

# The dawn of a Europe of many visions

What the European election  
manifestos tell us about  
the conflict, paralysis, and  
progress ahead

Luke Cooper  
Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz  
Niccolò Milanese



CONFLICT AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY  
RESEARCH UNIT





**Dr Luke Cooper** is a Visiting Fellow on the Europe's Futures programme, an Associate Researcher at the LSE CCS, and a senior lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University. He is a co-founder of the Another Europe Is Possible campaign and co-host of the Another Europe podcast, and is currently researching a book putting the crisis of the European Union in historical perspective.



**Dr Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz** (@RochDW) is a Research Officer in European Studies, Civil Society and Social Movements at the LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, and a Teaching Fellow in Sociology at the Department of Social Science, UCL Institute of Education. He is also Managing Editor of the LSE Brexit blog.



**Niccolò Milanese** is director of European Alternatives ([www.euroalter.com](http://www.euroalter.com)) and co-author of *Citizens of Nowhere: How Europe can be saved from itself* (Zed Books, 2018). He is a researcher at CESPRA, EHESS, Paris and a Marie Curie fellow in 2018–2020.

This report is produced as part of the Visions of Europe project at the LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, and funded by the Open Society Foundations.

# INTRODUCTION

---

The 2019 European election is the dawn of a Europe of many visions. This report contributes to the debate on the significance and the impact of this year's vote on the future of the European project in times of turmoil.

---

It focuses on the election manifestos of pan-European political parties competing in this election and what they tell us about the potential for conflict, paralysis, and progress ahead. Political manifestos are often seen as unimportant but they are in fact the contract between electorates and politicians that underpins democracy.

This is equally true on the transnational level, where European political party families aim to unite not only their voters, but also their member parties. Hence, the European election manifestos are often just as much about grand visions as they are about specific policies. This is partially because consent of member states is needed to create EU law. And while particular policy proposals may often struggle to be implemented after the election, the big picture visions give a snapshot of where European politics is heading.

With the growing salience of European issues in national domestic politics, we use the manifestos as a framing device to understand what achievements of the EU to date are most appreciated by today's politicians, as well as what values and ideologies drive political party machines. We also look into what threats and opportunities lie ahead for the version of the European project they promote.

This report can be taken as an accessible guide to the European party manifestos and how European politics work. It suggests that Europe is more polarised than ever. The rise of far-right ideologies is evidence of this, but so is the growing momentum behind progressive proposals for European reform. Ultimately, we are witnessing that European issues have finally entered national politics en par with domestic issues, and that electors have a choice between very different visions for the future of the European Union.

# KEY FINDINGS

Mapping the different European Parliamentary election programmes might mistakenly be seen as an exercise of limited value given that the Parliament's powers are always constrained by the member-states (represented by heads of government in the European Council) and the Commission (which is uniquely able to bring forward new proposals for new EU laws). However, the Parliament increasingly asserted its independence in recent years, taking the initiative to push forward the Spitzenkandidaten system for nominating the European President, while under the Lisbon Treaty it enjoys co-legislative power with the member-states giving it the power to block new EU laws. Beyond these formal powers the European elections also provide a uniquely international 'snapshot' of the European political scene. The manifestos bring out the different visions that are contending with one another to determine the future of the EU. They underline how Europe has become a highly pluralistic political space: a reality that may create fractures in the status quo advantageous to those seeking far-reaching political change or lead to a deepening of political paralysis in the years ahead. Our analysis identifies several features of the 'new Europe' being born in 2019:

- **End of the period of bipartisan consensus.**

In the twenty-first century the European People's Party (EPP) and Party of European Socialists (PES) have together enjoyed a majority in the European Parliament. This led to a consensus politics in the Parliament where the parties cooperated actively to 'get things done'. Many observers now predict this will change in the forthcoming European elections as the vote share of these parties comes under stress from an assorted range of liberal, green, left and right parties. However, even if they maintain their majority the manifestos suggest that both these parties are increasingly pivoting to the left (PES) or right (EPP), which will narrow the opportunity for cooperation around bipartisan consensus issues. The divisions within the European Parliament will still be shaped by the left-right division and by views on European integration. However, we observe an emerging salience of issues such as immigration and climate change that may further complicate the picture and may also weaken the Parliament in the potentially contentious negotiations with the Council over the post-election Commission. If the Parliament cannot agree a common candidate the Spitzenkandidaten system may not survive.

- **Political momentum around progressive visions.** While much of the focus of media discussion around these elections has focused on the rise of the radical right, the elections may well indicate increasingly momentum behind progressive reform efforts on the political centre and centre-left. With the appeal of French President Emmanuel Macron and his En Marche party for a new push around European integration, the pivot of the PES to the left, to the quite bold reform proposals of the European Greens, there appears to be strong momentum around progressive visions for the EU. These visions encapsulated in the manifestos are increasingly bolder and unapologetic about their quasi-federalist and socially progressive (pro-migrant, green, socially just, non-discriminatory, feminist) policy ambitions. They are also very much values driven, versus the political bargaining that historically dominated politics on a European level.

- **A 'coming of age' for Europe?** These may well be regarded historically as the first European EU elections. Whereas they have historically been regarded as a proxy contest for national-domestic politics, this is no longer only the case. Europe has 'come of age' in 2019. European issues are now en par - for good or ill - with national domestic politics across the continent. Five issues have promoted this Europeanisation of the political scene: the Eurozone crisis has underlined the need for reform at an EU-level; similarly, the migration crisis has also posited the need for a cooperative response while also igniting Eurosceptic sentiments; social issues of welfare and economic wellbeing are more strongly present than in past elections; and, finally, the climate emergency and the increased salience of this issue politically poses the need for European and international action.

- **Brexit has killed the politics of exit in Europe.** A key tangible effect of Brexit has led to a reduction in support for further exits across the EU. Support for the EU is at an all-time high in the member states. Radical euroscepticism (support for exit from the club) is in decline across Europe. This is illustrated by the sharp turn undertaken by the parties aligned with the far-right bloc within the European Parliament. They mostly no longer seek exit from the EU in the short term but instead have orientated towards seeking the radical reform of European institutions towards a 'sovereignist' Europe of nation-states.

# THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE EU: A ROUGH GUIDE

European elections are unique globally. Unlike other international organisations, which bring together national representatives on an intergovernmental basis, the EU establishes a system for the direct representation of citizens at the continental level through the European Parliament. Yet Parliament has only partial sovereignty over decision-making at a European level. Under the Lisbon Treaty it shares power with the Council, which brings together heads of states and governments of the member-states. For the vast majority of proposals to become EU law both representatives of national governments and the European Parliament must pass it. The Parliament can approve, disapprove or propose amendments to legislation. This system is referred to as 'co-legislative power'. Some exceptions to this 'ordinary legislative procedure' still exist, for example in taxation, in external relations and in institutional reforms, where the parliament has only the right to give an opinion.

The Commission acts as the executive arm for European decision-making. It is analogous to a national government operating at the EU level and directs the work of the European civil service. The president of the European Commission is appointed through a somewhat ambiguous process. Under the Lisbon Treaty, the member states of the European Union should propose a candidate to be a President of the Commission 'taking account of the European Parliament elections' and 'after having held the appropriate consultations', and this candidate should then be approved by the European Parliament.

In what has become known as the *Spitzenkandidat* system, in 2014 the political parties going into the election nominated their 'lead candidate' to become Commission President. Jean-Claude Juncker as the lead candidate of the largest Parliamentary group – the EPP – was proposed by the European Council and voted in by the Parliament. The President then selects 27 other Commissioners, one for each member, on the basis of nominations from the national governments. The Commission as a whole is then approved by the Parliament following hearings. Far from being the unelected bureaucracy claimed by eurosceptics, the European Commission is tightly constrained by this system of checks and balances: the hearings in the Parliament in 2014 changed the candidates and responsibilities of the

## SOME OF THE KEY EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

**European Council.** This body brings together the heads of government (e.g. Prime Ministers, Presidents, etc, depending on national context) of the member-states. It has no legislative power, but sets general priorities.

