

The radical left grows but only in the South of Europe

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The European elections of 22–25 May 2014 were expected to be disruptive and changing elections, especially for the parties that deeply criticized the idea of Europe carried in so far by the main European political groups.

The European Left Party (GUE-NGL) was one of these. However, differently from the Eurosceptic parties, the most lefty group in Strasbourg led by the Greek Alexis Tsipras was not against the Euro and the project of European integration but proposed a vision completely alternative to the neoliberal and predominant one, which was blamed not only for being the cause of the strong economic and financial crisis that hit the Union but also for offering totally insufficient answers to this situation. On these premises, many were foreseeing a positive result for the GUE-NGL—a result that would have inverted the decreasing trend that has affected the radical left in Europe.²

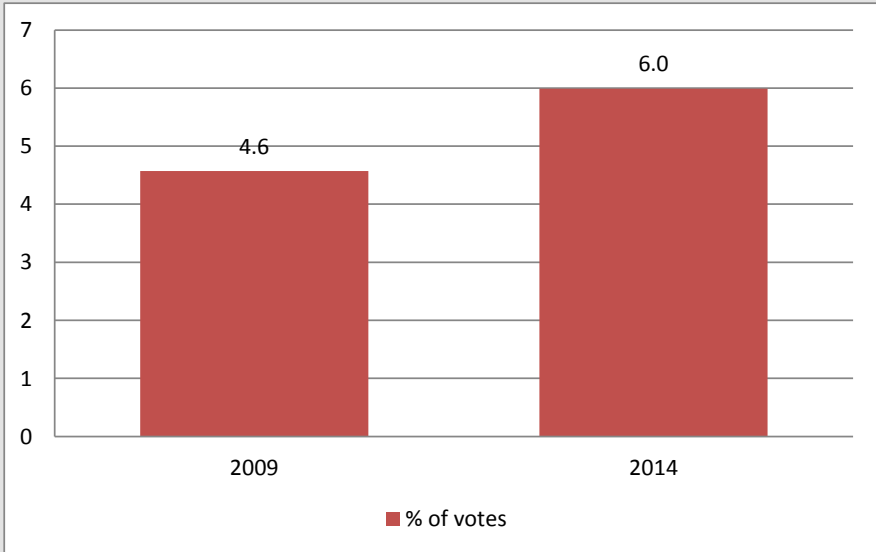
A first glance at the aggregate result (see figure 1) immediately reveals that this inversion of tendency has actually taken place. GUE-NGL has moved from 4.6% in 2009 to 6% in 2014—a clear leap of 1.4 points. This result certainly doesn't lead the GUE-NGL to the levels of the first European elections, in which the radical left group was made up of mainly communist parties but still approaches the result of 1999 when the group obtained 6.7% of the electoral consensus.

This result has accompanied an increase of GUE-NGL's presence in the European Parliament (see figure 2), moving from 35 seats of 2009 to 45 seats of 2014, corresponding to an increase of 10 seats.

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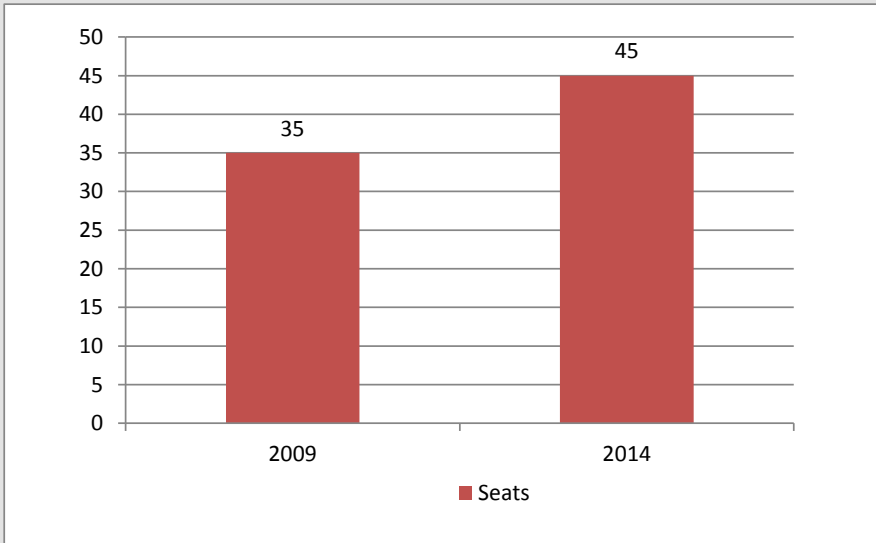
² With this regard, see the article in this volume: "From the Italian Communist Party to Tsipras: The path of Europe's radical left."

