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The Progressive Post

SOCIAL, FISCAL & CLIMATE JUSTICE: the right-left cleavage is still alive!

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Wolfgang Engler
Geert Mak
Luuk van Middelaar
Frances O'Grady
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SPECIAL COVERAGE

**2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS
LESSONS TO BE LEARNT**

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of the Berlin Wall

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Social, fiscal and climate justice: the right-left cleavage is still alive!

*by Maria Joao Rodrigues,
FEPS President*

The European project can only have a future if it overcomes the status quo imposed by conservatives and neo-liberals and if it refuses to fall into the trap proposed by national-populists. Regaining control over our lives in a time of globalisation is only possible if we address social, fiscal and climate justice and if we rebuild democratic sovereignty at all levels from local to national and international, with the European clout as a crucial one.

At the same time, the Social Democratic agenda can no longer be implemented in the limits of national borders. If we want to ensure a fairer welfare system in the age of energy transition and digital transformation, we need to build regulation, re-distribution and taxation policies with more European coordination. That's why we cannot escape a debate on social, fiscal and climate justice!

We need to build on the encouraging message coming from the recent European elections for more climate action, social and tax fairness and democracy when we are now defining the starting point and the direction of new legislature in the European Union. Crucial political battles on the way to govern the EU are and will take place: the growth strategy for the next 10 years, its translation into a multiannual financial programme, the new EU Global strategy, the way to deal with Brexit or the implications of no Brexit, the choices on enlargement, the partnership with Africa, the European migration policy, the ways to deepen European integration regarding defence, the Eurozone, taxation or the social dimension.

Against this background, some priorities should deserve particular attention to prepare the EU agenda for the next five years:

- Making Europe the leading case of green and just transition in line with the Sustainable Development Goals
- Defining the European way to drive the digital revolution
- Revamping the education system to prepare citizens for a digital era
- Developing the European Social Pillar to fight old and new social inequalities and raise social investment
- Reshaping the financial and tax systems to support this grand transformation
- Adopting a European budget to prepare for the future and to promote upward economic and social cohesion, including in the Eurozone
- Building up a European migration policy
- Organising a long-standing partnership with Africa for cooperation and development
- Updating the EU Global Strategy to strengthen multilateralism and assert our values
- Asserting a feminist Europe as a game changer in all levels of the political system: local, regional, national and European
- Making the young generations' aspirations our main compass to sail in troubled waters

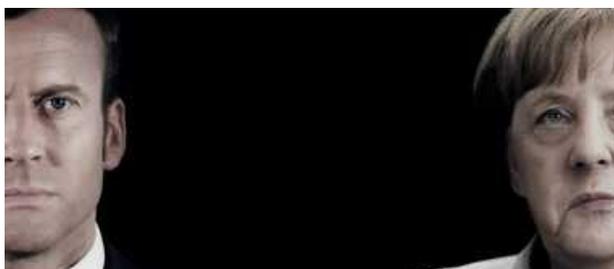
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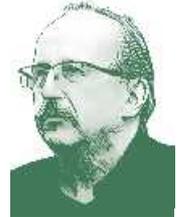
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EU GOVERNANCE IN THE NEW TERM

by Enrique Barón Crespo

The outcome of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament (EP) has opened a new term in the governance of the European Union with a dramatic package of new appointments for the top responsibilities in the institutional triangle (Parliament, Commission and Council), plus the announced succession at the helm of the European Central Bank at the end of the year.

| 10th July 2019, Brussels: the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen - still as a candidate - was grilled by members of the S&D group in the European Parliament, headed by Iratxe García.

The first fact that stands out in these elections is the increase of around 10 percent in participation. Citizens confirm their growing awareness of the EU as their political space. We are witnessing the consolidation of the EU as a shared civil society, based on the single currency and a European citizenship: steps on the way of creating a true European Demos. The Euro has not been an issue in the campaign because it is widely accepted, and the British participation in the European elections expresses our common endeavour on democracy and its values.

The second fact is that in the confrontation between those who are in favour of the European Union and those who are against it, there is a very clear majority of pro-European forces that have elected David Sassoli as President of the European Parliament. There is also a new Iberian impulse and a growing gender balance, expressed by the election of Iratxe Garcia as S&D leader. The Doomsday of a nationalist and populist wave dismantling the EU has not been confirmed, although we should not underestimate its destructive capacity.

The Spitzenkandidaten system that stipulates that only one of the main candidates of the European party families, and who actually campaigned in these elections, can be elected as President of the Commission, is no matter of course yet. In a parliamentary democracy, the first candidate for the investiture arises from the first political group, but only under the condition to have gathered behind her or him a coalition able to form a majority.

The link between parliamentary elections and the election of the President of the Commission was introduced in the Maastricht Treaty and it has been deepened in the successive treaties. The European Council, taking into account the elections to the EP and acting by a qualified majority, proposes a candidate for the Presidency of the Commission. It cannot ignore the election results. The tension between the two sources of political legitimacy, the direct vote of the citizens to the EP and the vote for their national heads of states and governments, which are members of the European Council, is an important part of the checks and balances of our system. Now, it is time to reflect on how to develop constitutional conventions that will allow a more democratic and efficient system.

A key question is a European electoral law with a right of initiative given to the EP and the reinforcement of the European political parties as transnational bodies. Transnational lists can be a part of this package.

A progressive program for the next Commission was debated by the Socialist Group with Ursula von der Leyen, the new President of the Commission. Her letter to the S&D group leader Garcia reflects her commitment, with the main priorities that have become part of her program:

- a climate neutral Europe, reducing CO2 emissions by more than 50 percent until 2030
- a more prosperous Europe, with quality jobs, especially for young people, a minimum wage, a European unemployment benefit scheme
- the completion of the Banking Union, taking the UN development goals into account
- a social, fair and equal Europe with full implementation of social rights (fair minimum wage, European child guarantee)
- a EU gender equality strategy with binding equal pay and measures for the fight against gender violence
- the taxation of big companies and a consolidation of the corporate tax base
- upholding the rule of Law,
- a fresh start on migration with a new pact on migration and asylum and a new way of burden sharing and moving forward on legal migration, building strong European borders, with a shared system of search and rescue and dismantling organised crime of trafficking
- an open and fair trade agenda
- a new neighbourhood policy
- a conference on the future of Europe with some key questions: the right of initiative for the EP, full codecision power

with no areas of unanimity and majority voting in external affairs, reinforcing the Community method.

- last but not least: our future relationship with Great Britain.

In all these fields, the new EP must develop and strengthen its role of co-legislator, especially in those related to taxing and budgetary powers, reinforcing the Community method. This means enlarging the field of codecision and fighting veto powers of individual Member States, in addition to being the political public forum of the EU. This would be a decisive step in building an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe, in the form of a vibrant democracy.



> AUTHOR

Enrique Barón Crespo is a former President of the European Parliament (1989–1992). He is a politician, an economist, and a lawyer. He's currently the chair of the FEPS Scientific Council



| 3rd July, election of the new
President of the European Parliament,
David Sassoli in Brussels.

MAKING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

THE GUARANTOR OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS

by David Maria Sassoli

We are in the midst of historic changes: youth unemployment, migration, climate change, the digital revolution, new world balances, which in order to be tackled need new ideas and the courage to know how to combine great wisdom and maximum audacity. But we also need the institutions to take on these challenges, amongst which is the European Parliament. The new President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli argues that in the parliamentary term that is beginning now, the procedures need to be strengthened to make the Parliament the leading player in a full European democracy.