**The Council of the European Union** (referred to as 'the Council' in the European treaties). This brings together representatives of national governments in specific areas, e.g. ministers for economic affairs. It has co-legislative power with the European Parliament.

**European Parliament.** The only directly elected body of the EU, the Parliament has co-legislative power with the Council of the European Union.

**European Commission.** Holds the exclusive right to bring forward new proposals for EU laws ('the right of initiative'), which then need to be passed by the Parliament and the Council.

Commission, and previously the Parliament has forced the whole Commission to resign (the Santer Commission in 1999).

Whether the *Spitzenkandidaten* process will be followed again in 2019 is in some doubt (see section on *Spitzenkandidaten*). But however it will be appointed, once in place the Commission does have real power. And this comes down to what is referred to as the 'right of initiative'. It is uniquely able to propose legislation for discussion and agreement by the member-states and Parliament. Historically, the Commission has driven forward European integration, but this role has come under pressure as political divergence over the future of the European Union has become more apparent amongst the member states. The political legitimacy that the European election results gives to the newly appointed President of the Commission becomes more important in this situation: a President proposed by the Parliament, and elected with a strong majority, with a clear manifesto to achieve, would be able to use his or her electoral legitimacy as an argument against dissenting member states.

# THE SPITZENKANDIDATEN SYSTEM: FROM NOVELTY TO UNCERTAINTY

---

Used for the first time in the European elections in 2014, the *Spitzenkandidat* process allows the European political parties to nominate candidates to become the President of the European Commission. This novelty was emphasised with the slogan for the elections 'This time it's different'. As a result, Jean-Claude Juncker became the first Commission President elected in this way, after running as the lead candidate of the European People's Party, against Martin Schulz for the Socialists, Guy Verhofstadt for the Liberals, Alexis Tsipras for the Left and Ska Keller and Jose Bové for the Greens. As the EPP was the largest party in Parliament, the European Council nominated (by qualified majority) Juncker, and this was subsequently approved by the Parliament.

For the 2019 elections, this process, which was supposed to bring greater legibility to the European elections, has become more complicated and uncertain, in three ways. Firstly, the number of *Spitzenkandidaten* is multiplying. More parties are putting forward candidates than last time, with the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists this time nominating a candidate, and new parties like European Spring entering the scene. The candidates from these parties have not been included in all televised debates, leading to accusations of the process being closed to newcomers. More complicated still is that several parties are putting forward multiple *Spitzenkandidaten*. As last time, the Greens have a woman and a man duo presenting as joint candidates. The European Left has also adopted this approach this time round too. The Liberals have gone several steps further, and are proposing a 'team Europe' of seven people including current Commissioners like Margrethe Vestager who has said ideally she would keep the same job of Competition Commissioner. As such, a process, which was originally conceived as nominating a candidate for the President of the European Commission, now seems to be about present options for the Commission in general. This underlines the informality and weak legal status of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system that may not survive the post-election negotiations.

Secondly, the European Council has emphasised that there is nothing 'automatic' about the winning candidate becoming Commission President. Under the treaties, the Council has the autonomy to nominate whoever it pleases as the

President, even if it must 'take account of' the results of the elections. The Parliament must vote to approve the nomination, but there is clearly the possibility for a standoff, or for a breakdown of support for the whole process to occur. In the recent past the President of the Commission has been a former Prime Minister or senior minister in national government, but the EPP's candidate this time, Manfred Weber, has no such experience on his CV and this has led to some doubts about whether he would be nominated by the Council.

Thirdly, disagreement has broken out about what it means to 'win' the elections: should the candidate of the largest party be nominated, or the candidate who can put together a coalition which has a majority? In 2014, the assumption was that the EPP as the largest party (with 29.3% of the vote) should have its *Spitzenkandidat* nominated, but this time around the two big groups – the EPP and the Socialists – risk losing their capacity to pretend to call the shots. This is one of the reasons the Liberals, as potential kingmakers, particularly if they are joined by the currently unaligned En Marche candidates elected in France, are presenting a team to go into the political bargaining process with as many cards as possible.

Partly as a result of the uncertainty around the process, the EPP and Socialist candidates, Manfred Weber and Frans Timmermans, are running highly personalised campaigns, with a greater emphasis on themselves than their predecessors. The EPP manifesto explicitly says that the President of the Commission 'must be determined by the people, as part of the elections to the European Parliament.' Weber has his own manifesto materials which highlight the main points of the EPP manifesto, a slogan 'The Power of We' (a pun on Weber), and accompanying videos and social media material. The website of Franz Timmermans presents the Manifesto of the Party of European Socialists in a more dynamic and personalised way than can be found elsewhere. Both candidates are running media-focused tours and rallies across the continent. Both candidates have narratives about how their personal values and life-histories, which they see as reinforcing the values of the parties they are representing.

Whilst the *Spitzenkandidaten* for 2019 come from more countries than in 2014, it is notable that several of the big European countries have

---

# Disagreement has broken out about what it means to ‘win’ the elections: should the candidate of the largest party be nominated, or the candidate who can put together a coalition which has a majority?

no representative, most notably France. The two finalists of the 2017 French Presidential elections, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, despite not running in the European elections themselves, have an impact on the *Spitzenkandidaten* process from outside. Despite both having lost something of their aura, Macron and Le Pen represent in some ways the polar opposites in their vision of the elections and their place in European governance. Both make appeals to Europeans across the continent, whether in an official capacity as the President, in op-eds translated and distributed across Europe (Macron recently made such an appeal) or through social media and public events.

Macron has deliberately not chosen to align himself explicitly with any of the European parties, in the hope that after the elections his En Marche representatives are sufficiently numerous to break parts of the EPP and Socialists into a new group with the Liberals, repeating something of the feat he achieved in France. Macron was frustrated in 2018 when the Parliament voted against the proposal of introducing transnational lists to the elections, and the new scepticism of the Liberal party to the *Spitzenkandidat* process is based on the complaint that without transnational lists, it makes no sense. Macron has also defended

the idea that the Commission should be smaller, breaking the principle of one commissioner per member state.

Against this vision of a Parliament partly elected on transnational lists nominating a transeuropean Commission, Le Pen is promoting the abolition of the Commission entirely, in a European Union which would still have a European Parliament but one where the European Council would have the ‘right of initiative’. The strength of the representation of the Europe of Nations and Freedom group she is part of in the European Parliament could be determinant for the outcome of the *Spitzenkandidat* process, particularly in a scenario of a stand-off between the Parliament and the Council if they choose different candidates. A stand off may be more likely if Eurosceptic populists among the national governments (Hungary, Poland and Italy being the most obvious possibilities) work together to attempt to block certain candidates at the Council level (see section ‘What about the far-right?’ below). In addition, as illustrated by the political polarisation found in the manifestos (see below), the lack of scope for cooperation between the PES and EPP around policy priorities may make it harder for the Parliament to present a single candidate, which will limit its bargaining power with the Council.

# THE EUROPEAN PARTIES AND THE 'SPITZENKANDIDATEN' 2019

Politics in the European institutions remains poorly understood in most EU countries. Those with a high profile in the institutions can often be little known in their countries of origin, let alone amongst the broader European public. Here is a brief outline of where each of the main political factions and *Spitzenkandidaten* in the Parliament sit on the left/right spectrum.

---

## **The European People's Party (EPP)**

**Politics:** The Christian democratic party of the European centre-right. Although generally on the centre-right the membership of the nationalist and autocratic Fidesz party in Hungary, which is the third largest grouping in the EPP, means that it also contains a large faction that would generally be considered on the new European far-right.

