

The electoral progress of the populist and Eurosceptic right

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The 2014 European elections have now ended with the consequent allocation of the seats among the various parties at the national level. The national parties will then have to gather into political groups² within the European Parliament (EP). In this article, I will firstly analyse the electoral results of the parties that belonged to the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group in the previous parliament. This political group gathers the populist and Eurosceptic parties and, in some cases, even some explicitly anti-Euro and anti-EU parties in the EP (Taggart, 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). As Figure 1 shows, the EFD gained 38 seats³ out of 751—which correspond to 5% of the total EP seats—increasing its presence in the parliament by seven seats compared to 2009 (when it gained 31 seats).

As already mentioned in a previous article⁴, the EFD was born as a political group on 1 July 2009, and in the previous legislatures, it was made of 13 parties from 12 member states of the EU. In particular, the most important parties were Northern League (*Lega Nord*), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the ultra-conservative Greek LAOS, the Danish People's Party,

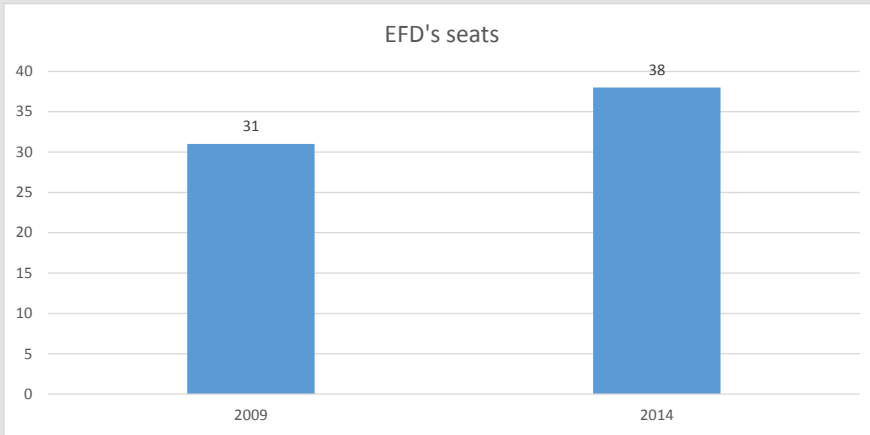
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² European groups and parties do not completely overlap as underlined by Bardi (2002). Some national parties belong to a parliamentary group in the EP although they are not member of the Euro-party.

³ It is worth mentioning that each political group has to be made of 25 Eurodeputies coming from at least seven different member states. At present, the EFD gathers deputies from six countries. In order to remain in the parliament, it has to convince at least one Eurodeputy from another country to join the group.

⁴ See Maggini in this volume.

Figure 1 – Seats in the European Parliament for the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (2009 and 2014)



the French *Mouvement pour la France*, the Dutch SGP, the “True Finnish” Party in Finland, and the National Party in Slovakia.

At present, the EFD parties that had gained seats have shifted⁵ from 13 to six, belonging to the same number of countries (see Table 1). Within the EFD, the party that has gained more seats (24) is Nigel Farage’s UKIP, which has conquered 27.4% of the consensus, thus becoming the first party in the UK and with a staggering increase of 11 percentage points and 11 seats compared to 2009. One of the aims of Farage’s party is to call for a referendum for Great Britain to leave to EU. With five seats in the EFD, the second national delegation is Matteo Salvini’s *Lega Nord*, which has gained a satisfactory 6.2%, even if it has lost 4 percentage points and three seats compared to the 2009 EP elections. The Danish People’s Party is the third national delegation with four seats (three more than in 2009), and with 26.6% of the votes and an increase of 11.8 percentage points compared to 2009 is now the first party in Denmark. Two seats each have been assigned to the Lithuanian Order and Justice—which maintains the same seats of 2009 and increases its consensus by 2.1 percentage points reaching 14.3%—and the Finnish Party that is now around 12.9% with one more seat and increases by 3.1 percentage points compared to previous EP elections. Finally, the Dutch cartel made of the Re-

⁵ Among those who have been surprisingly excluded from the parliament are the Greek Laos and Slovak National Party.

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Table 1 – Electoral results for the EFD parties that have gained seats in the EU member states at the EP elections (vote differences and seat differences between 2009 and 2014)

Country	Party name	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (change from 2009)	Seats (change from 2009)
Denmark	Danish People's Party	26.6	4	+11.8	+3
Finland	Finns Party	12.9	2	+3.1	+1
Italy	Northern League	6.2	5	-4	-3
Lithuania	Order and Justice	14.3	2	+2.1	0
Netherlands	Reformed Political Party ¹	7.6	1	+0.8	0
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	27.4	24	+11	+11

In the Netherlands in 2014 and 2009, SGP is allied with CU (Christian Union) gaining two seats. Only the SGP seat belongs to the EFD.

formed Political Party and the Christian Union (SGP-CU) has gained 7.6% of the votes and two seats as in 2009—one of these seats, the one belonging to the SGP, is part of the EFD.

As already mentioned in a previous article,⁶ the majority of the EFD parties belong to the Europarty Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD) apart from UKIP. Also, *Lege Nord* doesn't belong to MELD anymore but belongs to the Europarty The European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), made of populist right-wing and anti-EU parties such as the French *Front National* of Marine Le Pen, the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) of Geert Wilders (these are all parties that are not linked to any EP group), and the Swedish Democrats (which have never had any EP members until the 2014 EP elections).

