

The European Parliament 2014-2019: Big Changes Ahead?

10/12/2013 by Gaël GLORIEUX

2014 will see a new European Commission and European Parliament take office. Although official nominations for the post of European Commission President are only expected around February/March next year, the parties' internal selection processes are starting to give a clear picture of candidates for the socialists, greens and liberals. In parallel, studies already give an idea of what the next European Parliament could look like. In particular, the analysis of Notre Europe – the think tank founded by former Commission President Jacques Delors – shows that “populist parties” could represent up to 12%, an unprecedented high figure. In their view, however, this would not necessarily translate into major political influence.

On 6 November, the “Party of European Socialists” (PES) designated Martin Schulz, current President of the European Parliament, as their ‘candidate designate’, i.e. the likely socialist candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission. His election as candidate in March is considered as a formality since no other candidates have presented themselves. The situation is slightly different for the Greens and the “Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe” (ALDE), which will hold primary elections to decide between several candidates. Nominations for ALDE are open until end December. So far both Guy Verhofstadt, current President of the ALDE group in Parliament, and Olli Rehn, Vice-President of the European Commission, are candidates. For the Greens, four contenders are lined up: José Bové, Franziska Keller, Monica Frassoni and Rebecca Harms – all currently Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Two of them will be elected through an open online primary in late January.

The conservative “European People’s Party” (EPP) is in a different situation, with leaders finally choosing not to appoint a candidate ahead of the elections. Among the many names rumoured to be in the running are Donald Tusk (Polish Prime Minister), Frederik Reinfeldt (Swedish Prime Minister), Dalia Grybauskaitė (Lithuanian President), Enda Kelly (Irish Prime Minister) and Jean-Claude Juncker (former Prime Minister of Luxembourg). But it seems that the party will not decide on a candidate until after the elections, thus putting an end to the idea of a personalised campaign for their camp.

As for the composition of the upcoming European Parliament, an interesting analysis has just been published by Notre Europe, the think tank founded by Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission between 1985 and 1994. Their analysis is based on the most recent polls in 8 EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK) which represent $\frac{3}{4}$ of the EU electorate and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the seats in Parliament. While such polls 6 months ahead of the elections should be treated with caution, especially as the electorate is generally not very interested in European elections, the analysis is nevertheless very interesting.

According to this study, the EPP group would lose some 7% and the S&D (Parliament group for the PES party) would gain 3%, allowing both to come in at around 28%. The Greens and ALDE groups would both lose seats: -3% for ALDE and -2% for the Greens, while other groups (EFD, GUE and ECR) would remain stable. The big new element would be +12% for what they call “populist parties”, largely the French National Front, the Spanish Radical Left, the Italian 5 Star movement of Beppe Grillo and the German Alternative für Deutschland. Their analysis, based on the current behaviour of “populist” MEPs, is that these parties would most likely lack internal cohesion, thus rendering them impossible partners for a winning coalition. They thus conclude that: “It is highly likely that parties grouped together under the

“populist” label will make fairly substantive numerical gains [...]. But their numerical increase will not affect notably the functioning of the EP, which will remain largely based on the compromises built by the dominant political groups.”

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