**Candidate for President:** Elected Manfred Weber of the Christian Social Union (which is connected to the Christian Democratic Union of Angela Merkel but a formally separate party based in Bavaria) as its candidate

---

## **The Party of European Socialists (PES)**

**Politics:** The main party of the European social democratic centre-left

**Candidate for President:** Selected Commission First-Vice President Frans Timmermans who hails from the PvdA in the Netherlands after the only other candidate Marco Sevcovic (SMER-SD, Slovakia) withdrew from the race

---

## **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)**

**Politics:** Centre-right to far-right grouping, strongly conservative and Eurosceptic

**Candidate for President:** nominated Czech MEP Jan Zahradil

---

## **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**

**Politics:** Centre to centre-right with strong support for free market policies

**Candidate for President:** Rather than putting forward a single candidate they have nominated what they are calling a 'team Europe' of

different candidates for the incoming European Commission: Nicola Beer (FDP, Germany), Emma Bonino, former European commissioner (Più Europa), Violeta Bulc, current European Commissioner (SMC, Slovenia), Katalin Cseh (Momentum, Hungary), Luis Garicano (Ciudadanos, Spain), Guy Verhostadt (Open Vld, Belgium) and Margrethe Vestager, current European Commissioner (Radicale Venstre, Denmark)

---

## **European Greens**

**Politics:** Ecologist and redistributive parties on the centre-left to left

**Candidate for President:** Elected Ska Keller (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Germany) and Bas Eickhout (GroenLinks, the Netherlands) as co-candidates

---

## **European Left Party**

**Politics:** Left to far-left democratic socialist parties primarily made up of former communist parties

**Candidate for President:** Elected Violeta Tomič (Levica, Slovenia) and Nico Cue, (former Secretary-General of the Belgian metalworkers union)

---

## **Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD)**

**Politics:** Alliance of parties in the European parliament that are strongly eurosceptic

**Candidate for President:** No candidate

---

## **Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)**

**Politics:** Grouping in the European Parliament bringing together some of the most powerful parties of the European extreme right, specifically The League (Italy), National Rally (France) and the Freedom Party (Austria). Alternative für Deutschland and the Dutch Freedom Party are also part of this group.

**Candidate for President:** No candidate

# THE JUNCKER COMMISSION 'FIVE SCENARIOS' AND THE PARTY MANIFESTOS

---

In Spring 2017, less than a year after Britain's vote to leave the EU, the European Commission published a new, high profile report from President Jean-Claude Juncker's team, which outlined several plausible scenarios for EU reform in the run in to 2025.<sup>1</sup> It set the debate on the future of European governance in the context of the changing societal context characterised by demographic, technological, environmental and economic challenges. It argues there are five possible scenarios for European integration ahead:

1. **Carrying On:** The EU27 focuses on delivering its positive reform agenda
2. **Nothing but the Single Market:** The EU27 is gradually re-centred on the single market
3. **Those Who Want More Do More:** The EU27 allows willing Member States to do more together in specific areas
4. **Doing Less More Efficiently:** The EU27 focuses on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas, while doing less elsewhere
5. **Doing Much More Together:** Member States decide to do much more together across all policy areas

By introducing this taxonomy the Commission sought to overcome what it saw as the conventional approach of putting forward a 'binary choice between more or less Europe', an approach that it described as 'misleading and simplistic'.<sup>2</sup> This document proved to be formative, in so far as both EU officials and political leaders in member states have been referencing these possible avenues of the union's development. Accordingly, the party manifestos in the European Parliament elections can also be framed through this perspective. Mapping the manifestos in this way demonstrates how the European political landscape is increasingly pluralistic with avenues for consensus between the blocs in the Parliament (and, in turn, between the Parliament and the member states in the Council) likely to be quite limited.

---

## Carrying on

- Does not involve substantial treaty-change
- Focuses on implementing existing policies and frameworks

- May be vulnerable to exogenous shocks which are not prepared for
- Proposes deepening of single market in energy and digital sectors, and pursues new trade agreements, like the Japan deal.

Of the party manifestos the PES one could be situated within this camp. It does not make proposals requiring treaty-level change, but instead outlines priority areas related to touchstone social democratic issues like inequality, industrial strategy, and digital regulation. The PES only gives cautious support to new trade agreements if they have sufficient democratic accountability and protect consumer, human and environmental rights. However, they do say that the Eurozone requires 'substantial reform' and its 'own budget', 'reviewed to make sure that they foster sustainable growth and employment', which implies more of an orientation to 'those who want do more'.

---

## Nothing but the single market

- More bilateral agreements between states outside the EU treaties
- Growing divergence within the Eurozone leads to increased vulnerability to new financial shocks

Of the party manifestos (or equivalents) the ECR proposals clearly fit into this scenario. They propose 'mechanisms' for orderly withdrawal from the euro and the formal recognition the EU is a multi-currency union. They also wish to end the commitment to 'ever closer union' in favour of a 'confederal Europe' of nation-states.

---

## Those who want more do more

- Greater cooperation in security and defence by a core
- Eurozone countries alongside others coordinate social and taxation policies
- A two-level Europe with more tightly coordinated countries at the core sitting within a looser confederation of states

It is notable that this category is weakly represented in the manifestos, despite appearing in some parts of the ALDE and PES manifesto

---

(and notably in the discourse of some senior ALDE leaders). This perhaps reflects the fact that a two-speed Europe is a difficult electoral proposition to present throughout the European Union (notably in the slower lane countries). The PES calls explicitly for a eurozone budget, but this call could be interpreted in the perspective of all countries eventually joining the Euro (ie. Doing much more together).

---

### **Doing less more efficiently**

- Greater focus on subsidiarity. State aid control returned to national authorities
- No big moves to further integration. More pragmatic focus on smaller steps
- Focus on stability, rather than inequality, in relation to Eurozone reform
- EU does less on employment and social policy than it currently does

The EPP proposals can be placed in this category. On subsidiarity Weber has called for the trimming down of European regulation with an unspecific proposal to remove 'one thousand' rules currently in operation at the EU level. They also identify selective policy frameworks chosen as priority EU areas in the field of security, migration and asylum policy.

---

### **Doing much more together**

- Faster policy making at the EU-level
- Full fiscal union for Eurozone countries and the assumption all countries would one day join a modernised single currency area
- European Defence Union and a Europe that 'speaks with one voice' on foreign policy matters

The proposals of the European Greens could be placed in this category. Support for greater political federalism mean that ALDE, Volt and Spring could also, despite their ideological differences, all be put into this category.

# ELECTIONS 2019: WHAT ARE THE VISIONS OF EUROPE?

It is common practice that while political parties in individual Member States campaign on national (and often local) issues, the European party families that they belong to outline positions common to all their members in joint manifestos that serve as blueprints for their vision of European governance, should they succeed in the EP election. In order to gauge what are the visions of Europe among current major players in European politics we undertook a content analysis of the manifestos. For our analysis we selected all the current political groupings in the European Parliament, as well as nascent transnational European movements and parties that have been successful in establishing themselves in more than one Member State. We managed to obtain the election manifestos of: the European People's Party<sup>3</sup> (EPP) – the largest centre-right grouping; the Party of European Socialists<sup>4</sup> (PES) – comprising Europe's social democratic parties; the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe<sup>5</sup> (ALDE); the European Greens/European Free Alliance<sup>6</sup>; the European Left<sup>7</sup> comprising radical left wing parties; as well as of Volt<sup>8</sup> and European Spring<sup>9</sup> who are the transnational newcomers to the European political sphere. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) as a political group in the European Parliament do not campaign in the elections and therefore don't have a manifesto as such. Their EP office has provided documents in lieu that we used in the analysis. For the two remaining groups, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), both formations on the right to far-right, which have strongly eurosceptic views, no equivalent documents existed on an international scale, and we provide a separate analysis (see section 'What about the far-right?').