Alternative for Germany (AFD) gained seven seats with 7% of the votes, but it refused to join the new alliance and will probably join the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) while the most radical and anti-Semite national parties, such as the German National Democratic Party, the Greek Golden Dawn, and the Hungarian *Jobbik*, have not been allowed to join the alliance. In any case, in this article, extreme-right and neofascist parties are not taken into account. The common features of the parties belonging to the MELD and the EAF are the conservative and xenophobic political orientation, the aversion towards Europe, and the populism (Mudde, 2007; Pirro and

⁶ See Maggini in this volume.

van Kessel, 2013). Often, charismatic politicians, who consider themselves as leader of a community full of virtues, engage in a populist challenge against an establishment considered as full of vices (Tarchi, 2003).

Table 2 illustrates the results of the EAF parties who don't belong to any political group in the EP, by showing the differences in seats and votes (in percentage points) compared to previous EP elections. Parties that didn't gain any seats are excluded. The party that conquered more seats (24) is Marine Le Pen's *Front National*; with 25% of the votes, it is now the first party in France, overcoming the Gaullist and the Socialists, with an increase of 18.6 percentage points in the votes and 21 seats compared to 2009. The Austrian FPÖ performed well too, gaining 19.7% and conquering four seats (two more in 2009), with an increase of 7 percentage points in its consensus compared to previous EP elections.

The Eurosceptic and anti-immigration Swedish Democrats (SD) obtained 9.7% of the votes, thus making it to the EP for the first time with two seats. In the Netherlands, the populist party (PVV) led by the anti-Europe Geert Wilders has lost 3.5 percentage points compared to 2009 EP elections, going down to 13.3%, but still managing to elect four representatives in the EP like in 2009. Finally, in Belgium, the Flemish populist right party *Vlaams Belang* has suffered from a significant loss of 9.1 percentage points, managing to obtain only one seat with 6.8% of the votes.

After adding up the seats of the EAF parties that don't belong to any groups to the seats of the EFD, the populist and Eurosceptic right can count on 73 seats in the EP (without including either the most moderate Eurosceptic parties that will join the ECR or the extreme neofascist parties). In addition to these 73 seats, there have to be considered also the four seats gained by the Eurodeputies of Korwin Mikke's Polish New Right that made it for the first time to the EP with 7.2% of the votes; the two seats conquered by the Bulgarian nationalists of Bulgaria Without Censorship (BBT), which have reached more than 10% of the votes; and the seat conquered by the Greek Independents (ANEL) with 3.5% of the votes. With these extra seats, the populist and Eurosceptic right can count on around 80 deputies.

After the elections, Marine Le Pen gathered in Brussels with Matteo Salvini from the *Lega Nord*, the Dutch Geert Wilders from PVV, and the delegates from the Austrian FPÖ, the Swedish Democrats, and the Flemish *Vlaam Belang*. The aim is to give birth to the Alliance for Freedom, a new EP Eurosceptic group that Le Pen had already announced in March. What are new are the possible inclusion of the Eastern Europe nationalist movements and the definition of a series of joint initiatives, such as the request to call for anti-Euro referendums in each member state and the stop to the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the US. Being Eurosceptic, however, hasn't reached the expected high level of consensus. Apart from the unquestionable success of

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Table 2 – Electoral results for the EAF parties that are not enrolled in any group in the countries where they obtained seats at the EP elections (differences in votes and seats between 2009 and 2014)

Country	Party	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (change from 2009)	Seats (change from 2009)
Austria	FPÖ	19.7	4	+7.0	+2
Belgium	VB	6.8	1	-9.1	-1
France	FN	25.0	24	+18.6	+21
Netherlands	PVV	13.3	4	-3.5	0
Sweden	SD	9.7	2	+6.4	+2

the *Front National*, the excellent result of the FPÖ, and the good results of the Swedish Democrats and the *Legia Nord*, the consensus for the other Le Pen's allies has severely shrunk while the Slovak Nationalist didn't even make it to the EP. As already mentioned before, a parliamentary group can be built only with at least 25 Eurodeputies elected in at least seven member states. So far, Marine Le Pen has 35 Eurodeputies, but they have been elected only in six nations. Nigel Farage's UKIP has refused to join the group. Now, the only possible ways lead to Eastern Europe. Korwin Mikke's Polish New Right, the Bulgarian Nationalists, and some Hungarian Independents elected in Viktor Orban's *Fidesz* party are ready to join the Alliance for Freedom. Nothing has been decided yet, and negotiations are still ongoing. In any case, when it comes to single parliamentary initiatives, this group will have the support of the Eurodeputies of EFD led by Farage, who is also trying to join force with Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement.

In conclusion, in the recent EP elections, populist and anti-Europe parties have been moving forward on the whole even if this move has not happened in an even way within the EU. As already mentioned, in some countries, the parties belonging to the Eurosceptic right have stepped back compared to 2009. On whole, in any case, even if only the EFD is taken into account, the presence of these parties in the EP has strengthened. The reasons for this fact lie, on the one hand, on the fact that the EP elections traditionally represent a favourable context for opposition and protest parties in line with the "second order elections" theories (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). According to this theory, at EP elections, stakes are minor (or are perceived as minor) compared to general elections, and the electorate feels less constrained in its electoral choices, with the eventual punishment of traditional parties when they are not supposed to pursue effective policies. On the other hand, following the toughest economic crisis since the Second World War, antiestablishment parties that are

openly against EU austerity policies and European integration have increased their consensus in many countries. By gathering such a relevant share of votes in Europe against Europe, these parties have made these elections closer to *first-order* elections.

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