We need to recover the spirit of Ventotene and the pioneering impulse of the Founding Fathers, who were able to put aside the hostilities of war, and to put an end to the failures of nationalism, giving us a project capable of combining peace, democracy, rights, development and equality. In recent months, too many people have bet on the decline of this project, fuelling divisions and conflicts that we thought were a sad reminder of our history. Instead, citizens have shown that they still believe in this extraordinary path, the only one capable of responding to the global challenges we face.

We must have the strength to relaunch our integration process, changing our Union to be able to respond more strongly to the needs of our citizens and to provide real answers to their concerns, to their increasingly widespread sense of dismay. The defence and promotion of our fundamental values of freedom, dignity and solidarity must be pursued every day within and outside the EU.

The @europarl_en in the upcoming legislature: coming back to the values of the founding fathers!
David Sassoli, the new @EP_President



We often think of the world we live in, of the freedoms we enjoy. But let's say it to ourselves, given that others in the East or West, or in the South, find it hard to recognise, that so many things make us different – not better, simply different – and that we Europeans are proud of our diversity.

Let us repeat this so that it is clear to everyone that no government in Europe can kill, that the value of the person and his dignity are our way of measuring our policies. Let us repeat that nobody in Europe can shut the mouths of opponents, that our governments and the European institutions that represent them are the result of democracy and free elections. Let us repeat that no one can be condemned for their religious, political or philosophical faith. Let us repeat that here in Europe, girls and boys can travel, study and love without constraint. Let us repeat that no European can be humiliated or marginalised because of his or her sexual orientation. Let us repeat that in the European area, in different ways, social protection is part of our identity. Let us repeat that the defence of the life of anyone in danger is a duty established by our Treaties and by the international Conventions that we have signed.

Our social market economy model must be relaunched. Our economic rules must be able to combine growth, social protection and respect for the environment. We must equip ourselves with appropriate instruments to combat poverty, give our young

people prospects, relaunch sustainable investments and strengthen the process of convergence between our regions and territories.

The digital revolution is profoundly changing our lifestyles, our way of producing and consuming. We need rules that combine technological progress, business development and the protection of workers and people.

Climate change exposes us to enormous risks. We need investment in clean technologies to respond to the millions of young people who have taken to the streets, and some who have even come to this Chamber, to remind us that there is no other planet. We must also work towards ever greater gender equality and an ever more prominent role for women at the top of politics, the economy and social affairs.

We, as the European Union, are not an accident of history. We are the children and grandchildren of those who managed to find the antidote to that nationalist degeneration that poisoned our history. If we are European, it is also because we love our different countries. But nationalism that becomes ideology and idolatry produces viruses that stir up instincts of superiority and produce destructive conflicts.

We need a vision, and that is why we need politics. We need European parties that are



increasingly capable of being the backbone of our democracy. But we must give them new tools. The ones we have are insufficient. This parliamentary term will have to strengthen the procedures for making Parliament the leading player in a full European democracy.

Making the @europarl_en the leading player in a full European democracy - David Sassoli, the new @EP_President



But we are not starting from scratch, we are not born out of nothing. Europe is founded on its institutions, which, although imperfect and in need of reform, have guaranteed us our freedoms and our independence. With our institutions, we will be able to respond to all those who are committed to dividing us. The European Parliament will be the guarantor of the independence of European citizens! That is why we need reforms, greater transparency and innovation.



> **AUTHOR**

David Maria Sassoli is the new President of the European Parliament, member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and Partito Democratico (PD) in Italy. He's a former journalist.



"The question about Europe is: will this ship be repaired in the middle of the storm?"

Interview with **Geert Mak**, by Olaf Bruns

Geert Mak

is a self-taught historian and writer. He is one of the most successful non-fiction writers in The Netherlands. His books have been translated into more than twenty languages and include *In Europe*, his masterpiece on Europe in the twentieth century. He has won numerous awards in The Netherlands and abroad.

A way to make sense of the recent European elections is to put them into historical perspective. Geert Mak has investigated social change during the 20th century and various levels: a village in Friesland, in the northern Netherlands, a big city: Amsterdam, but most notably in his Opus Magnus In Europe for which he has travelled the continent criss-cross, during the whole last year of the last century, 1999 investigating the places where the history of the 20th century was made: 'a final inspection of the 20th century'. Now, 20 years later, we are well into the 21st century - reason enough for a historian to start inspecting it.

Progressive Post: *What was the one thing that has really surprised you on these elections?*

Geert Mak: I was very happy that so many people went out and voted again! There was a beginning of real European politics on the level of European citizens. And that is really a turnaround because these figures have been going down for so long. But this spring, people were suddenly very interested and very involved - there was a kind of "European coffeehouse".

PP: *What has brought about this sudden interest, or this "European coffeehouse", as you say?*

GM: We went as Europeans through the last decade from one long crisis to another. Perhaps a lot

of people realised that these are not national problems anymore, but European problems.

PP: *One of the first stations on your 1999 journey was Paris, where you have been walking on the traces of the Paris of the early 20th century: a place of openness but also a place of anti-Semitism. When you come to France after these recent European elections, you come to a country where a far-right party has become the first party. Do you see a historical continuity?*

GM: Not only in France, but also in Poland and Hungary, there is a very strong anti-Semitic tradition. Europe is full of old ghosts, sometimes they are hidden for a decade, or for a few decades, but then they emerge again.





| We are living in a time with very fast developments, and people cannot handle that. This causes something I call a ‘cultural trauma’, and that doesn’t only happen in mining towns or cities, where the mine suddenly closed.



“
This spring, people were suddenly very interested and very involved - there was a kind of “European coffeehouse”.

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PP: *What would you say makes these ghosts hide away - and what brings them back to life?*

GM: The important point was the heritage of World War II. For our generation, World War II was always there, often silent, but all our families have suffered. For the younger generations, the distance is growing bigger. And that is also good: that is peace! The Second World War gave politicians the courage to jump over their shadow and that made the European Union possible. It was difficult and complicated, but people wanted to do this, because they didn’t want a war, ever again. I’ve known a few of these elderly statesmen personally, people who never cried, but they did cry when they talked about the beginning of the European Union.

PP: *The main lessons to be drawn from the history of the 20th century were of course the two wars, and both wars were*

fuelled by nationalism. And now it’s precisely nationalism that is back again. Therefore: is it only about crisis and economics? Or is there something else going on? ‘Culturally’, some would say.

GM: There is much more going on than just economics. For a new book, I visited two British cities in the North, a city called Wigan, in England, and a Scottish city, Paisley. Both are very similar: old mining cities, that have a lot of economic problems now. But in Paisley, in Scotland, a big majority voted ‘remain’ in the EU referendum, and exactly the same kind of city, just a hundred miles south, voted with a big majority for ‘leave’. This has everything to do with uncertainty, with the feeling that these people don’t belong to the centre of power anymore. The people in Paisley were strongly connected to Edinburgh: they have their own parliament. And the people in Wigan have a parliament that is far, far away: in London. They really

feel alone, alienated, and that is a huge problem in a lot of places of Europe. We are living in a time with very fast developments, and people cannot handle that. This causes something I call a 'cultural trauma', and that doesn't only happen in mining towns or cities, where the mine suddenly closed. It's not only about economics, it impacts the whole of society: people's traditions, their friends, family relations - everything is upside down, just because this mine, which brought everybody together, is gone. You see this cultural trauma everywhere in Europe, also in the countryside. In France for instance, there are regions where most of the shops are closed down now.

