

The 2014 European Parliament elections will see populist parties make gains, but they will remain a battle for control between mainstream parties

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/12/03/the-2014-european-parliament-elections-will-see-populist-parties-make-gains-but-they-will-remain-a-battle-for-control-between-mainstream-parties/

03/12/2013

*European Parliament elections are due to take place in May 2014. **Yves Bertoncini** and **Valentin Kreilinger** write that while populist parties are likely to increase their numbers in the parliament, the major centre-left and centre-right parties will once again come out ahead, with a number of possible coalitions emerging from what is currently an open field. They argue that the election will come down to eight 'swing states' which have the largest populations and the greatest number of seats in the parliament.*



While the balance of power in the next European Parliament (EP) is the great unknown six months ahead of the May 2014 elections, a number of indicators are already available. They allow for a carefully conducted exercise of foresight, while keeping in mind that developments can still affect the overall picture. On the basis of the 2009 election results and recent opinion polls for the eight most populous EU countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom – which account for more than three quarters of the electorate and around two thirds of the seats in the EP), we have made a prediction of the composition of the next parliament in our recent [policy paper](#) for Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute.



Some political parties could get high or even very high scores in May 2014, but this would have almost no impact in terms of seats because they received a similar share of the vote in 2009 (for example, the CDU/CSU in Germany or UKIP in the United Kingdom). Conversely, if other parties get a low score, it will not have a great impact either, given the fact that their share was already low at the last election (for example, the French Socialist Party). But the increase in the number of seats for the French Front national could be very impressive (up to a six-fold increase), as well as for the Spanish Radical left (Izquierda Unida), not to mention the new Five Star Movement in Italy, which could get 19 seats. As another striking example, the British Labour Party could double its number of MEPs, while the Polish coalition formed by the Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish Peasants Party (PSL) could lose one third of its seats.

Table 1: National vote shares and number of seats for selected parties in 'swing states' in 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections

	National vote share in 2009	Predicted vote share in 2014	Seats in 2009	Predicted seats in 2014
Vote share changes with limited impact on number of seats				
CDU-CSU (Germany, EPP)	37.9%	41.5%	42	43
PVV (Netherlands)	17.0%	17.1%	4	5
UKIP (United Kingdom, EFD)	16.1%	22.0%	13	16
PS (France, S&D)	16.5%	20.0%	14	17
PNL (Romania, ALDE)	14.5%	20.0%	5	7
Vote share changes with large impact on number of seats				
PO-PSL (Poland, EPP)	51.0%	27.0%	28	19
Front national (France)	6.3%	21.0%	3	17
Labour (United Kingdom, S&D)	15.3%	35.0%	13	26
Izquierda Unida (Spain, EUL)	2.9%	11.9%	1	8
Five Star Movement (Italy)	-	21.5%	-	19

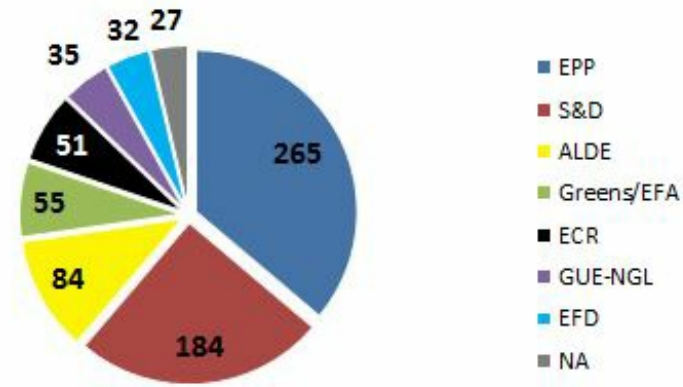
Note: The Front national and PVV are not aligned to any parliamentary group, while the Five Star Movement could potentially join a parliamentary group after the 2014 election. Data from 2009: European Parliament. Forecasts for 2014: the 8 most populous EU countries (our sample of ‘swing states’) account for 77.5 per cent of the EU population and 63.8 per cent of the seats. Tables and calculations: Yves Bertoncini and Valentin Kreilinger.

These opinion polls from the 8 ‘swing states’ can be projected on to the EU28 for two reasons. First, the trends in these diverse countries are more or less representative of Europe-wide trends. Second, their weight in the final balance of power is substantial. By doing so, we also allow for most of the political groups to be represented at the EU28 level in the same proportion as they are represented at the swing state level, even though we slightly overestimate the number of MEPs for the [European Conservatives and Reformists](#) (ECR) and the [Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe](#) (ALDE) in this projection.

The race between the [European People’s Party](#) (EPP – 209 seats predicted) and the [Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats](#) (S&D – 213 seats predicted) could be extremely tight. They would both have around 28 per cent of MEPs (+3 per cent for the S&D and -7 per cent for the EPP, compared with 2009). Both ALDE and the [Greens/EFA](#) might experience losses. According to our projection, they would receive 8 per cent (-3 per cent, 62 seats) and 5 per cent (-2 per cent, 38 seats) of MEPs respectively out of the 751 seats.