Figure 1 – Percentage of votes between 2009 and 2014



Source: www.elections2014.eu/it

Figure 2 – Number of seats gained between 2009 and 2014



Source: www.elections2014.eu/it

The disaggregated results by countries in Table 1 firstly reveal how, in comparison with the 2009 elections, the number of countries in which GUE-NGL didn't gain any electoral results (or at least a result as low as almost insignificant) has increased to six (Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary), moving from six to 12 countries. The most significant (and the only) case is Latvia where the breaking up of the "Saskanas Centrs" coalition—which reached 19.6% gaining one seat—has led to no representation for the GUE-NGL at these elections. Even if it almost doesn't influence the aggregate result, this result signals a loss of representation by the GUE-NGL within the EU member states.

Focusing again on the general result of the GUE-NGL in these elections, it is fundamental to understand where this inversion of tendency comes from. To find an answer to this question, it is necessary to analyse the results obtained by the parties in the Mediterranean countries, with the addition of some Nordic countries, in which radical left lists have remarkably increased their result compared to the past elections. (This has happened especially in Ireland, one of the countries that have suffered the most from the Brussels' intervention in their internal economy.)

Clearly, GUE-NGL has gained the most positive results in the three countries both most hit by the recent economic crisis and most involved in the austerity policies imposed by the *Troika* of IMF, European Commission, and European Central Bank: Greece, Italy, and Spain. Two other Southern nations, Portugal and Cyprus, add up to these three countries. Notwithstanding a slight decrease of consensus compared to previous elections, in these two countries, the parties linked to the radical left have managed to maintain a particularly high level of consensus compared to the EU average. (In Portugal, the "*Coligação Democrática Unitária*" has gained 17.2% of the votes and four seats, one less than in 2009, while in Cyprus, the Labour Progressive Party has gained 26.9% and two seats like in 2009).

In Greece, the result of GUE-NGL was the most expected. The Greek nationality of its leader Tsipras and particularly harsh austerity policies imposed to the Greek people had led to an astonishing increase in the consensus for the parties that forcefully challenged those policies, and Syriza—a party linked to GUE-NGL—was the leading one. In Greece, the radical left remarkably increased its consensus in comparison to 2009—by far the biggest increase among the European countries. With an increment of 19.6 percentage points, Syriza has become the first party in Greece, gaining more one vote out of three (32.6%) among the Greek voters. This result has consequently increased the number of European representatives of Greece in Strasbourg, moving from three in 2009 to eight in the current legislature.

Also in Spain, GUE-NGL—more precisely the coalition "*Izquierda Plural*" without counting the list "*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*" that joined the

Table 1 – Electoral results for the GUE-NGL in 2009 and 2014 by countries

Country	Votes 2009	Votes 2014	Seats 2009	Seats 2014
Austria	0.66	/	0	0
Belgium	/	/	0	0
Bulgaria	/	/	0	0
Croatia	5.8*	/	0	/
Cyprus	34.8	26.9	2	2
Czech Republic	14.2	11	4	3
Denmark	7.0	8.0	1	1
Estonia	0.8	/	0	0
Finland	5.9	9.3	0	1
France	6.0	6.3	5	4
Germany	7.5	7.4	8	7
Greece	13.0	32.6	3	8
Hungary	1.0	/	0	0
Ireland	2.8	17.0	1	3
Italy	7.0	4.0	0	3
Latvia	19.6	/	1	0
Lithuania	/	/	0	0
Luxembourg	3.4	5.7	0	0
Malta	/	/	0	0
Netherlands	7.1	9.6	2	2
Poland	0.7	/	0	0
Portugal	21.3	17.2	5	4
Romania	/	/	0	0
Slovakia	1.7	/	0	0
Slovenia	/	/	0	0
Spain	3.8	10.0	1	5
Sweden	5.7	5.7	1	1
United Kingdom	0.6	0.6	1	1
Total	4.6	6.0	35	45

*Elections held on 14 April 2013
 Source: www.elections2014.eu/it

Green Group—has gained an excellent result, gaining 10% of the votes, 6.23 percentage points more than the 3.77% of 2009. This had resulted in an increase of four Spanish members of the European Parliament in the GUE-NGL group, moving from one to five members.