PP: Your first station in Italy during your 1999 trip was Predappio, Mussolini's birthplace, where you discovered a souvenir shop with all kinds of fascist and Nazi paraphernalia: uniforms, swastikas and far right literature. Now, in the European elections, precisely in Predappio, Matteo Salvini's far right Ligue made a stunning result of almost 44 percent! What does a place like Predappio tell us about Italy's recent history?

GM: In Italy, fascism has never been far underground. These kind of souvenir shops in Predappio would have been impossible elsewhere in Europe. But for me, it's not about fascism: Italy was, still in 2014, under Matteo Renzi, a very pro-European country, and within five years this has totally changed. And that has a lot to do with the fact that Italy didn't get assistance during the euro crisis and it was also left alone during the immigrant crisis. So partly of course this extreme right is a typical Italian problem, just like Brexit is a typically British problem. But

it's also a European problem and a symptom of a European problem.

PP: How can centre-left politics offer an alternative for all these people?

GM: I think the recent elections in Denmark are very interesting. I didn't like that Social Democrats started to embrace right wing anti-immigrant policies. But they did something else too, and I think that explains a large part of their success: they acknowledged that they had made big mistakes in the past, that they went too far with neo-liberalism and they showed themselves again as a party that really wants to protect the working people and the poor. I think a lot of people with lower income have not felt that protection for years and they felt betrayed by their old workers parties.

PP: What's your view on leadership and its impact on European Union politics?

GM: Leadership is very important, because the European Union needs faces, real faces. Like in national politics, to develop normal and healthy European politics, you need leaders, people you can trust - or even distrust - and talk about. In politics, institutions are very important, and rules are important. But without leaders you only get big buildings and anonymous institutions and that doesn't stir democratic emotions. Democracy is also an emotional thing.

PP: It feels almost like a cynical moment: Europe has been trying to build this European public space for a long time - and then it comes into being during the crisis.

GM: These things always happen in crisis moments. The European Union, as

“

Democracy is also an emotional thing. Without leaders, you only get big buildings and anonymous institutions and that doesn't stir democratic emotions.

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a construction, is very out of balance, especially the euro, but also other parts of the European Union are very vulnerable constructions. And they have to be improved. Otherwise we will not survive as the European Union. But I expect that the moment that this will be improved will once more be when there is a new crisis: around Italy, with the euro for example, or again around the question of immigrants. And then the European Union is forced to make decisions that they didn't want to make in the beginning, but in the crisis, under pressure, they do. And again, the EU moves on a little bit. The question is: will this ship be repaired in the middle of the storm?



HOUSE of CARDS

by Alain Bloëdt

Like Claire and Frank Underwood, well known to fans of the TV series *House of Cards*, the Franco-German couple, formed by Chancellor Merkel and President Macron, preferred to pursue their own petty domestic interests despite the ecological challenge and the crisis of representative democracy.

Ursula @vonderleyen's election as President of the @EU_Commission - thwarting the progressive agenda.
Alain Bloëdt @ProgPost_FEPS



Some historians will probably say that the concept of *spitzenkandidaten* (a German term that refers to the main candidate of the ticket of a given party, who is set to become EU Commission President if that party wins the European elections) created in 2014, caved in even before the campaign began, when in spring 2019, MEPs rejected the ambitious idea of transnational lists. But, without officialising its final declaration of death

– Social Democrats and Greens in the lead, have not had their last word – did the heads of state and government and the two main brokers of these negotiations – France and Germany – really have to return to the old practices of backroom arrangements, without transparency?

In a context of an embattled European Union, which is still considered distant and technocratic more than 60 years after its

creation, voters nevertheless expressed optimism by turning out more than usual for the elections. However, this revival of citizenship proved insufficient for French President Emmanuel Macron. As he had announced, even before the election: knowing that his European parliamentary group ALDE – from which he has since erased the liberal brand by renaming it ReNew – was not going to win the election, it didn't seem suitable to him to support the *spitzenkandidaten* system.

“
A few months before the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 15th anniversary of the Union's enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries, the absence of a representative from these 10 countries among the new occupants of the key EU positions rings hollow.
 ”

The way was open for negotiations worthy of Roman conclaves!

Angela Merkel, for her part, as she has often done discreetly and effectively over the course of her long political career, tried to solve her domestic problems by shifting them to a European level. Was she convinced by the candidacy of Manfred Weber, a member of the CSU, the Bavarian party that is a complicated partner of her own CDU? It's hard to say. However, at the Congress of the European People's Party in Helsinki in November 2018, she decided to support him at the expense of another candidate, the pro-European, multilingual, highly qualified former Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, who was severely beaten in his own capital. Then, during the negotiations and the final abandonment of the Spitzenkandidaten concept, she also solved another domestic problem at the German Federal Ministry of Defence where the presence of Ursula von der Leyen was becoming more and more difficult to manage due to numerous errors.

The Spitzenkandidaten

The skilled couple Merkel and Macron offered the good people, who were excluded from the negotiations, a token of satisfaction by naming for the first time two experienced women, Ursula von der Leyen and Christine Lagarde, to lead the EU Commission and the European Central Bank. But what about the others? Among the winners is the unsuccessful Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, leading a care-taker government, since his coalition government partner, the Flemish nationalist party NVA, refused in December 2018 to sign the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The crisis was one too much for the coalition and Michel, who, in order to keep his position as Prime Minister, had accepted for four long years without objection that his Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration, Theo Francken, monopolised the debates around the issue of migration to the detriment of fiscal and

environmental issues, and without ever proposing fundamental reforms in this area.

Donald Tusk, without a successor

During these six-week-long EU negotiations, two other political realities, although for European democracy, seem to have been sidestepped by the European Council and its double-headed Franco-German leadership too: Brexit, on the one hand, and the divide between Eastern and Western Europe, on the other.

A few months before the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 15th anniversary of the Union's enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries, the absence of a representative from these 10 countries among the new occupants of the key EU positions rings hollow. Admittedly, Hungary and Poland are currently no easy interlocutors, but they remain a minority among the 12 countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. While the effects of the migration crisis have not yet fully disappeared and economic models sometimes clash between founding countries and those still catching up, the absence of a successor(s) to Donald Tusk as a representative from the East is not the best message sent by the founding countries, which are over-represented with a Belgian, a French, a German and an Italian.

Merkel and Macron however did cave in to a particular Eastern-European demand: as a timely concession to the Visegrad Group and Salvini's Italy, the Chancellor and the President have sacrificed both Spitzenkandidaten, Manfred Weber and Frans Timmermans, on the altar of divergent national interests.

Among the excluded aspirants was another major player of this Europe that sometimes wavers but without breaking up: Michel Barnier. Indeed, the Chief European Negotiator, responsible for preparing and

conducting the Brexit negotiations with the United Kingdom, has made a brilliant contribution to keeping the 27 Member States of a European Union united for over three years, despite the fact that further exits were predicted following the British referendum of June 2016.

Difference in interpretation

Beyond these essential political considerations, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel also ignored the green wave that shook their respective countries during the European elections.

The German Greens managed to increase their share from 8.9% in the last federal elections in 2017 to 20.7% in the recent European election and came out for the first time in their history as the second party of the country. The result confirmed - to the detriment of the ruling conservative-Social Democratic coalition - the striking importance of environmental issues in the German public debate. And although Merkel has reacted in the past by starting, for example, the phase-out of nuclear and coal, these issues didn't have any influence on Weber's election-programme as candidate of the European People's Party. A lack of ambition that shows how much the European Conservatives still seem ready to defend the industries tooth and nail.

