# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION 2019:
# INTERPRETING THE ELECTION OUTCOME IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, FRANCE AND POLAND

Expert council meeting | July 1st, 2019 | 14 – 17h

## Programme and Introduction

Staatskanzlei NRW
Horionplatz 1
40213 Düsseldorf

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW    NEW:NRW

Minister für Bundes- und Europaangelegenheiten
sowie Internationales
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

## Programme

| | |
|---|---|
| 14.00 | Welcome by Ludger **SIEMES,** Head of Department European and International Affairs, NRW State Chancellery |
| | Opening words by **Michael KAEDING** |

### European Parliament election 2019: The NRW-perspective

| | |
|---|---|
| 14.15 | The outcome of the European election from the NRW-perspective by **Michael KAEDING** |
| | Open discussion |
| 15.00 | **Coffee break** |

### European Parliament election 2019: The election outcome in France and Poland

| | |
|---|---|
| 15.20 | Presentation and interpretation of the election result in France by **Nino GALETTI** |
| | Brief comment on the respective implications for NRW by **Roland DÖHRN** |
| | Q&A |
| 16.10 | Presentation and interpretation of the election result in Poland by **Wojciech GAGATEK** |
| | Brief comment on the respective implications for NRW by **Roland DÖHRN** |
| | Q&A |
| 16.55 | Concluding remarks by **Michael KAEDING** |
| 17.00 | Departure |
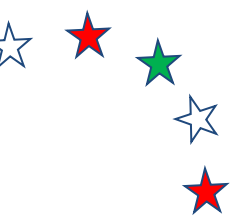
## Expert council members:

**Permanent members:**

Prof. Dr. **Ansgar BELKE** |  Jean-Monnet Chair for Macroeconomics, University of Duisburg-Essen

Prof. Dr. **Michael KAEDING** |  Jean-Monnet Chair for European Integration and EU politics, University Duisburg-Essen

Prof. Dr. **Adelheid PUTTLER** |  Chair for Public Law, European Law, esp. European Law, Public International Law and International Commercial Law, Ruhr-University Bochum

**External members:**

Prof. Dr. **Roland DÖHRN** |  Head of the "Macroeconomics and Public Finance" department, RWI-Essen – Leibniz-Institute for Economic Research

Dr. **Wojciech GAGATEK** |  Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Sciences and International Studies, University of Warsaw

Dr. **Nino GALETTI** |  Head of the international office France, Department of European and International Cooperation, Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation Paris
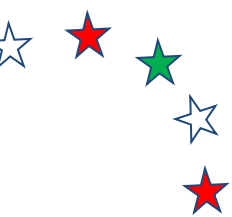
# Introduction

From 23 to 26 May 2019, the citizens of the European Union (EU) elected their representatives for the European Parliament (EP). The economic, financial and social turmoil of the past decade, the European migration issue, the impact of new technologies on society, work and security issues, and, not least, Britain's exit from the EU have severely agitated the foundations of European integration. The electoral success of populists, vehemently criticizing the European political system from left and right, reveals that the times of broad political majorities for a future-oriented Europe are long gone.

All the more was at stake in this year's EP elections, in which the European voters expressed their preferences for the Union's future. Its outcome will reveal whether the European community of values and the path to further integration will be reinforced, or if Eurosceptic and nationalist forces are about to gain further momentum. A first screening of the European election results indicates several trends: Europe was not only swept by a green tide but also by a considerable rise in voter turnout; Eurosceptics won, but did not experience the previously expected landslide victory; and the established parties, Social Democrats in particular, lost significant electoral support. A closer look at the results raises a number of questions though: What does the loss of the grand coalition mean for policy-making in the EP? Increasing pluralistic tendencies will render consensus building all the more difficult. How will the future allocation of seats look like? Will nationalist forces manage to form a unified group proficient to paralyze MEPs' work, or will they remain as scattered as before? Who will line up enough support to become Commission President – and who will gain sufficient consensus for the remaining vacant top positions?

While these European level questions will always lure in the background, their examination won't be the paramount objective of this month's expert council. It is equally important to take a step back and analyze the election outcome and the respective ramifications from a more national and even regional perspective. Especially the consequences for North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) – which has 18 million inhabitants and, in case of autonomy, would be the seventh largest EU member state – ought to be discussed. The expert council meeting of July 1, 2019, hence means to take a more thorough look at the European election outcome and the respective direct and indirect ramifications for North Rhine-Westphalia and its partner countries. The first part of the session will adopt a regional perspective and evaluate the immediate implications for NRW itself: What effects does the result of the 2019 European elections have on North Rhine-Westphalia? Which political, economic or social implications can be identified? Which future MEPs come from NRW and what can we expect from them? What does the NRW State Government need to prepare for?
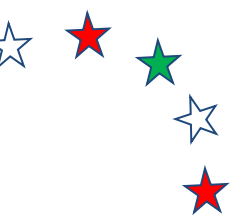
The second part of the meeting will take a more European stance and determine how the election fared in NRW's partner countries, putting a particular emphasis on France and Poland. In which par-

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

ties did the French and Polish voters place their trust? Do the results confirm the European trend? Does the election outcome reveal any particularities? Will this have any repercussions on the countries' relation to NRW? What are the major 'takeaways' for officials collaborating with these countries? In order to support the discussion, the following section will provide a brief summary of the election results in the three areas of interest: North Rhine-Westphalia, France and Poland.