The manifesto documents varied in length, detail, and scope. For the purpose of analysis we composed a table comparing and contrasting words and phrases representing the visions of Europe found in these manifestos. The outline below is a reflection of the critical reading of what each European political group perceives to be their fundamental values (ideology) and what they see as the achievements of the European project to date (column 1). Equally, it delineates how they define their political platform through opposition to what are the (internal) problems of the EU and largely (external) threats to its continued existence (column 2). The most substantive section is

the comparison between the goals and visions (column 3), the former category containing specific policies and programmes, the latter outlining the 'big picture' aspirations. Since this table is merely a heuristic device, there is some crossover between these categories – certain ideas or policy proposals appear more than once.

**Values and Achievements** compares and contrasts what each political family perceived to be the current legacy of the European project. What are the values, principles and ideologies that drive them? And what are the achievements, successes and milestones of the European construction thus far? Here we observe stark differences along traditional ideological lines. The conservatives of the EPP invoke Judeo-Christian roots of European civilization and praise the EU for its achievements as an actor of the liberal post-WWII order. The Liberals (ALDE) have similar views in this area, while being more focused on the individual as the locus of politics and policy, rather than the collective. The Conservatives (ECR) share these individualistic sentiments in terms of values and do see the EU as pillar of the western world order, albeit being altogether more critical of the idea of European integration, envisioning instead the end of the project of 'ever closer union' in favour of a Europe of nation-states. Conversely, the Socialists (PES) give political emphasis to equality and social rights as underlying political principles. But they are less keen to list the EU's achievements beyond peace, which they strongly celebrate. Similarly, the Greens emphasise communitarian values and, while making a number of criticisms of the EU, see it as beacon of peace in the world. The European Left (ELP) give support to the social aspects of the EU, but are far more wary of the union's credentials as an international actor. Interestingly, the newcomers to the scene, Volt and Spring, have little to say about foreign policy and geopolitics, beyond recognising the value of peace and the importance of 'freedom of movement'. These parties' ideological leanings are, however, manifested in the other columns.

The second recurring theme in all documents is a varying sense of danger and urgency in today's Europe. **Problems and Threats** outlines what these political groupings are signalling to their voters regarding the dangers they perceive across the continent today. Such outlines provide an important indicator of how they view the Europe of today and what plans they have for it in the future.

---

Here again the traditional ideological badges seem to correlate with what Europe's political parties see as the failings of the European project and what (mostly external) threats may lead to its demise. The EPP, which has dominated the Parliament for most of the twenty-first century, albeit working closely with the PES on bipartisan, "consensus politics" lines, is equally afraid of left-wing and right-wing extremism from within, as it is of Russia, China, and another wave of "uncontrolled and illegal" migration from the outside of the EU. The Liberals have similar views, but also include a long list of social and economic malaises plaguing the continent and the world – including Brexit and Trump. The Socialists are wary of right wing extremism, but most of all of inequality, both economic and social. Notably, they also mention 'migration' and 'human trafficking' to the EU as a potential threat to political stability. For the Greens, it is xenophobia, inequality, multinational corporations, war and climate change that comprise the key threats. The Left add NATO to this list, putting it at odds with the majority of parties in the EP that support the transatlantic alliance. The Conservatives and Reformists, on the other hand, see the Brussels bureaucracy, the overzealous implementation of its policies, and its drive to federalism as the main dangers for the EU. In this regard, Volt and Spring again do not have much to say about what are Europe's ills and dangers that await it, focusing instead on making more general prescriptions for the radical reform of Europe.

Above all, these election manifestos contain a mixture of specific policy **Goals** for the next 5 years (comprising the European Parliament and Commission's term of office), but also a swathe of grand **Visions** for the future of Europe. The balance between the two varies greatly from document to document, but in each case it is an indicator of the extent to which each political grouping is willing to commit itself to concrete policy proposals (and then be held to account) and what kind of visions of Europe's future they offer. The EPP want Europe to be "a community of values", while outlining only a few concrete sectoral policy proposals, some of which would fall into the *Carrying On* and other into the *Doing Less More Efficiently* category. Their most concrete set of proposals is to extend EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and an end to Turkey's accession negotiations. They vouch to protect the EU's borders by establishing a European Border Guard, signing border protection agreements with North

African countries, and unrolling a Marshall Plan with Africa to address the reasons for migration at their source. The second largest grouping, PES, who call for a "New Social Contract for Europe" have a slightly wider array of policies they would like to implement, for example a Social Action Plan and Plan For Affordable Housing and Public Transport. PES too see migration as one of the key policy areas to address; they propose a common migration and asylum policy that, according to human rights principles, would foster a regular and fair migration system working for the benefit of Europe's economy and the welfare state, which would also involve an investment plan for Africa. However they also remain vague on the details this would involve, implying they too want to 'carry on'. They do, however, call for a separate budget for the eurozone, which is widely associated with the idea of a multi-speed Europe and the development of a European fiscal union (*Those Who Want More Do More*).

Smaller European political party families have much more detailed policy proposals - perhaps because there is little chance they would have to implement them. ALDE's slogan is "A more liberal Europe" and they present a vast array of policies, with considerable specificity, one of which is to abolish the EP's second seat in Strasbourg. With regard to migration, ALDE too wants to provide shelter for refugees in their regions of origin, to sign migration agreements with safe countries in the Middle East and Africa in order to facilitate migrant's return. They also want to establish a Common European Asylum System and a European Border and Coast Guard. In general, however, they want to *Carry On* in certain areas, and *Do More Together* in others. So do the Left, which, while calling for "A Europe of the Peoples", want more social spending on the European level, but remain silent on its specific institutional design. When it comes to migration, the Left are no longer willing to cooperate with authoritarian regimes at Europe's borders for the sake of stability.

The Greens, in contrast, who strive for "a union that leads the world by protecting people and the planet" are the only established party grouping that, as far as the manifestos are concerned, want to *Do Much More Together* and outline a set of comprehensive proposals regarding the economy and EU institutions that would require new treaties. They also have a very principled stance on tackling migration – including common standards and rules for labour mobility and migration to the EU and full legal protection of asylum seekers – where the

---

# These election manifestos contain a mixture of specific policy goals for the next 5 years, but also a swathe of grand visions for the future of Europe

Parliament would control EU border protection arrangements. One of the new transnational parties, Volt, calls for a full political union that would amount to creating a united states of Europe and set out a series of policies to achieve this – including “legal pathways into Europe” for migrants.

By far the most detailed set of policy proposals is set out by European Spring. Their call for a “humane Europe” would also amount to a quasi-federal construction with a radically progressive approach to migration. Their ideas include a Common European Asylum System, ending the externalization of EU borders, support for political rights and integration of migrants, as well as the EU Blue Card scheme enabling labour migration. Here an outlier is ECR that see the “European Union as a community of nations”, who also have an idea for an “EU immigration system that works”. It would entail support for member states to police the EU border and a strengthened FRONTEX, as well as an increased return of failed asylum seekers and cooperation with MENA countries. They propose “mechanisms” for orderly withdrawal from the euro and the formal recognition the EU is a multi-currency union, as well as the end of the commitment to “ever closer union” in favour of a “confederal Europe” of nation-states – it is a mix of *Doing Less More Efficiently*, as well as *Nothing but the Single Market*.