The French Greens, for their part, undoubtedly obtained a third place in this European election. Although Macron's party was able to attract some well-known environmentalist figures to its list, just as it had been able to seduce many socialists two years earlier, during the French presidential and legislative elections, there was no convincing strategic shift towards ecology. Environmental issues never seemed to be the President's top priority and the doubt about his ecological commitment was reinforced among the French after the resignation of the then Minister for Ecological Transition Nicolas Hulot, a symbol of the fight against climate change.

The Franco-German duo's lack of consistency on ecological issues has fortunately been counterbalanced. Pushed by the Social Democrats, they finally had to put water in their wine and, in exchange for the presidency of the European Commission, conceded some major pledges in the field of law, social and environmental issues. Ursula von der Leyen has thus committed herself to providing ecological pledges within the first 100 days of her mandate and has presented MEPs with more ambitious emission reduction targets than in the past, as well as a Green Deal for Europe project, not to mention projects for sustainable European investment.

Reflecting current European politics, where liberalism has succeeded austerity, the Franco-German couple had a huge influence on choosing the candidates for the EU top jobs, skilfully placing compatriots or allies. Will this offer citizens the strong and ambitious Europe they want? MEPs were disappointed and the complicated election of the new President of the Commission, with the support of the very conservative Polish PiS, Viktor Orbán's Hungarian Fidesz and the Italian Five Star Movement, M5S, does not bode well for a progressive agenda that is essential for a continent with growing inequality and a world where Europe needs to play a key role.

#HouseofCards, #EU version:
the couple Merkel-Macron put their domestic interests over the climate challenge and the crisis of representative democracy - Alain Bloëdt



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SWEDEN: AN EXAMPLE FOR THE RECOVERED STRENGTH OF NORDIC SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

by Håkan A Bengtsson

In the night of the European elections, almost all Swedish parties celebrated. Perhaps they all felt the need to act as winners in front of the TV cameras, but in fact, for some of them there was indeed an increase in their share of the vote. Even the Social Democrats rejoiced, although the result was the worst achieved by the party in any election for more than a century. But the Party could take comfort from the fact that the decline was small (-0,8 percent) and that it is still, by a considerable margin, Sweden's largest party with 23,6 percent of the vote. The trend is mirrored in the other Nordic countries as well.

The EU elections appeared to mirror the current balance of power in Swedish politics. The red-green block (Social Democrats, Greens and Left party) has lost ground primarily during the last decade. But the same is true of the right of centre parties. In contrast the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats have achieved a high level of success. The Sweden Democrats did not perform as well in the EU elections as they did in the General Election in September 2018 but still managed to increase their share of the vote by 5.7 percent to 15.4 percent compared with

2014. The European election confirmed the structural shift to the right in Swedish politics and among the Swedish electorate. It is also reflected in the increase in the number of those who declare themselves to be right-wing since the last election in 2014, while those on the left have decreased.

It is worth noting that there appears to have been a shift in Swedish opinion regarding the EU. Participation in the election increased by almost 5 percent and reached 51 percent. From being one of the countries most critical of the EU, Sweden has become one of

those most in favour. One reason may be that Sweden has performed quite well in terms of economic development. Another might be that Brexit seems to be a problematic political alternative. A substantial majority - 77 percent - consider that Sweden should continue to be a member of the EU. On the other hand, a substantial majority are opposed to the development of the EU into a federal state. Few political parties could be described as 'EU devotees'. The Liberals conducted a very EU-positive campaign, but it failed to pay off: the party just about reached the 4 percent threshold (the



| The Social Democrats highlighted the social dimension, the environment and the struggle against right-wing populism as critical issues in their EU campaign.

minimum required for obtaining an MEP) and maintained its only representative in the European Parliament.

The conservative parties (The Moderates and the Christian Democrats) are opposed to any increase in contributions to fund the EU budget or to extending the EU's power. The Social Democrats have more or less the same position. In general, the Social Democrats have taken a more critical line when it comes to EU policy due principally to the mounting pressure on the Swedish labour market and collective bargaining model, which posted workers constitute to Swedish wage levels in several sectors of the economy.

The Social Democrats highlighted the social dimension, the environment and the struggle against right-wing populism as critical issues in their EU campaign. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), who supports the Social Democrats, focused on Swedish workers' pay and working conditions under the banner "take back control".

The Swedish Social Democrats have been in power on a national level since 2014 and have governed since 2018 through a minority government in coalition with the Green Party but relying also on support from the two liberal parties and acceptance from the Left Party.

Consequently, the Social Democrats have been forced into numerous compromises which in turn has resulted in considerable internal criticism alleging that the Party has been forced to accept policies which accord badly with social democratic values. Against this background, the European election was no catastrophe for the Party but rather confirmed the status quo. It was feared that the Party would be severely punished for all the compromises it had endorsed with the Liberal parties to stay in power and shut out the far-right Sweden Democrats from political influence. However, the recent election result indicates also that the Social Democrats have failed to reverse the trend that has seen them losing voters in election after election over a considerable period of time.

An interesting pattern which we recognise from several other countries is that the Social Democratic electoral base has changed. During the past half century class voting has gradually declined, even though the class voting pattern has survived much longer in Sweden than in many other European countries. With the entrance of the Sweden Democrats onto the Swedish political stage in the recent decade, even more of the working-class voters have shifted their political allegiance to the right.

Still the Swedish Social Democrats in Sweden are in a strong position - and so they are in the three other Nordic countries. In all four, the Social Democrats are still the biggest party, despite decades of decline. There are a number of possible explanations for this relative strength. The Nordic social welfare and labour market models, which to a large degree are the creation of Social Democracy, have survived the stress of globalisation despite its many challenges. In addition, the Nordic economies recovered rapidly after the financial crisis of 2008. Another

explanation is that there is still a high level of trade union membership among workers and employees.

The Prime Ministers of three Nordic countries are Social Democrats. Mostly, they rely on coalitions or other support agreements with a host of other parties: various left-wing parties, the Greens, centrist parties, parties with roots in the agricultural sphere, a range of liberal and even neoliberal parties.

This is probably a lesson Nordic Social Democrats can teach their other European counterparts: the centre-left's capacity to influence the development of society will be determined by its ability to create and build alliances with other parties. But also, by the question whether the left in general – and the Social Democrats in particular – are capable of setting the agenda, of formulating concrete policy proposals and of answering the big questions of how to organise society in the age of globalisation and after the financial crisis.

It is worth noting that in the general elections in Finland and Denmark, the Social Democrats focused on the environment, welfare and greater social equality. This resonates with the election strategy of the Social Democrats in Sweden. This strategy

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This is probably a lesson Nordic Social Democrats can teach their other European counterparts: the centre-left's capacity to influence the development of society will be determined by its ability to create and build alliances with other parties.

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has not succeeded in reversing the negative trend, but it has at least stabilised support for the Party. As always, future success depends on organisation, ideology, and policy.

The Swedish Social Democrats' recipe: a focus on the social dimension, the environment and the struggle against right-wing populism - @HakanABengtsson



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THE IBERIAN DRIVER FOR EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

by *Javi López*

| If they both won the European election in their respective countries, the Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa (p22) is currently in a clearer situation than Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whose PSOE party gained the most seats in April's national election but fell short of a majority.