Guiding questions

➢ What immediate effects does the result of the 2019 European elections have on NRW?
➢ What does the election result mean for the partners of NRW (Poland and France) and what conclusions can be drawn for NRW?
➢ What are the three major take aways for NRW, France and Poland respectively?
➢ Has the election outcome been in line with the European trends?
➢ Why did the green tide only occur in the West?
➢ How „European" was the election? Did EU-related questions prevail or was it more about internal power politics?
➢ What does the election result in France and Poland mean for their relations to Germany and NRW?
➢ How likely is the suspension and re-election of the French National Assembly and what does the outcome of the election mean for the upcoming national elections in Poland?
➢ Has the increased coalition building, for instance in Poland, turned out successful?
➢ Are there any patterns identifying pro-European vs. Eurosceptic voters?
➢ …

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
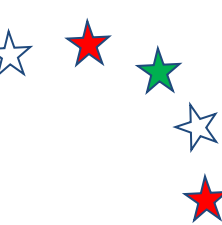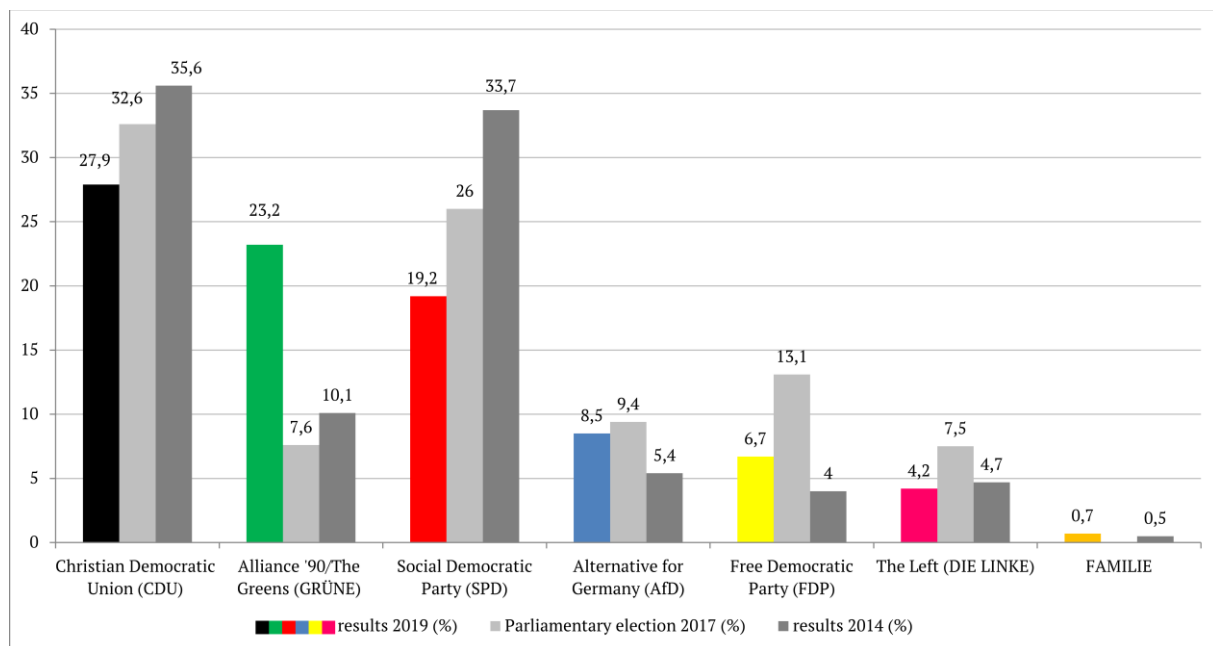Wissenschaft
für NRW    NEW:NRW

## 2019 European Election in North Rhine-Westphalia

As the biggest EU member state, Germany provides the highest number of Members in the European Parliament (MEPs), namely 96. The pending withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) and the related decision from January 2018 to reduce the size of the hemicycle from 751 to 705, splitting 27 former British seats between fourteen underrepresented member states, did not have any ramifications on the number of German mandates. In the preceding legislative period (2014 to 2019), and after Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (FDP) resigned his seat, eighteen MEPs represented the people of North Rhine-Westphalia. In the upcoming term, NRW will regain the missing seat, increasing the number of representatives to nineteen. Accordingly, NRW will hold the same number of seats as Austria and more seats than twelve EU member states. An interpretation of the NRW election outcome seems hence worthwhile.

