down from 52.4% in 2014 (and from 58.6% in 2004 and 2009) to 49.7%. This was the first time that it has gone below 50% since 1994, in spite of the simultaneous holding of local elections and of a referendum. Observers have pointed out, however, that Irish turnout figures are exceptionally unreliable, because of the lack of any centrally maintained electoral register and significant variations between local authorities in updating their registers.

The final outcome in Ireland only became clear on 5 June 2019. Fine Gael (EPP) has elected five MEPs (up one MEP from 2014 but with their second MEP in the South Constituency, Deirdre Clune, not being able to take up her seat until after Brexit). Their share of the first preference vote was 30%, up from 22.3% in 2014 and their highest figure since 1984. Mairead McGuinness is now Ireland’s second greatest vote-getter in all European Parliament elections, after Brian Crowley.

Fianna Fail (ALDE) secured two seats, up from one in 2014. Their only elected MEP in 2014, Brian Crowley, left Fianna Fail’s European political group, ALDE, and joined the European Conservative and Reformist Group instead, although in practice he was not able to travel to European Parliament meetings for

health reasons. Fianna Fail’s elected candidate in Dublin, in 2019, Barry Andrews, will also only be able to take up his seat after Brexit. The party’s share of the first preference vote was only 17%, down from 22.3% in 2014 (largely because of Brian Crowley’s very high vote) and was at its lowest level in the direct elections era, with a particularly poor performance in the Ireland North Constituency.

Sinn Fein (GUE-NGL) had a disappointing election, losing two of its three seats in Ireland, and with its first preference vote slipping from 19.5% in 2014 to only 12%. The opposite result was enjoyed by the Greens (Green EFA Group) who won two seats for the first time since 1999 and whose first preference vote went up from 4.9% to 12%, by far its highest ever figure. The other three Irish seats went to left wing independents, with Luke Ming Flanagan re-elected in the North Constituency and existing TDs Clare Day and Mick Wallace, elected in Dublin and Ireland South respectively.

Other Irish parties all performed poorly, with Labour on 3%, Solidarity People before Profit also at 3% and the Social Democrats on 1%, albeit with a respectable vote for Gary Gannon in Dublin. Other independents also gained few votes, with the one exception of maverick independent Peter Casey, who was the runner-up in the North Constituency.

A final point relates to gender balance. There are six men and five women among the initially elected Irish MEPs, and there would be seven men and six women after Brexit, with women constituting 45% and then 46% of the total, well above the EU average of 40%.

In relation to the results in Northern Ireland, from 1979 until 2019 the three seats in the UK’s Northern Ireland Constituency had always gone to two Unionists (the DUP and the UUP) and one nationalist (the SDLP until 1999 and Sinn Fein subsequently). In 2019, the DUP and Sinn Fein secured one seat each, but the third seat went to Naomi Long of the non-sectarian Alliance Party. The result was also Brexit-related in that two of those elected (Sinn Fein and Alliance) supported Remain and only one (the DUP) supported Leave.

### Analysis of Irish results

In Ireland, the elections did not follow the Europe-wide trend of rising turnout, with the Irish turnout now being below the EU average, perhaps because of some of the factors present



in many other European countries, such as concern about immigration and the mooted rise of right-wing populist parties were absent in Ireland. In certain respects, Ireland did follow some European trends; the Green Party did well and that parties of the left generally underperformed. On the other hand, there were some distinctly Irish features of the outcome, the excellent vote management of Fine Gael which gave it five seats within the European Parliament, the uneven recovery of Fianna Fail and the election of three independent candidates.

Fine Gael's five seats (four before Brexit and an additional one afterwards) will mean that Ireland will have a substantial delegation within the EPP, the European Parliament's largest political group. There will also be smaller Irish delegations in the Liberal (Renew Europe) Group (one member before Brexit, two afterwards and the Green/EFA Group (two members). The second largest Irish membership, however, will be in the left wing GUE/NGL group. From 2014-19 the four Sinn Fein MEPs (one from Northern Ireland, the other three from Ireland) all sat in this group, along with independent MEP Luke Ming Flanagan. In 2019, two of the three Sinn Fein members in Ireland lost their seats. Other parties of the left, like Solidarity People before Profit, also polled poorly. Conversely, two new left of centre independents, Clare Daly and Mick Wallace, were elected and have joined the GUE/NGL Group. In the last Parliament there were four Irish Sinn Fein members from Ireland and Northern Ireland and just one independent within the GUE group. After Brexit the balance between Irish members within the group will have completely changed, with only one Sinn Fein MEP and three left-wing independents.

One other feature of the result is that there are now no Irish MEPs in the Socialist (S&D) Group, the second largest group in the European Parliament, with the Irish Labour candidates polling very poorly. Ireland is one of only two EU countries (the other is the Czech Republic) without a member in the group.

A final feature worth noting is that no right-wing populist or anti-European party or independent candidate won any significant support in Ireland. Peter Casey, helped by his second place position in the recent Presidential poll, was a fairly distant runner-up in the North Constituency. Explicitly anti-European candidates, such as Hermann Kelly in Dublin, made little impact and obtained very low votes.

## THE OUTCOME OF THE 2019 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS.

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