

German and UK's Liberals collapse and ALDE loses ground

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2014 European Parliament election seems to be not so relevant anymore both in Italy (because of different Italian-related issues that have been setting media's agenda) and in European institutions (because the selection of the president of the European Commission has been a difficult problem for many European politicians).² Actually, it is very interesting to analyse the results of 2014 European election in regard to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (from now on, ALDE Group).

Let us analyse liberal democratic³ parties' results. Analysing Figure 1, it can be seen that the ALDE group has lost some seats compared to 2009 European election. Indeed, Figure 1 tells us something more. The 2014 electoral result is the worst since 1999 for the liberal democratic group. We must go back to 1999 to find a liberal democratic group that was less numerous (in percentage) than the one emerged after 2014 European election.

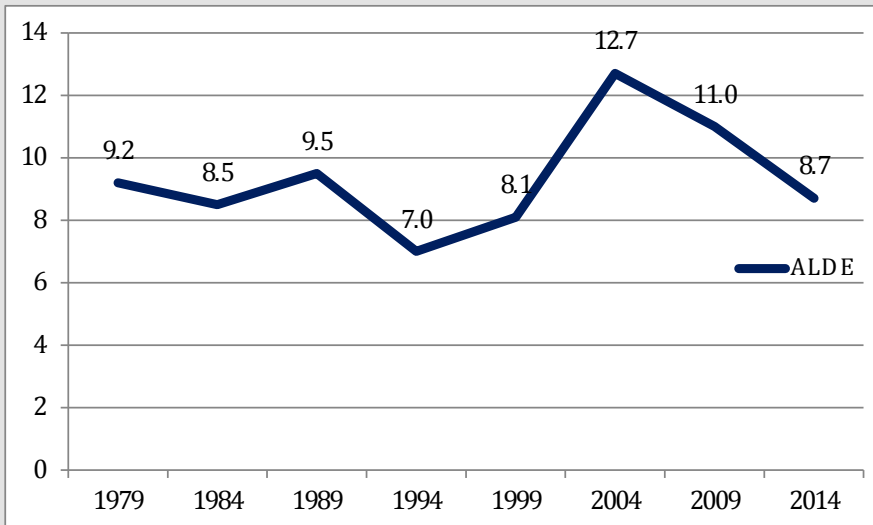
Obviously, aggregate data is important when dealing with a general trend. Nevertheless, if we want to analyse results in a more detailed way, performances of liberal democratic parties at national level must be taken into consideration.

¹ This article was originally published in Italian on the CISE website. It appears in English for the first time in this book.

² It seems that the next president of the European Commission could be chosen after more or less private negotiations among European politicians and parties. There is, therefore, the concrete risk of putting away pre-electoral promises about the necessity to partly overcome the European Union's democratic deficit via the creation of a more competitive and more transparent process to select the president of the European Commission.

³ As similarly explained in another contribution, I will use this term when dealing with the ALDE Group (and with its predecessors) and with the parties that have been connected to the ALDE Group.

Figure 1 – Electoral results of liberal democratic parties. Percentage of seats in the European Parliament (1979–2014)



Data source: for 1979–2009 data, see <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/eu2.html>; for 2014 results, see <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>; see further details on national results and on seats calculus in Table 1's footnote.

Taking a look at Table 1, a preliminary consideration can be made. Being incumbent at national level seemed not to have punished liberal democratic parties. This is an interesting element to consider even if it is related to just three countries. The Estonian party *Eesti Reformierakond* has increased its share of votes compared to the results of 2009 European election while Luxembourgian DP has suffered from some vote losses even if it has not lost any parliamentary seat in Europe. Finally, the Dutch VVD has slightly gained some votes (in percentage) compared to 2009 election. To sum up, liberal democratic prime ministers have not been punished by electors in European “second-order election” (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

Analysing Table 1 in a more detailed way, liberal democratic defeat is strongly connected with poor performances of parties in some European countries, that is, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

To begin with, in Germany, the collapse of FDP has brought about an eight-seat loss for the ALDE Group. This could have dire consequences for liberal democratic politicians in Germany, given the increased political fragmentation in the last years and the relevant changes regarding post-electoral alliances (see the interesting contribution by Poguntke, 2012).