In contrast to most member states, Germany's attempt to introduce a percentage threshold had been inhibited by the German Federal Constitutional Court. Therefore, eleven parties managed to win a mandate for the next parliamentary term. The NRW representatives are distributed among seven parties, i.e. CDU, SPD, the Greens, the Liberals, the Left, FAMILIE and the AfD.

Figure 1 | Election results in NRW: 2019, 2017 and 2014

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

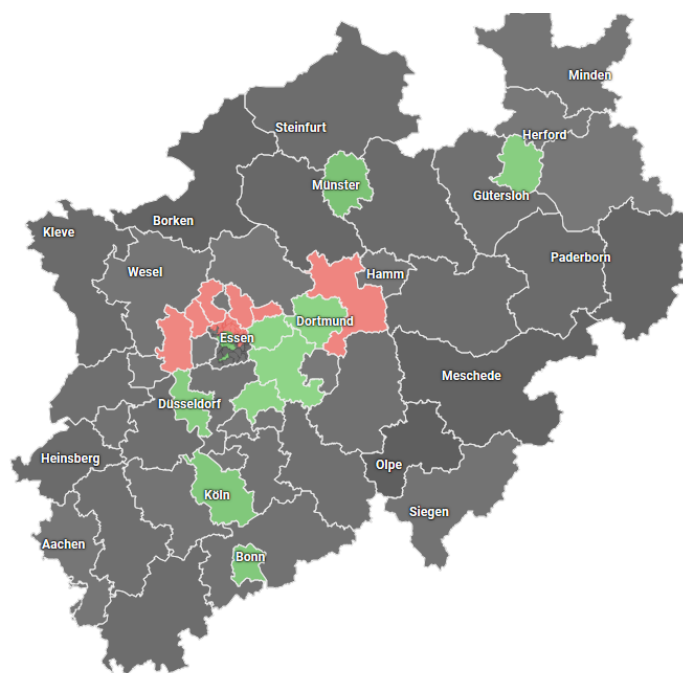Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

With a vote share of 27.9 percent, the **Christian Democrats** (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU) won the European election not only in Germany but also in North Rhine-Westphalia – even though the NRW results have been slightly below the party's federal score of 28.9 percent (Figure 1). Yet, the NRW-CDU had to face a decisive loss when compared to both the 2014 European and the 2017 German parliamentary election, in which it had still received 35.6 percent and 32.6 percent[1] respectively.

The **Social Democrats** (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) had to process an even bigger disappointment. With 19.2 percent of the votes, it had to endure a setback of 6.8 percentage points compared to the 2017 German federal election, and even 14.5 percent in contrast to the 2014 European election. As a result, the SPD no longer holds the second place but only ranks third to the CDU and the Greens.

In line with the German – in fact (western) European – trend, the **NRW Greens** (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) were able to gain a landslide victory, moving the party up from the third to the second place. From 10.1 percent in the 2014 European election and 7.6 percent in the 2017 federal election, its 2019 results almost tripled to 23.3 percent. In some constituencies, especially in urban areas such as Cologne, Düsseldorf, Bonn, Münster, Bochum or Dortmund, they even emerged victorious[2].

Figure 2 | 2019 EP election results by constituency



---

[1] Vote for party mandate (in contrast to personal mandate) – "Zweitstimmenanteil"

[2] Source: https://interaktiv.waz.de/europawahl-nrw/

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
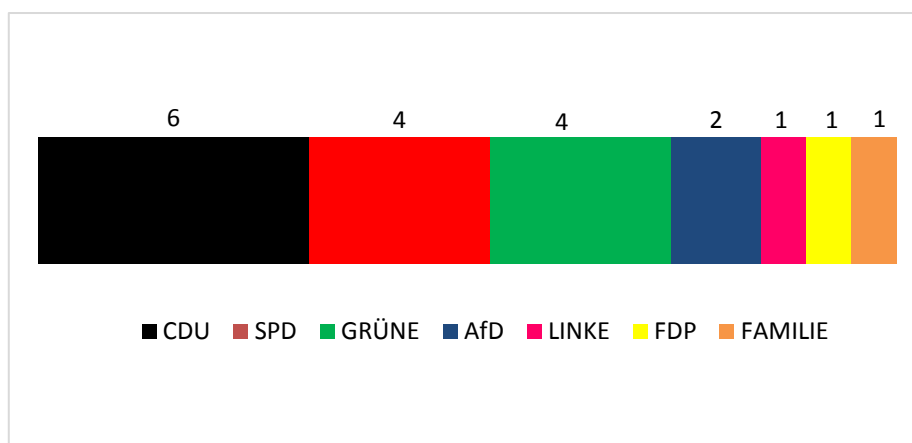Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW    NEW:NRW