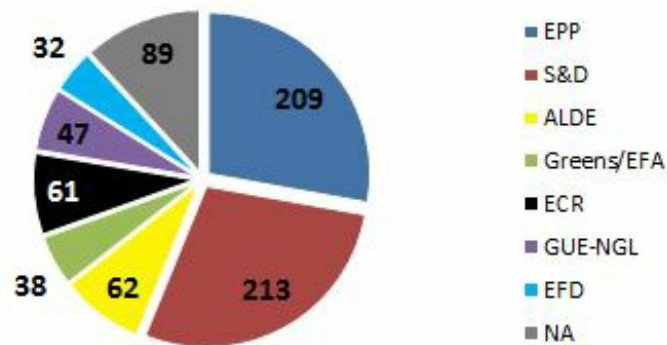
The remaining political groups are likely to remain stable or get slightly better scores. The projection gives the ECR 8 per cent of MEPs (+1 per cent, 61 seats), the [European United Left–Nordic Green Left](#) (GUE-NGL) 6 per cent (+1 per cent, 47 seats) and [Europe of Freedom and Democracy](#) (EFD) 4 per cent (no change in voting percentage, 32 seats). At this stage, national parties that are not aligned to a European political group or not yet represented in the EP could get 89 MEPs. Some of them might join one of the existing political groups, or indeed try to form a new political group (which requires at least 25 MEPs from at least seven member states). Political groups might also reconfigure themselves. Figure 1 shows the current share of seats in the European Parliament for each group, while Figure 2 shows the predicted share of seats after the 2014 election.

Figure 1: Number of seats held by each parliamentary group in the European Parliament (2009-14)



Source: European Parliament

Figure 2: Predicted number of seats held by each parliamentary group in the European Parliament after the 2014 elections



Note: See the authors' [longer paper](#) for a more detailed account of these calculations.

Some political families (socialists, radical left and greens) are more united than others (conservatives and, above all, 'populists'). Some political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA) are also more cohesive than others (especially than the groups of populist MEPs). In addition to this, internal cohesion varies by policy area, and the "actual power" of the political groups is not the same as their "nominal power" in terms of seats obtained at the last election. Doru Frantescu has [shown](#) that this is crucial for understanding the issues at stake in the 2014 European elections. The 'actual power' of the political families and groups that are cohesive will be slightly greater than the 'nominal power' they will have in terms of seats in May 2014.

The real challenge in the EP, as the assembly of a system of separated powers, lies in forming a majority. Three different coalitions were possible in 2009-2014: a 'grand coalition' between the EPP and S&D, with or without the ALDE; a 'centre-left coalition' between the S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL; and a 'centre-right coalition' between the EPP, ALDE, and ECR. The winning coalition(s) in 2014 will determine both the work of the EP as EU co-legislator and will elect the next Commission President (376 MEPs must vote in favour of the candidate proposed by the European Council for the appointment to be approved).

On the basis of our estimations, neither a coalition of the centre-left (getting 48 per cent) nor of the centre-right

(getting 44 per cent) will have an absolute majority of the seats. The likely rise in the share of ‘populist’ MEPs will make a grand coalition even more likely – if we look at the projection, only two coalitions could have an absolute majority at this stage. One would be a grand coalition with the ALDE that could choose to support a candidate proposed by the political group holding the biggest number of seats, or a candidate proposed by the ALDE, given its central position in such a coalition. In both cases, the candidate could be the one appointed to run for the presidency of the Commission through the election campaign or another candidate who could gain enough support in both the European Council and the EP. The other is a “grand coalition” formed by the S&D and EPP groups only – again, they could choose to support a candidate of the political group holding the biggest number of seats, whether the candidate for the Commission Presidency in the election campaign or a compromise candidate.

Table 2: Possible coalitions after the 2014 European Parliament elections

	Grand coalition with ALDE	Grand coalition	Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition
S&D	213	213	213	
EPP	209	209		209
ALDE	62		62	62
Greens/EFA			38	
GUE-NGL			47	
ECR				61
Total	484 (64%)	422 (56%)	360 (48%)	332 (44%)

Note: See the authors’ [longer paper](#) for a more detailed account of these calculations.

The [numerical increase of populist forces](#) will not notably affect the functioning of the EP, which will remain largely based on the compromises built between the dominant political groups. This reflects the positions of the overwhelming majority of EU citizens. The uncertainty as to whether the mainstream political groups and parties might embrace the analyses and recommendations formulated by populist forces is probably the most serious political threat for the EU as a whole. It is naturally difficult to foresee the changes to the balance of power which will occur in six months’ time, but one thing is for sure: the political game is extremely open at this stage, and this should prompt all the players concerned to engage in a vigorous defence and promotion of their alternative visions and proposals for the EU.

Please read our comments policy before commenting.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/1auievi>

About the authors

Yves Bertoncini – *Notre-Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

Yves Bertoncini is the Director of the think tank Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute. His research includes European policy and institutions, democracy and mobility. He previously worked in the European Commission, the Office of the Prime Minister of France, and the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.



Valentin Kreilinger – *Notre-Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

Valentin Kreilinger is Research Fellow in politics and institutions at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute. His research has included work on the Fiscal Compact, the ‘community method’ of policy making, EU political union, and the dynamics of European Council summits. At the institute, he is currently responsible for research projects on differentiated integration and the European Parliament 2014 elections, in addition to a conference series on the ‘European public space’.



-