Today, the Iberian Peninsula is sending out a message of hope to the rest of the European continent. The Socialist parties that lead the Portuguese and the Spanish governments have both secured a remarkable 33 percent of electoral support in the recent European elections and are in a position to become a reference point for European Social Democracy as a whole.

In Spain, the electoral resurgence of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party) at the hands of Pedro Sánchez deserves a thorough analysis, since the country is today the most populated European country governed by Social Democracy and PSOE has won the four elections held in the spring of 2019: local, regional, general and European.

Pedro Sánchez became President of the Spanish Government in June 2018 thanks to a constructive motion of no-confidence against the previous Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, after a harsh sentence for corruption which confirmed the existence of systemic irregular funding in the centre-right Spanish Popular Party (PP). The

first successful motion of no-confidence in the four decades of Spanish democracy – a genuine black swan – brought the third Socialist, after Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, to the Presidency of the Government.

Over the last year, the PSOE has had the chance to roll out a strong 'red', 'purple' and 'green' agenda with a clear pro-European character and in favour of modernisation of the country which largely explains the election results. Pedro Sánchez formed the first Spanish cabinet with a large majority of women, as well as ministers who were highly regarded in society, several of them having substantial experience in Brussels,

such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, former President of the European Parliament Josep Borrell, and the Minister of Economy, the former Director General at the European Commission Nadia Calviño.

The policies implemented by Sánchez's cabinet over the last year have been aimed at the rebuilding of the welfare state and the

Spain and Portugal, two beacons of hope for European Social Democracy - @fjavilopez



modernisation of the economy through a budget proposal that consolidates productive investments and made the largest increase in the minimum wage in the history of democracy (22.3%), increase in paternity leave or increase in spending against gender violence. Other priorities are the fight against corruption, a territorial agenda of dialogue but strong in the defence of the constitutional order and the development of feminist policies in favour of gender equality as well as policies against climate change that ensure the necessary green transition of the country.

The virtue of the political formula of the current PSOE lies in their ability to assimilate and interact with the profound changes experienced by the Spanish political system and



PSOE has kept the traditional identity traits of European Social Democracy – redistribution and individual freedoms – while adding items related to environmentalism and the strong Spanish feminist movement that the new generations across the globe are demanding.



reach agreements with their left (Podemos) but remain true to their traditional role of trustworthy State party. At the same time, they have kept the traditional identity traits of European Social Democracy – redistribution and individual freedoms – while adding to their programme items related to environmentalism and the strong Spanish feminist movement that the new generations across the globe are demanding.



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The Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa is following a similar formula: the “Gueringonça government”. The Portuguese government is a minority socialist government that has achieved spectacular results for its country: economic recovery, improvement of salaries and social benefits and reduction of debt and deficit. The solvent government of Antonio Costa has managed to reach agreements in Parliament with the parties on his left with progressive policies while occupying and redrawing the political centre of the country.

Back in Spain, there are two major challenges for Pedro Sánchez and PSOE: the political fragmentation and the establishment of post-election agreements among liberals, conservatives and the far-right, which we have already seen after the 2018 regional elections in Andalusia. Good election results do not guarantee easy governance in a fragmented political system.

At the same time, the post-election agreements at regional and local level have consolidated a block formed by the liberal Ciudadanos, PP and the far-right Vox that maintains a high level of confrontation with Pedro Sánchez’s government and the deterioration of some basic consensuses due to the normalisation of the new far-right party in Spain. This behaviour, especially on the part of Ciudadanos - Macron’s alleged political partners in Madrid - should certainly draw the attention of the whole of Europe.

In a tense and polarised context on account of the conservative forces, the PSOE’s bet for understanding, serenity, and a will to lower the political temperature has strengthened its electoral position. This is not a very common thing nowadays and could set an example for European Social Democracy as a whole.



> AUTHOR

Javi López has been a Member of the European Parliament since 2014 (S&D Group). He is the Secretary for European Affairs of the PSC - Socialist Party of Catalonia & Presidency Member (PSOE) of PES - Party of the European Socialists. He has a Law Degree from the UPF - Pompeu Fabra University and a Master in Leadership for Political and Social Management at the UAB - Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is also a Member of the Council of ECFR (European Council for Foreign Relations).



THE V4 AFTER THE EP ELECTION: GLASS HALF EMPTY, HALF FULL

by Maria Skóra

The 2019 European Parliament election brought a visible decline in the popularity of the centre-left and relatively good results for all kinds of right-wing populists are unsettling. Fortunately, this tilt to the right is not significant enough to meaningfully affect the functioning of the European Union. Looking at the election results in the Visegrád countries (V4), we see how much they were determined by the dynamics of the domestic political scene.

The left is in decline in East-Central Europe. In Czechia, the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) received a catastrophic result of less than 4%, falling below the electoral threshold. This not only deprived Czech Social Democrats of all their seats in the EP but also put their governing coalition with the centrist-populist ANO in doubt. At the same time, even Andrej Babis' victory wasn't stunning (21%), and the Czech political scene remains very fragmented, with no distinctive alternative leader.

On the contrary, in Poland and Hungary the governing right-wing parties petrified their poll positions. However, whereas in Poland a deep polarisation is visible, as the united opposition, the so-called European Coalition, won 38,47%, against 45,38% for the governing Law and Justice party (PiS), in Hungary, the hegemony of Fidesz proved untouched, with 52,14% of all ballots cast in their favour and no serious competitor

in sight. In both countries, the once governing Social Democrats (SLD and MSZP, respectively) no longer play a significant role. To improve their chances in May 2019, both parties decided to join forces in broader opposition blocks, either by joining a multi-party coalition (Poland) or seeking alliances with the greens (Hungary).

In Poland, this decision proved to be a strategic masterpiece: the SLD will send five MEPs to Brussels. In Hungary, similar endeavours proved futile: MSZP lost two of three seats, winning only 6,66% of all votes. However, the Socialists & Democrats Group (S&D) will still welcome representatives of other formations from the Visegrád. In Poland, a new left-liberal initiative Wiosna debuted in this EP election by winning three seats in the European Parliament. Four other MEPs will join the S&D Group from Hungary, representing the social-liberal Democratic Coalition (DK), which won 16,18% of all votes.

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Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński's influence at the European level will be limited: Orbán's Fidesz is struggling to remain part of EPP and Kaczyński's PiS is affiliated with the unsuccessful ECR.

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Of all traditional social-democratic parties in the Visegrád states, only the Slovak Smer-SD managed to independently reach a meaningful result of 15,72%. However, it still lost 8% compared to 2014. Three MEPs from Slovakia will join the S&D Group, losing one seat. Nevertheless, Slovakia still stands out in the Visegrád Group, resisting Euro-sceptic moods. At the same time, voter turnout was the lowest there among all V4 countries: 22,74% as compared to exceeding 40% in both Poland and Hungary and almost 51% on average in the EU.

It seems that in the V4 countries, the traditional left - Social-Democrats - struggle to survive, despite their popularity in the past. Radical or social left (even the most successful Czech communists - KSČM, not to mention the Hungarian Workers Party or grass-root RAZEM in Poland) remain practically insignificant, with hardly any political influence. However, speaking of fringes, the right wing is far more visible in the V4, like the Hungarian Jobbik, the Slovak People's Party Our Slovakia or the nationalist Konfederacja in Poland, for whom the final result of 4,55% was a close call to make it to the EP. Yet, even if they were able to enter elected bodies, be it at a regional, national or European level, it seems that the far right will remain a loud but impactless opposition.