The manifestos also bring to light a “coming of age” of Europe insofar as European issues enjoy increased salience in national-domestic politics. They illustrate how, in this new Europe being born in 2019, there is growing political polarisation

around values and policies. A key effect of this will be the limited scope for a politics of bipartisan consensus in the European Parliament. Traditionally the PES and EPP have cooperated to “get things done”, but given the two blocs may not have a majority in the Parliament this time round the scope for cooperation will be limited. Even if they do emerge with a combined majority, however, the manifestos illustrate a retrenchment around counterposed ideological positions. One effect of this, illustrated by the EPP’s selection of the social conservative Manfred Weber as its *Spitzenkandidat* from the anti-immigrant CSU, will mean that both parties may pivot forces further to the left (PES) or right (EPP) rather than seek cross-party agreement between them. On what might be seen as the “central issues” facing the new Europe – the Eurozone, climate change and immigration – the manifestos illustrate the extent to which the parties tend to talk past one another. The EPP appears to prioritise geostrategic, security, terrorism and cultural identity issues, attaching its approach to immigration to these fundamentals, while the PES, in contrast, is less keen to engage these topics, instead focusing on issues the EPP similarly do not prioritise: e.g. inequality, economic reform, sustainability. Both parties are, in turn, pressured by the groupings to their right and left that offer a more radical break with the status quo in relation to these three big areas: migration, the Eurozone and climate change. Many predict that this will lead to paralysis in the European Parliament, but the fracturing of the status quo could also provide opportunities for these reform efforts to succeed.

---

## Values and Achievements

## Problems and Threats

### European People's Party (EPP)

**Values:** European founding fathers; gender equality; common Judeo-Christian roots; solidarity; tolerance; tradition; European identity; European way of life; European civilisation; (our) families

**Achievements:** overcoming national egoism; end of the East/West division; NATO; European Social Model; social market economy

**(Internal) Problems:** populism; nationalism; (extreme) leftism; fake news; antisemitism; migration brain drain; ageing population

**(External) Threats:** Russian & Chinese authoritarianism; radical Islam; illegal and uncontrolled migration; terrorism; climate change; excesses of globalisation

### Party of European Socialists (PES)

**Values:** solidarity; social rights over economic freedoms; cultural diversity is Europe's strength; fairness; duty to protect the vulnerable; promotion of a feminist Europe with rights for all; universal right to work and pension; social rights prioritised over free market; rule of law and human rights; intergenerational solidarity; sustainable development

**Achievements:** Europe's unity and diversity; democracy; peace in Europe

**(Internal) Problems:** neoliberal and conservative models of governance; nostalgic nationalism; inequality; concentration of wealth and property; unemployment and social exclusion; poor working conditions and in-work poverty; discrimination; sexual harassment and gender-based violence

**(External) Threats:** climate change; migration; uncontrolled market forces

### Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

**Values:** the individual; freedom; prosperity and stability; a Europe where human rights, the rule of law, and democracy apply equally to all; right to a life of self-determination, regardless of birth or belief, gender or sexual orientation; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; diversity; competition, fairness and open trade; reasonable debate, responsible conduct, respect for evidence and tolerance of diverse opinions; women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights; rule-based trade as an essential source of prosperity

**Achievements:** our freedoms of movement of people, goods, services and capital; common understanding and institutions for democracy and justice; peace and prosperity on our continent; liberal institutions, the rule of law and independent judiciary; European identity of our citizens enriches our national and local identities

**(Internal) Problems:** nationalism; authoritarianism; abuse of excessive political or economic power; gender-based violence and sexual harassment; anti-liberal forces and political paralysis; youth unemployment; Brexit; imbalances within the Eurozone; curtailment of judicial independence and freedom of the press in some states; a rapidly ageing population

**(External) Threats:** globalisation; climate change, environmental degradation, plastic pollution, need for a clean energy; terrorism, cross-border crime and human trafficking; badly-regulated migration flows and the challenges of integration; potential trade wars and protectionism; technology (AI & personal data); China; Trump; aggressive Russia

---

## Goals and Visions

---

**Goals:** protection of Europe's borders (European Border Guard); border protection agreements with MENA; Marshall Plan with Africa; European cyber-brigade (against Russia and China); a European drone; real defence capacity (2030); protection of environment and a dynamic economy (Energy Union); integration of recognised refugees (Common Asylum System); integration of Western Balkans; end to Turkey's accession; strong network between regions; expansion of Erasmus; modernisation of CAP<sup>10</sup>; EUI<sup>11</sup> 4.0; QMV<sup>12</sup> on foreign policy

**Vision:** "Europe is a community of values"; unified global voice for Europe; less bureaucracy; more democracy

---

**Goals:** tax justice; stronger EU budget; digital revolution; agricultural transformation; quality jobs; social security; protecting those in need; quality public services; common European defense; European Labour Authority; a social action plan; economic opportunity for all; long-term investment plan; green transition; industrial strategy; research and innovation; Eurozone budget; profits taxed where generated; stronger EU budget; sustainable development plan; just transition fund; plan for affordable housing; clean public transport; reform of CAP; Europe Day as public holiday; EU gender equality strategy; youth and child guarantee; expansion of Erasmus+; European culture cheques; reform of the UN; common asylum and migration policy; European investment plan for Africa

**Vision:** "New social contract for Europe". Social and ecological progress; a Europe of welfare with strong welfare states; a Europe of solidarity for the many, not the few; Europe leading on tackling climate change; democracy respected and promoted abroad; a feminist Europe; Europe must be a beacon of democracy, peace and stability, as well as a benchmark for social justice, dialogue, multilateralism, human rights, decent work, the rule of law, sustainable development and gender equality; soul of Europe and common future

---

**Goals:** youth civic engagement and political participation; open, rule-based, and free trade (WTO); common European asylum system; migration agreements with safe countries in the Middle East and Africa; European border and coast guard; investing in research and innovation; education focused on critical thinking, entrepreneurial and soft skills, flexibility, and systemic and interdisciplinary thinking; target of 3% of the EU GDP invested in research and development by 2020; recognition of qualifications; foster labour mobility among member states and regions; gender equality; transition to a resource-efficient circular economy; carbon neutral economy by 2050; European energy market; reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels; trans-European networks; boosting EU's cohesion policy; more free trade deals; digital single market; legal framework for new technologies; new effective mechanism outside to monitor violations of fundamental rights, civil liberties and the rule of law in the member states; QMV on security; common and security defence efforts (PESCO<sup>13</sup>, Europol<sup>14</sup>); close partnership with the UK after Brexit; support for ROI<sup>15</sup>; strengthening EEAS<sup>16</sup>; a European seat in the UN Security Council; European Parliament should only have one seat in Brussels; reconstruction of the EMU<sup>17</sup>; CAP reform

**Vision:** "A more liberal Europe"; a free, democratic, entrepreneurial, prosperous, sustainable and united Europe open to the world; The European Union is a positive ideal for many others in the world; an example to follow; Free movement of people within the EU is vital for continued European integration and prosperity; the EU should play a more important global role; simplify bureaucracy and renew the societal contract

## Values and Achievements

**Values:** freedom and human dignity

**Achievements:** free trade; growing sense of solidarity; NATO alliance; eliminating barriers to trade and creating the world's largest single market; end of east and west division; continent-wide area of unprecedented freedom and stability

## Problems and Threats

**(Internal) Problems:** implementation of EU rules in an unnecessarily bureaucratic and complicated way; the European Union has overreached - too centralised, too ambitious, and too out of touch with ordinary citizens; eurozone crisis; Brexit; misguided and dangerous model of a centralised federal European state; ideological commitment to integration

**(External) Threats:** violence and criminality

**Values:** a union not of selfish interests but of shared responsibility; economic and social progress for all; pan-continental Europe; human dignity, sustainability, equality, peace and solidarity; democracy and civic rights; feminism and gender equality

**Achievements:** the European Union is far from perfect but it can be a powerful force for good; success of the Horizon 2020 programme<sup>22</sup>; European Citizens' Initiative<sup>23</sup>; Europe has always upheld multilateralism and will continue to do so; The European Union has been at its heart a peace project – helping to maintain peace is a natural role for Europe in the world

**(Internal) Problems:** political hatred; status-quo politicians failing to enact real change; financial crisis and austerity policies; status-quo parties; authoritarianism, racism, neoliberalism