In contrast to the Greens that scored more in NRW than at the national level (23.3 in NRW as compared to 20.5% nationwide), the NRW-'**Alternative for Deutschland**' (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) could not keep up with its national election returns. With 11 percent in Germany and only 8.5 percent in NRW, the right wing populists appear to enjoy less support on the regional level. Also when compared to the results of the 2017 federal election (9.4 %), it had to accept certain setbacks. Still, the party managed to improve its backing checked against the past European election, where it only accounted for 5.1 percent of the votes (i.e. a plus of 3.1 %).

Both the Left (die LINKE) and the NRW Liberals (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP) gained one seat in the new European Parliament. With a result of 4.2 percent, **the Left** lost both compared to the 2014 European election (-0.5 %) as well as the 2017 German federal election (-3.3 %). Moreover, this amounts to a substantially weaker outcome than at the national level, where it ended up with 5.5 percent. Unlike the Left, the **FDP** has achieved a much better outcome in 2019 than back in 2014, noting an increase from 4 to 6.7 percent. However, bearing in mind that the NRW-FDP won over 13 percent in the 2017 national elections, it had to accept a rather unexpected loss of support, cutting its preceding approval in half.

What does this mean for the number and distribution of MEPs from NRW? Compared to the previous EP term, the number of CDU-MEPs coming from North Rhine-Westphalia will decrease from eight to six. The Greens will increase their number of NRW-MEPs by two, thereby doubling their representation within the Greens/EFA-group. The Social Democrats (SPD) will lose two NRW-MEPs, sending only four representatives to Brussels. The AfD will be newly represented by two NRW-MEPs; the Left and the FDP will each be represented by one MEP from North Rhine-Westphalia. Also FAMILIE gained a seat, slightly increasing their result to 0.7 as compared to 0.5 percent in 2014.

Figure 3 | Distribution of seats from NRW

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

Finally, just as Germany itself, NRW saw a remarkable rise in voter turnout. Whereas in 2014 already 52.3 percent of the North Rhine-Westphalian people cast their vote, i.e. above the EU average of 42.31 percent, in 2019 turnout had increased to 61.4 percent – again way above EU average (50.95 %). Although NRW turnout for the 2017 German parliamentary election amounted to 75.4 percent, the turnout at the European election is a noteworthy result for an election that is merely considered to be second order.

Figure 4 | Voter turnout NRW
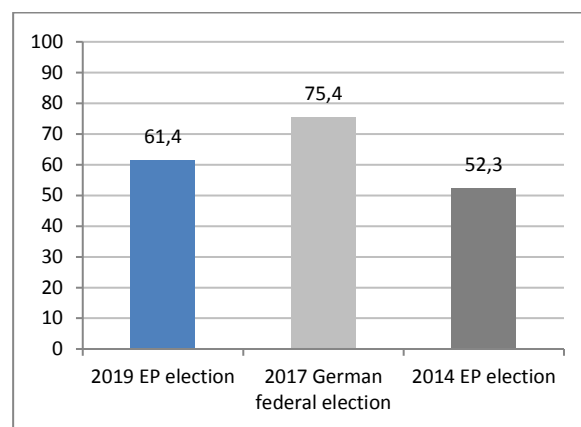


In summary, the results for NRW follow the nationwide trend: Rising voter turnout, losses for the established parties and the Left, an imposing Green wave, and an increase for the right-wing populists of the AfD, yet less than expected.

## European Elections 2019 in France

In contrast to Germany, France was identified as one of the member states being numerically underrepresented in the European Parliament. It was hence set to gain five mandates following the reallocation of seats after Brexit, increasing its representation from 74 to 79. Yet, since the UK's withdrawal from the EU had been postponed until the end of 2019, the number of elected French MEPs will remain at 74 until de facto Brexit will have taken place.

For this year's European election, France witnessed a change in its electoral system. Since the 2004 EP elections, the country had been split into eight electoral constituencies with members being elected by proportional representation (North-West, West, East, South-West, South-West, Massif central-Centre, Île-de-France and Overseas). Ahead of the 2019 election however, the government under Emmanuel Macron has decided to introduce various modifications and return to national lists with a five percent threshold. This modification had been supported by most political parties, was confirmed by the National Assembly in February 2018, and has taken effect in the 2019 European parliamentary election. Arguably, the return to national lists might benefit smaller parties that were previously disadvantaged by the system of large regional constituencies, while it was expected that larger parties might win fewer seats.