As of political alternatives, the green wave that hit the political scene in Western and Northern Europe does not exist in the V4 states. Green parties are generally marginal there, some not even present in any elected body. Most probable reason for it is of historical nature: When the environmentalist movement was forming in the European core, the South and the East were wrestling with authoritarianism, be it far-right or authoritarian real socialism, respectively.

V4: the visible decline of the centre-left and good results of right-wing populists are unsettling. @MariaSkora from @DPZ_Berlin



Thus, values such as freedom, democracy, human rights were represented and associated by other well-established opposition actors. Also, in times of latter socio-political transformations, the green agenda had to yield to bigger tasks of forming new state institutions, launching functioning economies, resetting social structures.

As of today, it seems the major beacons of pro-European hope in V4 are liberal actors, like newly elected president Zuzana Čaputová and her Progressive Slovakia party, or two surprise wins: Momentum in Hungary and the Pirates in Czechia. In fact, the Czech governing ANO party, which also won the EP election, despite populist tendencies and corruption charges against its leader, remains in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE). Moreover, the great anti-PiS mobilisation in Poland was initiated by the liberals from the Civic Platform (PO) and the Modern Party (Nowoczesna), both joining either EPP or ALDE in Strasbourg. Even the Polish Wiosna and Hungarian Democratic Coalition, although joining the S&D Group, set on a liberal agenda not only regarding values but also some economic issues. It seems that in the eyes of the voters, there is more potential in this "fresh" left wave than in the traditional social democracy.

To sum up, the political scene in the V4 is visibly tilted to the right and polarised, with

two Eurosceptic leaders – Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński – cementing their power. Nevertheless, their influence at the European level will be limited: with Fidesz struggling to remain part of the European People's Party (EPP) family and PiS affiliated with the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). At the same time, there is a slight refreshing breeze in the V4, with new parties emerging and trying to counterbalance the sinister Euro-sceptic mood. Nevertheless, the left, once so powerful, does not seem able to redefine itself, with their social agenda hijacked by right-wing populists and progressive ideals seemingly more appealing if advocated by new faces.



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“The technocratic approach is not credible anymore”

Interview with **Luuk van Middelaar**, by **Olaf Bruns**

Luuk van Middelaar

is a political theorist and historian. From 2010 until 2014, he worked as chief speechwriter and advisor to the European Council President Herman Van Rompuy. The author of the prizewinning *The Passage to Europe*, he recently published *Alarums and Excursions*, a ground-breaking account of the Union's crisis politics.

*How do the recent elections to the European Parliament affect the balance of power between the EU institutions? In his recent book *Alarums and Excursions - improvising politics on the European stage*, the Dutch historian Luuk van Middelaar analyses how a decade of crises – from the financial chaos of the euro and the Greek sovereign debt; the conflicts with Russia over Ukraine; unprecedented levels of refugees from across the Mediterranean and the turmoil created by Brexit – have shaped a new way of doing politics on the European stage.*

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More and more, politics in the EU is being played out on stage, in public view, in the limelight. Historically, a lot of EU politics rather took place backstage.

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Progressive Post: *Your recent book, first published in Dutch under the straightforward title *De nieuwe politiek van Europa* (The new politics of Europe), has in the English translation become *Alarums and Excursions - improvising politics on the European stage*. Admittedly, I had to look up 'Alarums' in the dictionary!*

Luuk van Middelaar: I wanted to underline the importance of the theatre and theatricality in politics. One of the key things we've seen in the past years is that more and more, politics in the EU is being played out on stage, in public view, in the limelight. Whereas historically, a lot of EU politics took place more backstage. Then my English publisher came up with this expression 'Alarums and Excursions', which is in fact a stage direction from the Shakespearean theatre, meaning that the

actors have to prepare for imminent action and hectic scenes and perhaps a battle. It evokes that moment right before action which I found appropriate for the 10 years of EU crisis politics, which I try to describe in the book.

PP: *And then you open with a quote from somebody who has been on stage a lot: Miles Davis. 'I will play it first and tell you what it is later'.*

LvM: With this quote I wanted to underline the other important aspect, that of improvisation: for 10 years, EU leaders and institutions had to rush, improvise and invent things on the spot. Nobody quite knew what they were doing. It was as if we were running breathlessly from one crisis to the next. And I thought, perhaps now, after 10 years, if you start with the financial crisis in 2008, it's time to take a step back and to see what we collectively,



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as the EU, have been doing in this time. Hence this Miles Davis quote: let's now take a look at the improvisation and see if we can make some sense of all of this.

PP: *The one actor that was centre stage during these improvisations is the European Council. When analysing how the European Union function, it's often described as being in conflict with a rival actor: the Parliament, which has just been newly elected. Analytically, it's a 'supranational' versus a 'federal' approach. But you distinguish three approaches for the EU construction.*

LvM: Indeed. Historically, the first approach which I call the 'backstage approach' was the idea to depoliticise conflicts. It's basically a technocratic-functional approach, where the commission as a technocratic, impartial expert body is centre stage, together with the Court of Justice. The strategy of de-politicisation is pretty much the DNA of the EU. Back in the 1950s, it was obviously a brilliant idea: the founding EU members realised that we, as countries, do not necessarily have conflicts, we rather have problems together. This was the idea of Jean Monnet and Schumann and the founding fathers. And problems, you can solve. Either legally,

or procedurally, to make them disappear or to... - sweep them under the carpet.

What you see then is that there are two rather political approaches of how to do your politics and these could be described as the federalists and the con-federalist approach: the federalist approach embodied institutionally by the European Parliament, representing EU citizens, and the con-federalist approach embodied by the European Council, as the body of national leaders.

And it shows you that these two institutions – Council and Parliament – even if they may be at odds sometimes, also share something: they both thrive under the public eye, they both look for visibility, they look for contact with citizens, unlike the Commission, the Court and the Council of Ministers.

PP: *Does the increased participation in the European elections indicate a power shift between these institutions?*

LvM: I think the European Parliament is a clear winner of the election and in particular because of the high turnout. In terms of competence, the European Parliament is of course a very powerful parliament. Even if you compare it to many national parliaments, it has nothing to be jealous of. But

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The nationalists' presence makes the European Parliament a more credible body where all voices, the plurality of public opinion in the EU, is represented and where ideas are fought out, rhetorically and politically.

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its weak spot has always been to be seen and to be found credible as a public arena, speaking on behalf of all European citizens. And I think that is changing now. The turnout, above the symbolic threshold of 50 percent, is very important and also the fact that there are more diverse voices within that parliament than the old monopoly – or 'duopoly' as some say – of the Christian Democrats, EPP, and the Social Democrats, S&D, which





has been broken down by stronger voices of new players which are also needed for majorities: the Greens the Liberals.

PP: *How about the nationalists?*

LvM: Even their presence, I would argue – although many in Brussels are worried about them – paradoxically could strengthen the parliament. Why? Because it makes the European Parliament a more credible body where all voices, the plurality of public opinion in the EU, is represented, and where ideas are fought out, rhetorically and politically. And that makes the European Parliament less of a 'Brussels Parliament' and more of a real 'European Parliament'. And it will also make it stronger vis-à-vis the other two institutions.

