

The 2019 European elections – an opportunity for Europe

The 2019 European elections are taking place in turbulent times. Brexit, the debt and financial crises, migration and refugee movements: Many pan-European challenges require collective European solutions. This shows the European elections from a new angle, as they represent more than the mere possibility of exchanging ideas on Europe's future.

Reading time approx. 5 minutes—read, like, comment!

What does Europe's future look like? – the perspectives of others

The 2019 European elections are taking place in turbulent times. Brexit means that the “ever closer union” of the EU is facing a fracture for the first time in its history. The election successes of system-critical EU opponents in many EU member states indicate that political majorities for a strong Europe are no longer a given.

The consequences of the European finance, state debt, and migration crises represent huge challenges for Europe (Kaeding 2013). Rising powers in a multipolar system regard Europe less and less as a model. Instead they see a descending and ageing continent preoccupied with its own affairs.

National political responsibility is lacking. In this respect, in all EU countries, it is important to be clear about which problems can be solved on a national level and for which problems national solution approaches fall short. The current debate on the future of Europe must, in this regard, gain momentum in all member states so that all levels of all countries can deal with Europe and be ready to continue working on the European project. The European elections provide an opportunity to do just that.

National discussions about Europe must be the focal point and they must be brought together in Brussels. After all, they reflect Europe's diversity. Each EU member state has its own individual reasons for being and remaining a part of the EU. These reasons emerge and develop in different political landscapes. At the same time, all member states are subject to geographical constraints and a changing world order, and are defined by social structures and their histories as nation states (Kaeding et al. 2019). In the beginning, the EU was a small club of six countries, all traumatised by two world wars. The EU now extends from Lisbon to Nicosia, from Tampere to Valletta. National discussions are not just related in terms of their differences. There are also many common factors, including the fear of losing national sovereignty and debates on the division of power in Europe, the different levels of political activism for defending self-interests, the discourse on migration and borders, and the security concerns arising from this (Kaeding et al. 2019).

These common factors and differences within the EU must be understood and respected if we are to find common European solutions for Europe-wide problems. The European elections provide an opportunity to exchange ideas on the future of Europe.

Only in this way will it be possible to understand the varying motives and strategies of other member states, to comprehend the negotiation results in Brussels, to relate to the European policy of others, and to design the Europe of tomorrow in everyone's interests.

As an “EU Equal Partner” every state will always have to make concessions. The future of Europe is neither black nor white. Negotiations between 27+ member states can only be achieved by making compromises (Kaeding 2013). In a Europe of this size, German-French initiatives, though necessary, are in and of themselves not sufficient in this respect.

Ultimately, a cooperative Germany must take on a leading role and be prepared to adopt the perspectives of others in order to develop a feel for the various political dynamics in a Europe of 27+ member states.

This is not just about “more Europe” or “less Europe”. It means a more functional Europe with the aim of continuing to ensure peace, security and well-being, as well as the irrevocable guarantee of joint liberal-democratic rights in all EU member states.

Exercise your right to vote on 26 May 2019 and take part in deciding how to lay the tracks into Europe’s future.

What happens at the European elections?

It’s that time again as of 23–26 May 2019. For the ninth time, EU citizens are able to democratically vote for the representatives of the European Parliament. Since the introduction of direct voting in 1979, the European Parliament is the only EU organ elected by general, direct, free, and confidential vote, and is thus seen as a “EU Citizens’ Chamber”.

THE FACTS

In 2019, the election will take place in all EU member countries between 23 to 26 May. All people eligible to vote in Germany can do so on Sunday 26 May 2019 from 8 a.m. to 6 pm by showing their identity card or passport and their polling card. Everyone on the electoral role can also apply for a postal vote.

WHO IS BEING ELECTED? - PARTIES

The European election decides which representatives of which party will enter the EP. There are no uniform Europe-wide lists for the election. Instead, different candidates stand for election in each member state. These candidates are nominated by their respective national party beforehand. The voters then cast their ballots for a national party to fill the seat quota assigned to their country.

In Germany, 25 parties are permitted to run in the 2019 European elections. Among them are, as in the German federal elections, the parties with the biggest chances of success: the CDU/CSU, the SPD, the FDP, Bündnis90/die Grünen, the Linke and the AfD. There are also smaller parties in the mix. These may have failed to clear the required five-percent threshold in the federal elections, but they have a chance to win seats in the European elections.

Following the elections, the national parties send their representatives to the European Parliament according to vote percentages. These representatives then join other representatives from other member states in factions corresponding to their political orientations. This means that representatives of the CDU/CSU usually find themselves in

the European People's Party (EVP) and those from the SPD are part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Representatives from parties who are also members of a European party often form EP factions. This is not always the case, though, and representatives from other parties are often able to join the faction too. A representative is only permitted to be a member of one faction at any given time. However, each representative is entitled to remain factionless if they feel that none represents them. There are currently eight fractions in the European Parliament.

The European Election Guide (Europawahlratgeber):

The 2019 European elections are taking place in turbulent times. The European Election Guide highlights the importance of the election, provides arguments for participation, supports citizens in participating in the election in an informed way and helps them to understand the EU's political system even better. It provides facts about the election and highlights the special features of the 2019 European elections. It also offers an outlook on the future of the EU and helps German-speaking readers to take on the perspectives of other Europeans.

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