**(External) Threats:** terrorism and wars; big multinational corporations; climate crisis

---

## Goals and Visions

---

**Goals:** reducing barriers in the Single Market; consumer rights across the EU; protection of whistleblowers within EU institutions; support for EU trade deals (CETA<sup>19</sup>); support for MS to protect EU border; increase return of failed asylum seekers; strengthen the role of FRONTEX<sup>20</sup>; new institutional settlement - intergovernmentalism (not 'community method'); EU budget needs better democratic accountability; 'Luxembourg Compromise' and treaty change; revocation of 'an ever closer union'; control and leadership of MS; role of national and regional parliaments must be enhanced, role of the Commission downplayed; 'red card' procedure; president of the European Commission should be proposed and appointed by the Council: European Court of Justice should take a minimalist interpretation of its role tightly focused on judicial interpretation; fiscal competition within the EU; multi-currency union – the euro should be voluntary; MFF<sup>21</sup> ceilings agreed in 2013 should be maintained; one seat for the European Parliament; 2% of GDP expenditure on defence

**Vision:** "European Union as a community of nations"; flexible Europe: looser, confederal association of nation states; transparency and accountability of EU institutions; more Europe, more bureaucracy, and another EU institution is not the solution to the crisis; global facing EU; using private enterprise to reduce poverty around the world; neither federalist fundamentalists nor anti-European abolitionists offer real solutions to the problems faced by Europe today

**Goals:** common standards and rules for labour mobility and migration; protection of asylum seekers; EP control over EU border protection; limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels; by 2030 and building a netzero emissions economy; Europe must phase out coal by 2030 and other fossil fuels, including gas, as soon as possible thereafter; stronger public transportation; zero-emission vehicles; circular economy; CAP reform; strengthening environmental law; make the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality; implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; European social security number; Erasmus+<sup>24</sup> to be broadened and strengthened; European Youth Guarantee; equal access to the 'commons'; support for SMEs<sup>25</sup>; WTO<sup>26</sup> trade over bilateral deals; ecological tax reform (common consolidated corporate tax base); banking crucial to the real economy must be separated from trading; defence of net neutrality; transparency in the ECB<sup>27</sup>; gender quotas; abortion rights; same-sex marriage; common standards and common rules for labour mobility and migration; increase funding for international development and humanitarian action (0.7% of economy); opposition to the creation of new eurozone-only institutions and support instead establishing a special euro-zone committee in the European Parliament; budgetary co-decided by the European Parliament; eurozone coordination and euro-bonds open to non-EMU countries; Eurogroup<sup>28</sup> must become an ordinary body of the Council of Ministers<sup>29</sup>; banking union must be completed with a workable EU deposit insurance scheme; ECB as last-resort lender for Member States and to foster full employment, besides price stability; Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>30</sup> should be expanded to apply directly in all areas and Member States

**Vision:** "A union that leads the world by protecting people and the planet."; the future is Green; a Europe where young people no longer have to struggle to find decent jobs; women are not discriminated against at work; and small business owners do not suffer from unfair tax competition by big corporations. Where parents do not have to worry about their children being exposed to harmful chemicals; journalists about getting silenced by powerful interests; and trans people about facing violence on the streets. Where the elderly do not live in abject poverty and people drown in the Mediterranean. Where animals are no longer abused in industries; and old-growth forests logged for short-term profit; a Green New Deal; further steps have to be taken towards "an ever-closer union"



## Values and Achievements

## Problems and Threats

European Left  
Party (ELP)

**Values:** solidarity; the text speaks of European residents (vs citizens); fundamental human rights of all people living in Europe

**Achievements:** public services and institutions; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

**(Internal) Problems:** neoliberal bloc and the extreme right; nationalism; racism; unemployment; precariousness; lack of trust in democracy; sexism; centre-periphery divide

**(External) Threats:** big capital, NATO

Volt

**Values:** federalism

**Achievements:** EU – a guardian of peace in Europe

**(Internal) Problems:** political crisis

**(External) Threats:** N/A

Spring<sup>31</sup>

**Values:** freedom of movement is a fundamental human right – and a cornerstone of the European Union; culture is our common language and our shared heritage

**Achievements:** N/A

**(Internal) Problems:** deficit of democracy

**(External) Threats:** N/A

Note: The **EFDD** seems not to have a manifesto. The group's EP secretariat has not responded to our queries. No suitable equivalent could be found. The **ENF** Group Secretariat at the European Parliament claims that the group's parties will campaign on a national level and will not have a manifesto. No suitable equivalent could be found.

---

## Goals and Visions

---

**Goals:** against free trade agreements; anti-corruption measures; protection of workers' rights, trade union freedom, and the preservation and expansion of social rights; internet neutrality; decriminalisation of abortion; termination of NATO; change of EU Treaties; ECB to have employment goals; cooperatives and self-management in the economy; democratic ownership of banks; financial transaction tax; economic empowerment of women; restructuring and reduction of debt; renewable energy; sustainable agriculture, universal public and free education; fair trade with the world; suspension of EU Association Agreements with human rights violations; Turkey accession as long as it democratises; rejection of PESCO & FRONTEX

**Vision:** "A Europe of the Peoples"; democratic control of the people; solidarity and redistribution; promotion of peace

---

**Goals:** a federal Europe with a European government; real EU political parties; ECB to support employment and growth; a minimum European corporate tax of 15%; EP legislative initiative; digitalizing the EU administration; Europeans to have a say in EU budget; European public broadcasting platform; European army; EU-wide permanent forces with a unified EU military command under civilian control; strengthen European internal security – Europol; all EU software open source; all lobbying in the European Institutions transparent and monitored; EU project funding dependent on national efforts to fight corruption; European Labour Platform to match the unemployed and employers across Europe; decentralised digital labour; a minimum income above poverty level in all Member States; R&D spending to 4% of EU GDP by 2025; AI oversight; expansion of ERASMUS+; reform of CAP; legal pathways into Europe for economic migrants and asylum seekers; protection and integration of refugees

**Vision:** strong political union; empowerment of citizens; security and accountability; a just and sustainable society; Europe an economic powerhouse; Europeans to participate in policy-making; protect the press and whistleblowers; protect the dignity and safety of workers, especially in new sectors; digital literacy for all; green economy; circular economy; equality for women, minorities, and the disadvantaged

---

**Goals:** EP should have the right to initiate legislation, elect President of the Commission and dismiss it; improve European Citizens' Initiative; mandatory lobby register; 10-year ban on lobbying after holding EU office; allow the member-state consulates to host voting for European citizens outside the EU; Universal Citizen Dividend – first step to universal basic income; expansion of EU Cohesion Fund; decriminalisation of drugs; e500 billion each year in Europe's green transition; carbon tax based on the level of a country's development and emissions; expansion of EU budget; European clearing union; complete banking union; European People's Bank; ending tax havens; EU-wide inheritance tax and financial transactions tax; Common European asylum system; EU Blue Card scheme; ending the externalisation of EU borders; opposition to Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) and the investment court system; international clearing union; gender parity in EU institutions; convention on reproductive rights; European public broadcaster

**Vision:** strengthen the role of local government in Europe; European Spring will fight for worker power, believes that every person is entitled to a decent standard of living; Green New Deal; Europe's economic institutions should serve the interests of the many, not the few; people over profits; a humane Europe; 'Peace and Solidarity Pact' that rejects EU militarization; bolstering EU accession; no one should face discrimination on the basis of their identity; open Internet & ethical AI; accessible and decolonised culture; European Spring will invest in Europe's youth

---

# WHAT ABOUT THE FAR RIGHT?

---

There is a widespread anticipation that the far right will make a significant breakthrough in the 2019 European elections, and media coverage of the elections is often framed as a competition between right-wing populists and the European mainstream. The Brexit referendum result in the UK in 2016, Marine Le Pen reaching the second round of the French Presidential elections, the breakthrough of Alternative für Deutschland in the German elections, and the entry of the FPÖ to government in Austria in 2017, the entry of La Lega into the Italian government in 2018 and the entry into government of the Finns party in 2019 have maintained an ongoing narrative of the rise of far-right populism, which has together fed these expectations. The success of the recently created Forum For Democracy in the Netherlands 2019 provincial elections, and the projected success of the newly created Brexit Party in the UK, further illustrates the far right are on the rise.