Italy represents a particular case, in which, even if the percentage level has decreased by 3 percentage points, GUE-NGL has gained three more members of the European Parliament compared to the previous elections, in which the radical left did not succeed to elect a representative. The explanation lies in the fairly high electoral threshold (4%) in the Italian electoral system. This has led to the fact that in 2009, the two parties linked to GUE-NGL—the list including the “*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*” and the “*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*” and the list “*Sinistra e Libertà*”—both remained below the threshold, reaching respectively 3.38% and 3.12%, thus not being able to elect any representatives. In these elections, the radical left has gathered into one list—“*Un'altra Europa con Tsipras*”—managing to breach the threshold (gaining 4.03%) and consequently to elect three MEPs.

The case of Croatia is similar to Italy's. At the elections of 14 April 2013, the two lists linked to GUE-NGL reached respectively 3.5% and 2.4% and didn't manage to breach the threshold of 5% necessary to gain a seat.

It is useful to notice also the increase of some parties linked to GUE-NGL in some Central-Northern Europe states, such as the Netherlands, where the “*Socialistische Partij*” has gained 9.6% of the votes—2.5 percentage points more in 2009—obtaining however the same number of elected Eurodeputies. An increment can be observed also in the tiny Luxembourg where “*DéiLénk*” reaches 5.8% of the consensus, increasing by 2.3 percentage points, without nonetheless managing to gain any seats. Among the Northern countries with an increased consensus, Ireland clearly stands out—a country also strongly hit by the economic crisis and by the policies implemented by the *Troika*. In Ireland, the “*Sinn Féin*” has reached 17% of the consensus, with an astonishing increase of 14.2 percentage points compared to 2009, thus gaining three Eurodeputies, two more than in the previous elections. In addition, also in Denmark and Finland, the parties linked to GUE-NGL have grown, especially in the second case, in which the Left Alliance has increased its result by 3.4 percentage points.

The performance of the parties linked to GUE-NGL in France and Germany has remained stable while in Czech Republic, similarly to Cyprus and Portugal, there has been a decrease of 4 percentage points, but the consensus and the numbers of Eurodeputies still remain high (11% and 3 Eurodeputies).

With the aim to provide an explanation to these results, it can be stated that GUE-NGL surely has benefited from the climate of protest against the austerity policies that have hit different countries of the Union. It is no coincidence that most relevant successes in percentage points—and in some cases also in terms of gained seats—come from the countries that have suffered the most from the cuts imposed by Brussels (Greece, Spain, and Ireland, above all, but also Portugal and Italy). However, the general impression is that the growth of radical left parties has not been as general as the growth of popu-

list and Eurosceptic parties—only eight countries out of 28 have registered a percentage increase in the consensus. If we add up what previously mentioned with regard to the longstanding low representation of GUE-NGL in Europe—only 16 countries out of 28 had a list linked to GUE-NGL—and the problem of the electoral thresholds—which mostly seems to be a problem of vote dispersion, as in 2009 in Italy and 2013 in Croatia—the result begins to show a clear logic and still remains below many expectations.

In any case, it is necessary to underline the importance of an inversion of tendency for GUE-NGL compared to the last elections. This inversion tendency, however, will have to consolidate during this legislature and gather around a well-defined programmatic platform, in order to build a project with a solid foundation for 2019. An important part of the increment registered in these elections can be linked to the feelings of protest against the current status quo of the Union. In five years, it might be much more difficult to see the same context. It is therefore urgent to strengthen the party at the European level and its network of parties in each member state. This is the only way to give a sense and a future to the radical left in Europe.

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