So, the key question is whether these kind of opposition movements will only make fools of themselves, or play a purely anti-European destruction or 'leave' card – like UKIP, or the previous Front National – or whether more so they want to be a legitimate opposition within the system, saying 'we don't want to destroy it, we want to be part of it and we want to change some of the policies'. And that's an important distinction between these two kinds of opposition.

PP: *...because it shifts from an opposition of principle against the whole 'theatre', to becoming an actor on that very stage.*

LvM: An actor on the stage and perhaps with a dissonant voice. But not one willing to bring down the whole theatre, and that is the key difference. And it means that again, paradoxically, they may strengthen the legitimacy of the project as a whole, because they're buying into it with their dissonance.



PP: *A way to handle dissonant voices on that European stage has always been the technocratic approach: 'You are against this or that part of the European Union: you probably don't understand it'. How do we confront these groups without falling into the trap of the technocratic answer?*

LvM: I think this technocratic approach is indeed no longer credible, for all the issues the EU is dealing with today. The same is true for the approach of the moral high ground, which often came second. First people said: 'you don't like it, well, probably you don't understand it and I'll explain it again'. And then they said: 'if you still don't like it, probably you're not a good European!' This was part of a longstanding tendency to put outside the order any critical voice. Voters are becoming a little bit allergic to these approaches now. There must be a possibility to disagree with policies within the system!

What is needed is political narrative of why certain decisions are taken, in the name of a certain view of the future, or appealing to certain values, which can unite a majority of parties and public opinion to follow a certain approach.

And I think that is more important now than in the past. Because even if I'm critical in the book of the technocratic approach, it was

The high turnout, as well as the new diversity of voices, gives the @Europarl_EN more credibility - @LuukvMiddelaar



fair enough for large parts of building an EU market for example. It is rather technical stuff to harmonise, for example VAT rates or to invent rules for food hygiene!

For a lot of the key issues that are dealt with today by European states and institutions together this no longer works: the refugee crisis, the euro, what to do with Russia, with China... – these are fundamental issues, involving not only matters of expertise, but really values. Take the refugee crisis, it's values of solidarity versus perhaps security and identity. For these kind of issues, the technocratic approach is not credible anymore: it is not by bringing together 28 national experts and people from the commission that you can then decide what to do with 1.2 million refugees. There, you need a political story and also political compromise or a way to work with different values to appeal to public opinion to say, OK this is perhaps what we want to do, but this is what we can do and what we will do and where we show that we also have some capacity to act.



| Talking about the life situation of young people and how to improve it was something that Frans Timmermans did well in the debates.

During the campaign for the European elections, in several Member States there was no focus on young people. As parties are cynically busy with vote-maximising, it is hard to blame them: the population of Europe is ageing, and young generations only make up around 26% of the general population. Not only are they less numerous than other generations, but unfortunately they are also less likely to vote in the European elections. But that is also exactly the reason why it is so important for the progressive party family to make an effort to engage the new generations.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN MORE THAN “YOUTH”

by Maj Jensen Christensen

*#EP2019: the S&D parties @
TheProgressives had a good
result with some young voters -
but much needs to be done!
Maj Jensen @YESocialists*





“
We will not be able to do what is necessary if we leave it to individual choices. We need to regulate the big industries and the huge corporations.
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Looking at the detailed analysis of the election results, the S&D Group came out as the winners among the young electorate in the recent European elections. A little more than 20 % of people aged 18-24 voted for the progressive group. This was a little better than the EPP and way better than the Greens, who got less than 16% among the young.

On the basis of those numbers you might say the “fair, free and sustainable Europe”-campaign has been successful among the young, and I could end my piece here. But the S&D is only biggest among the youngest group of the electorate: the “Generation Z”, those between 18 and 25. Among the “Millennials” (aged 25-34) - and every other generation – the EPP came out strongest. On the contrary, the Greens may not be the biggest group among any generation on European level, but it was their strong support among the

younger generation in some Member States that led to their improved results.

However, all these numbers are aggregated projections for Europe as a whole. When going a step further in examining the details, things turn out to be more diverse. The result of 20% of the youngest voters in Europe for the centre-left hides the fact that S&D parties were indeed biggest among young people in the UK, but only received, for example, around 7% of the young votes in Germany, where the Greens’ huge support among the young voters secured their electoral success.

The same goes for the “Fair, free and sustainable Europe”-campaign. It no doubt had an impressive impact in the Netherlands where our common candidate Frans Timmermans was on the ballot himself. But in several other countries “Fair, free and sustainable”

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was not even the slogan of the campaign. In Germany the slogan was “Europe is the answer” (Europa ist die Antwort), in Denmark “Together we fight the fight in Europe” (Sammen tager vi kampen i Europa) and in the UK it read “Transforming Britain and Europe for the many, not the few”.

In several of the national campaign, the focus on young people was absent. If a party is cynically focusing on vote-maximisation (and most parties have to), it is hard to blame it for not focusing much on the young generations: the population of Europe is ageing, and young generations only make up around 26% of the general population. In addition, they are less likely to vote in the European elections than other generations. But perhaps exactly because of this is it so important that the progressive family makes an effort to engage the new generations.

Far too often “connecting with the young people” is limited to having that token-one young person in the panel or that one page on “youth policy” in the political manifesto. But our generations are not just interested in “youth policy”. We are interested in all policies concerning our generation: from the cuts on education to the lack of decent jobs and affordable housing. And also: pension age as well as the amounts. And of course, the climate crisis - the very basis of our future on this earth.

Talking about the life situation of young people and how to improve it was something that Frans Timmermans did well in the debates. He touched on the precarious work situation for many young people and explained that the solution for this problem is systematic and political - not personal.

The same goes for tackling the climate crisis. We will not be able to do what is necessary if we leave it to individual choices. We need to regulate the big industries and the huge corporations.

Looking ahead, beyond the European elections, this is exactly what we need: A strong focus on improving the life-situation, not just for the young but for all. Recent years have seen setbacks in the quality of, security of and access to education, jobs, housing and public service. We don’t want to fight for a status quo, we want improvement. All of this is a job for the newly elected MEPs and the coming Commission. We want a Europe that works for us - and you can make it!



> AUTHOR

Maj Jensen Christensen is the newly elected Secretary General of the Young European Socialists (YES) - the biggest party political youth organisation in Europe.

THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: A STEP AHEAD FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

by Zita Gurmai

In recent years, numerous countries worldwide have witnessed the rise of powerful, transnational movements which campaign against what they call 'gender ideology'. These right-wing, nationalist forces, like Fidesz in Hungary, Vox in Spain, Rassemblement National in France and others have successfully mobilised people against equality issues, such as women's reproductive rights, LGBTIQ+ issues, gender equality policies, sex education, and gender studies as an academic field. This is not a new phenomenon. It is a pattern that was also reflected during the EU elections.

We saw a global network of anti-gay, anti-abortion and anti-feminist activists gathering at 'the World Congress of Families' in March, in Verona, Italy. It is an old strategy: to spread distortion and hatred to reinstall traditional gender roles, male privilege and maintain patriarchy. But women and progressive forces did not remain silent. On the contrary; an increased number of women and men took to the streets to call for safeguarding achieved women's rights and gender equality, and to make sure no pushback is allowed.

In Spain, thousands of women and men marched on 8 March to call for a feminist Europe, a Europe of equality and justice. The fight for women's rights has always been at the core of the socialist movement and thus with the increased anti-gender movement, the European socialists were determined to stand by and with women with a strong #FeministEurope Campaign.