Moreover, the emergence of autocratic regimes in Hungary and Poland, around a narrative of 'illiberal democracy' promoted by the Hungarian government, in particular, fundamentally threatens the liberal democratic values of the EU. The actions of the Orbán government going back to 2010 (Hungary) and of the Law and Justice government (Poland) in challenging basic European norms around the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media, political plurality, women's rights and the right to asylum, have led to a debate about how the European Union can enforce and protect its values inside its borders. The incapacity of the European Commission to enforce quotas for the distribution of asylum seekers across the Union further points to a crisis of authority and the potency of this nationalist challenge.

The narrative of a battle between the European elite and the populists serves the populists well. However, our analysis of the mainstream political parties shows significant divergence between them when it comes to their ideas for the future of Europe. To an even greater extent, there is a divergence between the right-wing populist forces on most issues concerning the future of Europe and its geopolitics, to the extent there is no common manifesto amongst these parties, political collaboration between them is not guaranteed, and has been unsuccessful in the past. Going into the elections, they are not all part of the same political party. Notably, Orbán's Fidesz remains a member of the mainstream EPP, albeit a member that has been suspended by the party pending an

internal investigation. The Polish Law and Justice Party is part of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists, which is likely to disappear following the elections given the importance of British Conservatives to that group. The Brexit Party and the Forum for Democracy Parties are unaligned, and competing against other far right-wing parties currently represented in the European Parliament (ie. UKIP and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in the Netherlands).

The European Alliance of Peoples and Nations is the main far-right nationalist platform contesting the European elections in 2019, including the Austrian Freedom Party, French National Rally, Italian Lega, Alternative for Germany and the Dutch Freedom Party. It has the most minimal of common platforms, comprising 5 shared values: democracy, sovereignty, identity, specificity and freedom. The party defends a sovereigntist vision of Europe, in which each 'state and people' has a distinct identity which ought to be preserved and which opposes transfer of sovereignty to supranational bodies or the European institutions. The party argues that freedom of expression is under attack and should be defended, and commits to democratic functioning and rejects and 'past or present affiliation, connection or sympathy to any authoritarian or totalitarian project'. Amongst this Party, it seems that Marine Le Pen's National Rally plays an important ideological role, having developed a much more extensive manifesto specifically for the French elections, but travelling with her proposals to party rallies in each of the countries involved. Matteo Salvini, as Italian Interior Minister, appears to play the role of political broker for the far-right, notably attempting to align the parties of the European Alliance of Peoples and Nations with the Orbán administration.

The National Rally manifesto presented by Marine Le Pen presents several characteristics of the discourse of the far right. It adopts a tone of betrayal and accuses the European Union of broken promises, of favouring unrestrained globalisation, of undermining national sovereignty and national identity, of making Europeans less safe by removing borders, of increasing taxes and spending money that could otherwise be spent by national governments. It defines European identity as Christian, opposes the entry of Turkey to the EU, calls for a war against Islamism and the militarisation of Europe's borders and dismantling of the Schengen agreements with reinstated national border controls. It pointedly accuses the European Union of not respecting

---

# There is a divergence between the right-wing populist forces on most issues concerning the future of Europe and its geopolitics, to the extent there is no common manifesto amongst these parties

the Brexit vote of the UK, trapping the UK into the European Union against its will. And it criticises the EU for launching proceedings against Poland and Hungary for not respecting the values of the Union. In a significant break from the past, the manifesto does not call for the dismantling of the European Union, or the withdrawal of France from the Union or the euro, but rather a European Union with nations at its core, without a European Commission and without a European Court of Justice.

If the change of emphasis of the European Alliance of Peoples and Nations from dismantling the EU to transforming it into a Union of Nations will make it hard for the Alliance to work with more traditional anti-EU eurosceptics (including Alternative for Germany, which has been campaigning on leaving the euro, or potentially the EU itself, and on abolishing the European Parliament), other major disagreements between a potential far-right alliance after the elections include on the topic of the circulation of workers in Europe and the risks of social dumping, in their attitudes towards Russia, and in their social attitudes and values, which range from highly socially conservative and hierarchical to more liberal.

Whilst collaboration between these European

parties may not be sufficiently tight and coherent to transform the European Union fully into their image, the possibilities of sufficient strategic collaboration to disrupt and degrade the functioning of the European Union have significantly increased. With several far-right parties in national governments, and some nominally centre-right parties showing increased willingness either to work with the far-right or to adopt their language and positions, the influence of the far-right in the European Council has increased, and this may also have an impact on the nomination of the new Commission. Furthermore, increased representation in the European Parliament means a greater legitimacy for the far-right, as well as substantial revenue: two major objectives for these parties.

The flipside of the potentially increased representation for far-right political parties in the parliament is that the majorities of the two main political parties, the EPP and PES, is fragile, and this (in combination with the political differences between the two parties we describe above) may end the grand-coalition politics that has characterised the European Parliament over its last terms, forcing each party to set out more distinct policy positions, as well as for the left of the parliament to work together more often.

# A CONSTITUTIONAL VISION FOR EUROPE? WHAT THE MANIFESTOS PROPOSE

---

It is often claimed that the European Parliament lacks sufficient power because it does not have the right to initiate legislation. This contrasts with the American federal government, for example, where the legislative branches (the Senate and House of Representatives) can initiate revenue bills. While the president (the executive) has the power to veto such bills passed by Congress, the legislature may override this by a two-thirds majority in both houses. However, not all systems have a strong right of the legislative to initiate legislation without the support of the executive branch.

The peculiarity of the European system lies in its hybrid character. In some ways it is akin to an intergovernmental organisation and in other ways it has features of a single, federal structure. As a consequence of this, European parliamentarians may often share criticisms of the member-states, and agreement on policy proposals, which cut across traditional ideological divides. One example is that they will often support more powers for the Parliament, particularly over the right to initiate legislation. This is evident in the manifestos when it comes to the constitutional reform of the European system. The EPP argues that ‘the European Union must become a fully-fledged parliamentary democracy’ with the right to initiate legislation.<sup>32</sup> This proposal is also backed by the Alliance for Liberal and Democrats for Europe.<sup>33</sup> Others go further than this towards greater supranational integration. The European Greens support a right of initiative for the Parliament but also argue that the ‘EU must be developed into a full supranational democracy’ with the abolition of the ‘unanimity requirement’ (which allows states to wield a veto in some areas) and its replacement ‘by normal legislative procedure and simplified enhanced cooperation.’<sup>34</sup>

Amongst the pro-European parties the exception to this consensus is the Party of European Socialists, which does not advance any proposals for constitutional reform of the EU in its manifesto. At the *Spitzenkandidaten* debate at the European University Institute in Florence on the 2nd May socialist candidate for President Frans Timmermans said that, while he supported a right of initiative for the Parliament, it was hard

to envisage this as a possibility within the next five years because it would require treaty-change (and therefore unanimous agreement from the member-states). Another outlier in the opposite direction is the start-up party, Volt Europa, which has been backed by a range of prominent liberal figures and has called explicitly for

... a Federal Europe with a European Government, headed by a Prime Minister elected by the Parliament, and with a President elected by the people. This will create a strong, open and transparent European parliamentary democracy.<sup>35</sup>

Amongst the Eurosceptic currents most do not produce manifestos or equivalent documents with proposals for European reform (see table on pages 14–19). The European Conservatives and Reformists Group, which includes the British Conservative party and the Law and Justice Party, which has been accused of eroding the rule of law in Poland, is an exception in this regard. It argues that:

The misguided and dangerous model of a centralised federal European state should be rejected in favour of looser, confederal association of nation states.<sup>36</sup>

Specifically, it opposes more power for either the Parliament and Commission, effectively calling for the further strengthening of the rights of nation-state representatives, including what it calls a ‘red card’ procedure, which would allow any measure to be blocked if it was opposed by more than 50 per cent of the national parliaments of member-state countries.<sup>37</sup> In relation to the right of initiative of the European Commission it implies that it would seek to constrain power, however, its substantive proposals, for the production of white papers and seeking guidance from member-states in advance, look very similar to the current practice. Although their international grouping does not produce a manifesto for Europe, the large French far-right party, *Rassemblement National* (National Rally, formerly *Front National*) have produced a substantial manifesto for Europe,

---

in which they abandon several previously held positions; for example, opposition to the Euro currency and support for a French exit. This reflects how the chaotic British exit from the European Union has led to a change in position from far right parties that now favour what critics refer to as ‘corrosion from within’, rather than outright exit from the bloc. As part of these efforts the National Rally party has called for the abolition of the European Commission and its replacement with a purely technocratic civil service-like body.<sup>38</sup>

# CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

---

This report mapped the different European Parliamentary election programmes of the major European political families competing in the 2019 vote. Whilst these European Political Parties remain largely aggregations of national parties, and in each country candidates will be running on national manifestos to a greater extent than the European manifesto, there are at least seven arguments for saying that 2019 marks the coming of age of European politics.

---

Firstly, the *Spitzenkandidat* system, despite and perhaps because of the uncertainty on whether it will survive, is promoting a more personalised and differentiated campaign than in previous elections. Jean-Claude Juncker and Martin Schulz as front runners in 2014 did not lead as propositive campaigns, with rallies, social media and TV adverts, as Manfred Weber and Franz Timmermans in 2019.

Secondly, the political context that has developed over 10 years of financial crisis, and a sense of migration and security crisis, has led to European politics being central in many national political debates. Making the distinction between European and national issues and levels of politics is now more artificial than ever.

Thirdly, and connectedly, many of the manifestos of the parties situate Europe in a multipolar world in which the European model contrasts with, and may be threatened by, Russia, China or the USA.

Fourthly, this election sees the emergence of two transnational political parties, Volt and European Spring, which are not unprecedented (previous elections also saw the participation of trans-european parties), but have more extensive, ambitious and detailed policy proposals than the main parties.

---

Fifthly, the weakening support for the two large European parties that have dominated European politics until now, the EPP and the PES, has led to a move away from grand-coalition style politics, to a move to the right and the left respectively, and opened the possibility of a left-wing coalition of PES, the Greens and the Left, promoted directly by Timmermans during the campaign. This report has shown that such a coalition would be built around common values rather than just left-right distinctions – prioritisation of a Green New Deal, a social Europe, gender equality and women’s rights and upholding of the rule of law and democratic norms. Areas of tension in such a coalition would include geopolitical and security issues, Europe’s border controls, trade deals and the details of eurozone reform.

Sixthly, the Brexit process (and arguably the Greek experience of 2015) have largely discredited the politics of exit from the European Union or the euro, and the far-right now presents itself as aiming to take over and redirect the European Union towards a union of nations. Rather than simply ‘more’ or ‘less’ Europe solutions, there are now very diverging visions of European integration that are competing against one another in the political sphere.

Lastly, these elections are marked by an increased sense of fragility of the European Union, the possibility of its demise and also the possibility of its radical transformation and redirection, even in a context where Treaty change is assumed to be impossible by almost all players. Whilst the parties have more or less ambitious and detailed proposals for the future of the European Union, there is now the sense that the European Union can change also without Treaty amendments, and that the elections are as much about influencing the way the political winds are blowing across the continent as the action of parliamentarians and the institutions. Despite the dangers of such a moment, this is surely an important step in the coming of age of European politics.

# NOTES

---

1 European Commission, 1st March 2017. *White Paper on the Future of Europe; Reflections and Scenarios for the EU-27 to 2025*.

2 Ibid, p. 15

3 [https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2015/09/Manifesto2012\\_EN.pdf](https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2015/09/Manifesto2012_EN.pdf)

4 [https://www.pes.eu/export/sites/default/galleries/Documents-gallery/PES-Manifesto-2019\\_EN.pdf\\_2063069264.pdf](https://www.pes.eu/export/sites/default/galleries/Documents-gallery/PES-Manifesto-2019_EN.pdf_2063069264.pdf)

5 [https://www.aldeparty.eu/sites/alde/files/40-Resolutions/2019\\_freedom\\_opportunity\\_prosperity\\_the\\_liberal\\_vision\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_europe\\_0.pdf](https://www.aldeparty.eu/sites/alde/files/40-Resolutions/2019_freedom_opportunity_prosperity_the_liberal_vision_for_the_future_of_europe_0.pdf)

6 <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/8.%20PROOFREAD%20Adopted%20%20EGP%20Manifesto%202019.pdf>

7 <https://www.european-left.org/>

8 <https://www.volteuropa.org/amsterdamdeclaration>

9 [https://europeanspring.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EuropeanSpring-Manifesto.ENG\\_.pdf](https://europeanspring.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EuropeanSpring-Manifesto.ENG_.pdf)

10 Common Agricultural Policy.

11 European University Institute – a postgraduate university based in Florence.

12 Qualified Majority Voting.

13 The Permanent Structured Cooperation is the part of the European Union's security and defence policy in which 25 of the 28 national armed forces pursue structural integration.

14 The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation.

15 Republic of Ireland.

16 The European External Action Service is the diplomatic service and foreign and defence ministry of the European Union.

17 The Economic and Monetary Union.

18 The ECR as a political group in the European Parliament do not campaign in the elections and therefore don't have a manifesto as such. Their EP office has provided documents in lieu.

19 The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement is a free-trade agreement between Canada, the European Union and its member states.

20 The European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

21 The multiannual financial framework (MFF) is the EU's long-term budget.

22 EU's Research and Innovation program.

23 The European Citizens' Initiative is a unique and innovative way for citizens to shape Europe by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal.

24 Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.

25 Small and medium-sized enterprises.

26 World Trade Organisation.

27 European Central Bank.

28 The Eurogroup is the recognised collective term for informal meetings of the finance ministers of the eurozone – those member states of the European Union (EU) which have adopted the euro as their official currency.

29 The Council of the European Union is one of three legislative bodies and together with the European Parliament serves to amend and approve the proposals of the European Commission. It represents the executive governments of the EU's member states.

30 The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union enshrines certain political, social, and economic rights for European Union citizens and residents into EU law.

31 European Spring has the most extensive list of policies, some of which were too detailed to include in this comparison.

---

32 EPP Manifesto: *Let's open the next chapter for Europe together*, p. 13

33 ALDE Manifesto: *Freedom, opportunity, prosperity: the Liberal vision for the future of Europe*, p. 10

34 European Greens: *Time to Renew the Promise of Europe*, p. 14

35 *The Amsterdam Declaration, Volt's Manifesto for the European Parliament*, p. 1

36 *The Future of the European Union*: ECR Statement, p.4

37 *ibid*, p. 6

38 'Le Pen's Rassemblement National revises stance towards EU and the euro' <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/le-pens-rassemblement-national-makes-its-ties-to-the-eu-and-the-euro-official/>



CONFLICT AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY  
RESEARCH UNIT



**EUROPEAN  
ALTERNATIVES**

Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit  
Department of International Development  
London School of Economics and Political Science  
Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

+44 (0)207 955 6419  
[id.ccs@lse.ac.uk](mailto:id.ccs@lse.ac.uk)  
[www.lse.ac.uk/ccs](http://www.lse.ac.uk/ccs)  
[@LSE\\_CCS](https://twitter.com/LSE_CCS)