Figure 5 summarizes the election outcome. In France, six parties were able to clear the percentage threshold and send representatives to Parliament: The Rassemblement National led by Marine Le Pen (23.3 %); closely followed by Macron's liberal La République En Marche (22.4 %); a surprise win for the Greens (13.5 %), the conservative Les Républicains (8.5 %) as well as the two leftist parties Parti socialiste with 6.2 percent and La France Insoumise with 6.3 percent.

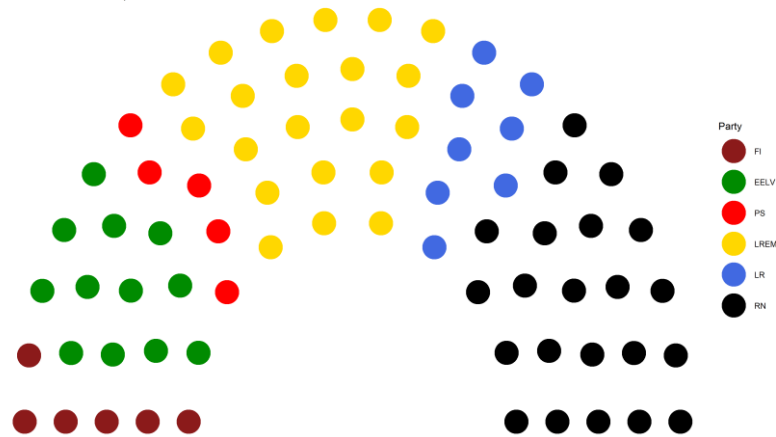Figure 5 | Election results in France: 2019 and 2014
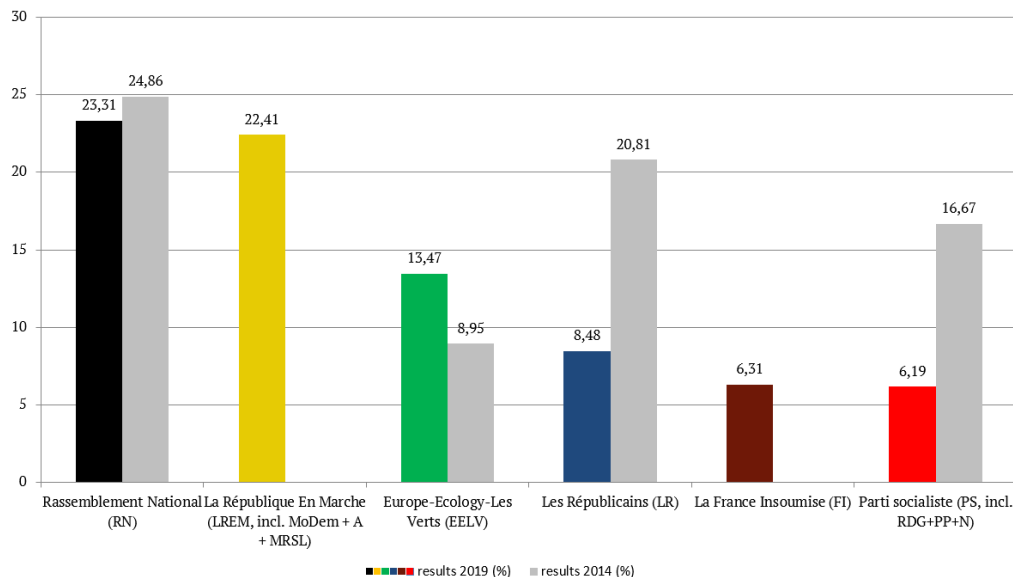
**The republicans** (*Les Républicains*, LR), led by François-Xavier Bellamy, have been confronted with an election result that has been far below the latest estimates and hence appear as one of the major losers of this year's EP election. While recent forecasts still considered the party to receive 13 to 15 percent of the votes, they ended up with a mere 8.5 percent, indicating a decisive setback when compared to the 20 percent they had been able to collect in 2014. This was a resounding failure for the party, which until now, had 20 MEPs in the European Parliament and will now see this number more than halved.

Similarly, the joint list of the **French Socialist Party** (*Parti socialiste*, PS) led by Raphaël Glucksmann could only gain have of the percentage points they still acquired in 2014, i.e. 6.19 percent as compared to almost 14 percent, resulting in a loss of about eight seats for the French S&D delegation. This is an interesting turn in French politics. Socialists and Republicans basically took turns in governing the country for decades. Yet, already in the legislative elections of 2017, the two traditionally largest parties faced essential setbacks, and for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, neither party was able to bring a presidential candidate to the run-off. The 2019European elections thus corroborated a gradual trend: the established parties have been replaced. Macron's LREM and the right-wing RN under Marine Le Pen seem to have buried the old French party system.