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Table 1 – Electoral performances of liberal democratic parties in 2014 European election at national level and differences from 2009 (percentage of votes and number of seats)

	2014		Differences from 2009	
	% Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Austria	8.1	1	+8.1	+1
Belgium	22.8	6	+0.3	+1
Bulgaria	17.3	4	-3.8	-1
Croatia	29.9	2	+29.9	+2
Cyprus				
Czech Republic	16.1	4	+16.1	+4
Denmark	23.5	3	+3.3	0
Estonia	46.7	3	+5.3	0
Finland	26.5	4	+1.4	0
France	9.9	7	+1.4	+1
Germany	4.9	4	-6.2	-8
Greece				
Hungary			-2.2	
Ireland	22.3	1	-1.8	-2
Italy	1.4	0	-6.6	-7
Latvia		0	-7.5	-1
Lithuania	29.4	3	+9.7	+1
Luxembourg	14.8	1	-3.9	0
Malta				
Netherlands	27.5	7	+4.8	+1
Poland				
Portugal				
Romania		0		-5
Slovakia	6.7	1	-2.3	0
Slovenia	8.1	1	-13.1	-1
Spain	11.9	6	+6.7	+4
Sweden	16.5	3	-2.5	-1
United Kingdom	6.7	1	-7.1	-10

Data source: for 2009 (unless otherwise specified), see <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/eu2.html>; for 2014 (unless otherwise specified), see <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>; regarding 2014 Irish data, I have put data on the party that will join ALDE Group; regarding Romanian data, I have decided to include the National Liberal Party's results, an ALDE Group member, which has asked to enter the European People's Party Group; the Latvian LPP/LC has disappeared from national political landscape; regarding Spanish results, I have not considered the Union, Progress and Democracy's results (6.5% and four seats) that could join the ALDE Group in the near future; and finally, I have indicated in bold the countries in which the prime minister comes from a liberal democratic party.

Secondly, in Italy, the party that has been founded by Antonio Di Pietro, the former *Mani Pulite* prosecutor, called *Italy of Values* has basically disappeared from political landscape, having obtained just 0.7% of ballots. Moreover, the electoral coalition called *Scelta Europea* got less than 1% of votes. This coalition was formed by three political formations, i.e., *Scelta Civica*, founded by Mario Monti, former Italian Prime Minister; *Fare per Fermare il Declino*, a liberal democratic and pro-market formation founded by some Italian economists such as Michele Boldrin and Sandro Brusco; and *Centro Democratico*, led by Bruno Tabacci. *Scelta Europea's* results have had a noticeable echo in Italian media, both because *Scelta Civica* was founded in order to be the fulcrum of Italian politics in 2013 Italian general election and because the electoral coalition had strong pro-Europe stances (on the relationship between Italian politics and pro-Europe rhetorical arguments, see Hay and Rosamond, 2002, pg. 161–162).

Thirdly, and possibly most importantly, let us deal with Liberal Democrats' defeat in the UK. Nick Clegg, leader of the party, tried to challenge Nigel Farage, leader of the xenophobic and anti-European UKIP, in two public debates focused on the relationship between United Kingdom and European Union. The leaders of the Conservative party and of the Labour party decided not to take part in these debates. Unfortunately, for Liberal Democrats, Clegg and his pro-Europe ideas and policy proposals were defeated. At the end of May, European and local elections in the UK confirmed the results of the debates. Liberal Democrats lost many councillors at local level and were almost swept away from European Parliament, having being able to confirm just one member of the European Parliament (from now on, MEP) out of 11.

Liberal democratic results in Germany, Italy, and UK are fundamental to understand the decline of ALDE Group after 2014 European election. Indeed, in these three countries, liberal democratic parties lost 25 seats. This means that good performances of liberal democratic parties in other countries (such as Netherlands, Croatia, and Czech Republic) have not been able to compensate the strong losses in the three abovementioned countries.

Moreover, looking at the power relations within the ALDE Group, French, Belgian, and Dutch MEPs represent more than 30% of ALDE MEPs. Conversely, British and German influence with the liberal democratic group has been strongly reduced.

In a contribution written before 2014 European election, I imagined that European and German austerity policies and the pre-electoral leap of anti-Europe and extremist parties could have fostered a defeat for liberal democratic parties. Indeed, 2014 European election were a dire moment for liberal democratic politicians. ALDE Group, possibly the most pro-Europe group within European Parliament, is less numerous (in percentage) than 2009 and 2004. This means that liberal democratic leadership and parties must deal with a

hostile environment at European and at national level. We often say that European Union must change in order to survive. It may be the same phrase, *mutatis mutandis*, is useful for ALDE Group as well.

References

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