The Party of European Socialists was very clear on this through their three-step approach: first, a strong feminist Manifesto, second, an outspoken feminist common candidate and third, gender-balanced European lists.

This approach was maintained during the debates of the European Campaign; as the feminist PES candidate Frans Timmermans said, "it's not only about the 14 women Commissioners, but about the 250 million women in Europe and what we will do for them".

Unlike the other European parties' common candidates, Frans Timmermans advocated for going beyond a parity European Commission and talked about comprehensive policy proposals which will benefit all women, for example finally closing the gender pay and pension gaps and a European Directive to end gender-based violence. While our common candidate spoke out about a feminist model for Europe, the

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| The women's organisations of the Social Democratic parties need to remain critical, acting as gender equality watchdogs for the parties and within the parties.

media refrained from going beyond the quota discussion. A missed opportunity for a true gender perspective in reporting and analysis from the media. This said, we welcome the work and achievement of the women's rights movement in getting feminism on the European agenda and as a decisive issue for voters.

Moreover, our political family has done well in terms of women's representation on European electoral lists; some of our parties went beyond national legislations by applying zip-lists or quotas. Based on the available data, 41.6% of the candidates for PES member parties were women. This is reflected in the election result of the S&D with 41.8% of the newly elected MEPs being women. While the S&D is above the new European Parliament's average of 39% in terms of women's representation (compared to 36% in 2014), the group dropped from 45% in 2014, falling behind the Greens, GUE and Renew Europe.

It is worth noting that parties with zip list were able to guarantee a high number of women MEPs and that having women head of lists can guarantee that smaller delegations (1 to 3 representatives) have a

good gender-balance. The lack of quotas or women on eligible places gave rise to very poor results in terms of women's representation. Another real achievement for the progressive women's movements is the election of the new President of the Group Iratxe Garcia Perez, a strong feminist fighter.

What do these numbers mean overall? We, the women's organisations of the Social Democratic parties need to remain critical, acting as gender equality watchdogs for the parties and within the parties. We need to be the voice that constantly reminds everyone that gender equality has not been achieved, and will not be achieved without actively promoting and implementing it. Only political will, good policies and long-term effective mechanisms can make it happen.

A more fragmented parliament increases the need to increase our efforts to find a progressive majority in the European Parliament that supports progressive women's rights, preferably with parties that do not compromise on gender equality. The appointments of positions such as Chairs of Committees, Commission portfolios or Presidents of the EU institutions will be closely watched by the feminist movements as we need to

guarantee that a feminist European vision is put into practice after the election. That is what PES Women will do, and will continue to do, until gender equality is a reality.



> **AUTHOR**

Zita Gurmai is President of PES Women, which promotes gender equality inside and outside the Party of European Socialists, and Vice-President of FEPS. Former Member of the European Parliament, she has been re-elected, in April 2018, Member of the Hungarian Parliament.

OUT OF THE DOLDRUMS

by László Andor



The 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections saw Social Democracy falling to a historic low. In the new EP, the share of seats held by Socialist, Social-Democratic and related progressive parties is the lowest ever. Overall electoral support for progressives continues to show a downward trend in Europe, calling for a serious reflection, but without falling into despondency. Keynesian macroeconomic strategy as well as a bolder social policy for the EU is vital - and so is a global progressive agenda.

Despite a most dynamic EP election campaign in Spring 2019, in some EU countries Social Democrats appear dispirited, and give the impression of sailing on a stagnant, if not a slowly sinking ship. While showing some strength in the north and the south, the situation of the Social Democrats is nothing less than critical in the two major countries which have been the driving force of European integration for seven decades.

The collapse of the Socialist Party in France leaves a large hole in the map and the disarray into which the German SPD has fallen since the EP elections has become a comparable drama. Among the 'new EU Member States' in the east, Social Democrats are in power in some countries—but not without controversy—and modest improvements in others have not been robust enough to offer solace.

On the positive side is the improved performance of the left in the Iberian Peninsula and a few other parts of the European south, together with the Dutch surge and the return of the centre-left to government in the north. This very mixed overall picture makes a deep reflection necessary, on the role the overlapping EU crises have played in the decline of Social Democracy and the importance of European policy as part of the progressive reconstruction strategy that has to be built now.

Defining a progressive programme at the EU level appears a key task in itself, but also because it frames Member States' policies. Compared to five years ago, that current Social Democrat programme seems better prepared and more cohesive. The endeavour is to make progress in three key areas: reshaping the global order in the interest of sustainability, revamping the Monetary Union to facilitate convergence,

and reinventing a Social Europe to tackle inequality.

For Social Democrats, the constant development of a Social Europe is a core goal—even if some believe the point is to be more liberal than the Liberals or greener than the Greens. It should be clear that absorbing policies championed by Liberals or Greens cannot be a substitute for delivering on key issues, including Keynesian macroeconomic policy. The availability of jobs and the quality of our workplaces today depend on EU regulation, and this has to be updated to ensure that new trends such as digitalisation and robotisation do not undermine the high standards we have achieved. The successes of several legislative cycles at EU level like the 2014 Enforcement Directive on Posted Workers and 2018 revision of the Posted Workers Directive have ended the period when workers coming from other EU Member



States were presented as the main threat to national welfare of other Member States.

Further efforts to stamp out 'social dumping' have to concentrate on such proposals as the co-ordination of minimum wages across countries. Although the EU is not and will not be a welfare state, it has to develop a safety net for the national welfare systems, for example through a reinsurance of national unemployment benefit schemes. Participants of a recent debate in this field have promoted the concept of a 'Social Union'.

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Missing the opportunity of earlier Social-Democratic electoral success to reform the EU financial and economic model leaves a crucial and comprehensive task which no other force is ready or capable to tackle yet. One can, as Joseph Stiglitz does in this number of the Progressive Post, argue for a general rewriting of the rules of the European economy, but there should be no doubt that the reform of the single currency must be at the centre of this effort. If and when the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) can be relaunched, the most urgent tasks will be the completion of the Banking Union by adding deposit insurance to the existing pillars and the introduction of a genuine fiscal capacity in support of risk-sharing and convergence. Such measures do not require a federal leap or treaty change. Because of the risk of disintegration in case of another economic downturn, EMU reform is vital - but further building-blocks of a new business model should not be forgotten either. In particular, the time has probably come for an effective industrial policy, with new potential for innovation as well as regional development.

Finally, the future of EU integration and, within that, the perspective of a Social Europe also depend on a global progressive agenda. Europeans, more than anybody else, can and must strive to rescue collective action in the world.

The main threat to multilateralism comes from the country which invented the system—the United States of America. The US has been looking for ways to manage its own relative decline and today this has become more disruptive than constructive. It threatens the achievements of the recent past, including in climate policy, nuclear disarmament and economic development. The current juncture calls for a rediscovery of the Social Democratic tradition of global solidarity and the construction of a progressive international agenda. Saving EU integration

and multilateralism from the new authoritarians and nationalists is not about defending the status quo ante, since the laissez faire of transnational finance and the 'race to the bottom' generated by unregulated trade in the past thirty years have contributed to some of the alarming political developments of our time.

A critical assessment of the neoliberal period is a crucial part of progressive reconstruction in economic and social policies, but also regarding the global agenda. There are large constituencies in Europe looking for the political force that insists on the simultaneous pursuit of sustainability and equality. Demonstrating this capacity will bring the wind back into the sails of social democracy.



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László Andor is the new FEPS Secretary-General. He is a Hungarian economist, and former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2010-2014).

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