Both parties in general gained from the fact that the election campaign was framed, not least by themselves, but as a heads-off between a liberal and a nationalist perspective on European politics. From this duel, the right-wing **Rassemblement National** (RN) emerged as winner (23.31 %). Yet, whereas Le Pen won the election, the RN actually lost votes when compared to 2014. Five years ago, the then called Front National emerged as the strongest force in the European elections with 24.86 percent. The about 1.5 percent decrease amounts to a loss of two seats for the RN delegation in the European Parliament; for which European party group remains to be seen.

The pro-European **La République En Marche** (LREM), i.e. 'Renaissance' forming a joint list with MoDem, Agir, and the Radical Movement led by Nathalie Loiseau, has been elected a close second, accounting for 22.41 percent of the votes. While Macron's list had not been in place for the 2014 European election, LREM won a landslide victory against Marine Le Pen in the run-off to the French presidential election in 2017 – with 66.1 to 33.9 percent. It was expected that a 2019 win by LREM could have put an end to months of social crisis and the never-ending clashes with the increasingly disparate acting yellow-vests movement. However, even though only a close loss, the final outcome of the election is likely to further weaken the French President. In fact, Marine Le Pen already demanded the suspension of the French National Assembly. French society seems deeply divided.

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

French seats in the European Parliament 2019

Party
FI
EELV
PS
LREM
LR
RN

The green surge flooding large parts of Europe also reached France and thereby contributed to the biggest surprise of these elections. Whereas pre-election surveys had seen the French Greens at around 8.5 percent, **Europe-Ecology-Les Verts** (EELV), led by Yannick Jadot, managed to obtain 13.47 percent of the votes. The results confirm the large support for Green politics and render the EELV the third largest political force of the French EP delegation – doubling their seats for the Greens/EFA group from 6 to 12. While the Greens experienced a surprise win, the new list of **La France In-soumise** (FI) led by Manon Aubry had to suffer a surprise defeat. Even though election forecasts had expected a nip-and-tuck race with the Greens, the FI finally found itself at 6.31 percent, winning only six seats.

In 2014, voter turnout was at 42 percent slightly below EU average. For 2019, similar participation was expected. All the more surprising was that turnout considerably increased to 50.12 percent, again close to but slightly below EU average but even higher than the turnout in the last 2017 national legislative election.
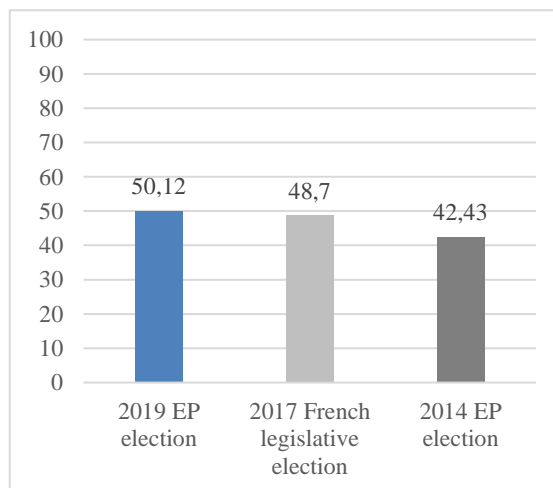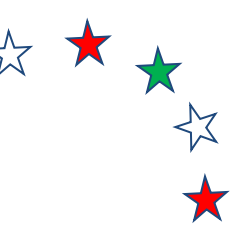
Figure 6 | Voter turnout France

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

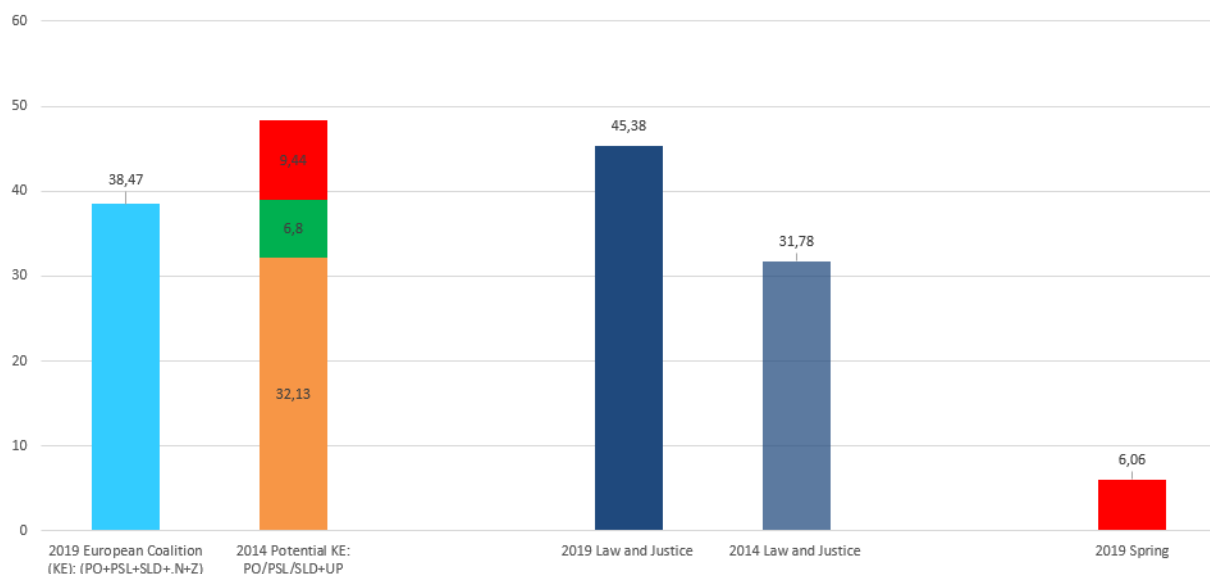Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

## 2019 European Parliament election in Poland

On Sunday, 26 May 2019, the Polish electorate took part in its fourth European election since the country joined the European Union in 2004. Whereas the Polish delegation consisted of 51 MEPs after the 2014 election, the reallocation of seats following the expected withdrawal of the United Kingdom will grant Poland one additional mandate in the upcoming legislative term.

For Poland, this year's European election was supposed to become a groundbreaking test for the upcoming national parliamentary election taking place in autumn 2019. While the ruling Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski aims to consolidate its position in power, the opposition, especially the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), hopes to regain ground and replace Kaczynski's party as leading actor in the Sejm. It was hence expected that the outcome of the European election would provide a first indication of who will be ruling the country in the future.

In the 2014 European election, the 51 seats of the Polish delegation were split between five political parties that managed to pass the five percent threshold. The 2019 election however, saw a considerable increase in coalition building at the domestic level. The two biggest parties, i.e. the national-conservative PiS and the Civic Platform, decided to collaborate with several smaller parties in common national lists in order to increase their chances to thrive in the European elections. In consequence, election campaigning became largely a battle between pro-Europeans versus Eurosceptics, mirroring the decisive cleavage in the French election campaign. In the end, only three parties (or alliances) managed to clear the threshold:
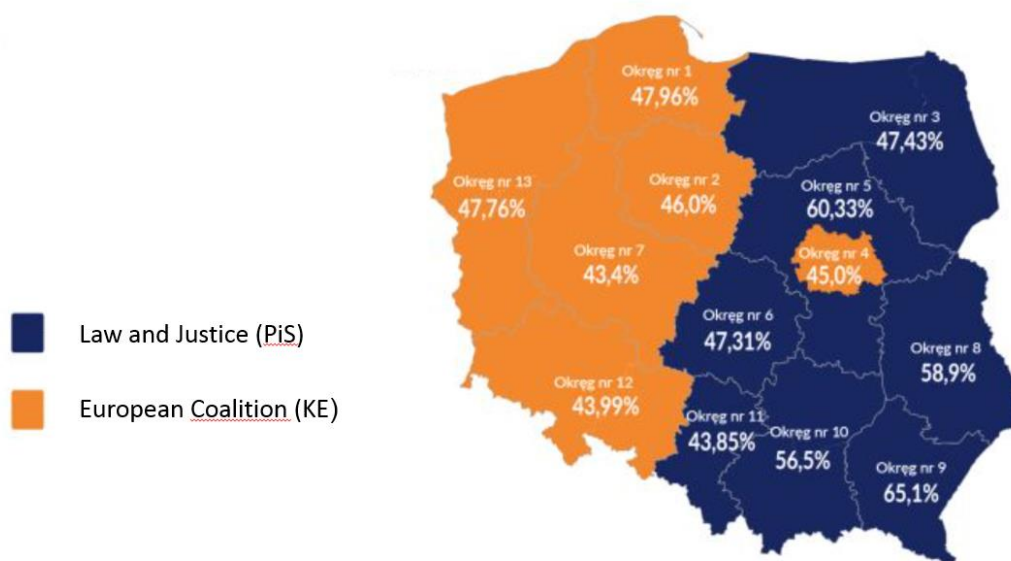
Figure 7 | Election results Poland, 2019 and 2014

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

(1) The United Right (*Zjednoczona Prawica*), a conservative political alliance led by PiS, which can be considered the greatest beneficiary of the election; (2) the European Coalition (*Koalicja Europejska*, KE), which intended to promote the European project among the Polish electorate but ended up only second; and (3) Spring (*Wiosna*), a social democratic party that had only been founded in the beginning of 2019.

For the European election 2019, **Law and Justice** decided to collaborate with two smaller right-wing parties[3] in an alliance labelled the United Right. This strategy had already proven successful in the 2015 Polish parliamentary election, where the PiS was able to replace the then ruling PO with 37.58 to 24.1 percent. At the national level, the alliance has been in power ever since. In the 2019 EP election, the United Right won 45.38 percent of the votes. That is a substantial improvement when compared to the 2014 results, which left the PiS with only 31.78 percent, while both its alliance partners were not represented in the preceding European Parliament at all. This year's election outcome has hence been the United Right's biggest victory so far. The number of seats for the Polish delegation in the group of the 'European Conservatives and Reformists' will increase from 19 to 27, meaning more than half of the Polish mandates will be distributed among Eurosceptic MEPs. This came rather surprisingly, since pre-election surveys had predicted PiS at a steady 40 percent for the past months, arguing that European issues might be rather meaningless for voters of a national-conservative party and in turn leading to less participation. Only two weeks before the election, there was a sudden increase in predicted support for the PiS, suggesting that the party managed to mobilise voters and was thus able to score its historic victory.

Figure 8 | 2019 European election result in Poland by constituency



Law and Justice (PiS)

European Coalition (KE)

---

[3] Agreement (Porozumienie) and United Poland (Solidarna Polska)

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

Following the Polish local elections in 2018, the European elections were considered a significant test for the opposition's ambitions to regain power in the approaching national election. For this purpose, large parts of the EU-friendly, conservative or centre-left parliamentary opposition including the PO joined forces and established the so-called **European Coalition** (KE)[4]. Yet, attaining merely 38.47 percent of the votes, this alliance was not as successful as its Eurosceptic counterpart. This result has been far less than what could have been expected when considering the sum of the coalition's seats resulting from the 2014 election. While the coalition would have received 28 seats in 2014 (23 for the EPP and 5 for the S&D), the 2019 election left them with only 22 seats (still 5 seats for the S&D but only 17 for the EPP). By implication, this marriage of convenience, bringing together forces that are in fact united in their support for Europe but reveal considerable differences when it comes to other policy issues, could not live up to its expectations.

Interestingly, the Polish election results reveal a stunning East-West divide  (Figure 8[5]). In the western parts as well as the capital, the pro-European KE scored by far the best results – accounting for an average of 46.7 percent. The eastern parts of Poland, however, are firmly controlled by Law and Justice. Here, the PiS scored on average 54.2 percent, revealing an entirely different electorate than in the West. Presumably, this can be traced back to the traditional urban-rural gap. While the western part of Poland is characterized by numerous large cities, whose voters appear to support the pro-European coalition, voters in the East, which is characterized by more rural areas, seem to prefer national-conservative politics.



Polish seats in the European Parliament 2019

Party

Spring

KE

PiS

---
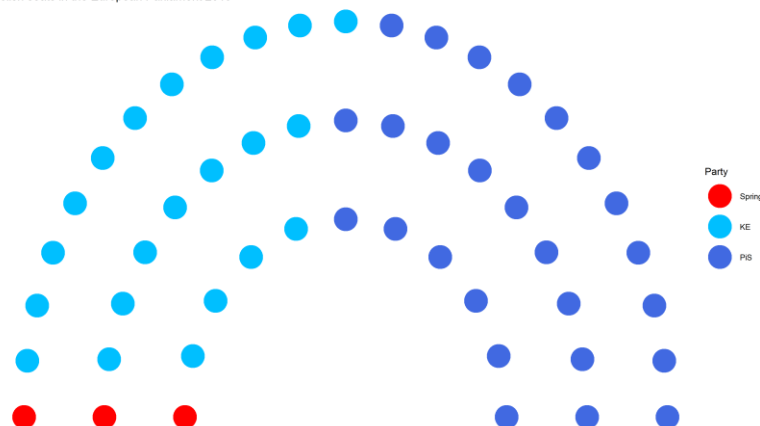
[4] i.e. the Civic Platform (PO), Modern (.N), the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the Polish People's Party (PSL) and the Greens (Zieloni)

[5] Source: https://www.tvn24.pl/wybory-do-europarlamentu-2019/wybory-do-europarlamentu-wyniki-w-okregach-i-wojewodztwach,939169.html

Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding | Jean Monnet Lehrstuhl ad personam

Europäische
Integration &
Europapolitik

Netzwerk Europa-
Wissenschaft
für NRW

NEW:NRW

Finally, the newly established left-wing party **Spring** *(Wiosna)* gained 6.06 percent of the votes, bringing another 3 seats to the S&D. Neither the **Confederation** *(Konfederacja)* nor the right anti-establishment party *Kukiz'15* passed the 5 percent threshold but both improved their results when compared to the 2014 election.

Poland clearly confirms the European trend of rising voter turnout in this year's elections. While in 2014, only 23.83 percent of the electorate decided to cast their vote, in this year's election participation almost doubled to 45.68 percent – i.e. the highest turnout Poland has seen for a European election thus far.

Figure 9 | Voter turnout Poland