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Europe

Who sows far right policies ... reaps the far right

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This Sunday the European elections concluded, electing the deputies who will make up its tenth legislature. It never hurts to remember that these elections are used as the perfect makeup to renew the governance framework of the EU (Parliament and European Commission). The call for the elections attempted to avoid the image of a hierarchically structured bureaucratic apparatus with little democratic control that responds to a balance of state powers based on the hegemony of the Berlin-Paris axis. This process will conclude, some months later, with Parliament's ratification of the president of the European Commission and the council of commissioners previously negotiated by the member states.

Perhaps the most notable headline of this electoral call is the growth of the extreme right, a growth that consolidates a right-wing of the EU that has been brewing for some time. The current dispersion of the extreme right, into three groups in the European Parliament, blurs the image of its electoral result, but it cannot be ignored that it has been the second most voted force in Europe with just over 20% of the votes ahead of the social democrats. In this way, the extreme right has managed to become the first force in Italy, France, Hungary, Belgium, Austria and Poland, and the second force in Germany and the Netherlands, while the European Socialist Party has only managed to win in Sweden, Romania, Malta and in Portugal it tied with the right.

Le Pen's party, National Rally (RN), has managed not only to win again in France for the third consecutive time in a European election, with twice as many votes as the governing party but also to be the party with the most deputies in the European Parliament, a good example of the strength of the European extreme right. This result has generated a real earthquake in France, where Macron has been forced to call emergency legislative elections.

In fact, the extreme right has not stopped growing in Europe since the beginning of the century, from barely getting enough deputies to form a group in the European Chamber to being the second most voted force in these elections. In a decade they have doubled their support and are emerging as a force that will be able to determine parliamentary majorities in the next legislature. The Eurocratic bureaucracy in Brussels considers this possibility very seriously and, to this end, has begun an entire campaign to differentiate between a good extreme right and a bad extreme right; that is, between that extreme right that unequivocally assumes neoliberal economic policy, remilitarisation and geostrategic subordination to the European elites and NATO, and that other that still questions them, although increasingly timidly.

In the electoral campaign itself, Ursula von der Leyen, the European Peoples Party incumbent President of the European Commission, has opened the door wide open to an agreement with a part of the extreme right represented by Meloni, the "good extreme right". In this sense, the president of the European People's Party (EPP), the German Manfred Weber, was already in favour of reaching agreements with the extreme right after a meeting with the Italian president Georgia Meloni last year. These approaches contribute to normalising the extreme right as an acceptable partner, legitimising not only its political space, but also its hate policies and speeches that are increasingly gaining a greater audience among the European electorate. This is a good example of the leading role that is predicted for the extreme right in this coming legislature, in which they will play a key role in obtaining parliamentary majorities.

In this sense, it seems that Le Pen does not want to be left out of this facelifting surgery again, she is aware that she has to finish concluding her particular process of de-demonisation, not only to represent something in the next European Parliament, but also above all to have a chance in the French presidential elections next year. In this way, the French far-right has knocked on Meloni's door to try to join forces and become the second political force in the European chamber. In the next three weeks, a period in which the political groups in the European Parliament have to be formed, we will decipher the mystery of who Meloni has opted for. For the siren songs of the Popular group or

for leading a large group of the extreme right: Jorge Buxadé (Vox) himself reminded Alberto Núñez Feijóo during the campaign: "Don't get excited because Giorgia Meloni is one of ours." It seems that interesting and complex weeks are predicted within the framework of the right and the extreme right to see how the political groups are finally configured in the European chamber.

Perhaps another of the headlines that these elections leave us with is the trend of erosion of the European two-party system, as since 2019, for the first time in the history of the European Parliament, the Popular Party (PPE) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) failed to gain an absolute majority. In these elections, five years later, the socialists are no longer the second most voted force, being relegated by the extreme right to a historic third place. They increasingly need to expand the so-called grand coalition that until now has governed Europe, with new forces.

In fact, as already seen in the last legislature, the liberals of Renew Europe and on some occasions the Greens, have been fundamental in establishing majorities in parliament and approving major measures of this legislature (Green Pact, European remilitarisation, Migration Pact and Asylum, etc.) It has been precisely these two groups, both Renew Europe and the Greens, that have suffered the strongest electoral erosion in these elections, losing 20 and 18 seats respectively. If in 2019 they grew, to a certain extent, as renewing and modernising forces of an outdated bipartisan governance, not having met expectations led them to pay a high electoral cost. Despite this, they appear to be two fundamental forces to ensure the majorities of the grand coalition.

Perhaps the clearest example of the erosion of the Renew Europe political formula is embodied by Emanuel Macron in France, where his party has not even achieved 15% of the voting total. Macron represents a type of empty political figure, the standard bearer of an exit from the power bloc to its own crisis of representation and corruption of the big parties, and which was sold as a formula that condensed the extreme center into a single party. A political model coming from the world of business management and perceived, precisely, as a manager of the diffuse "civil society" but guarantor of neoliberal (dis)order. In short: a kind of outsider to maintain the status quo.

In fact, Macron joins a global trend of emergence of authoritarian neoliberal populist leaders who from the business/financial world have stopped trusting professional politicians to lead their interests themselves as an elite from the front line of politics. These elections have not only marked the decline of Macronism as the prince of neoliberal Europeanism that came to replace the grand coalition, but have also opened an uncertain scenario for the electoral advance of the legislative elections (June) and for the French presidential elections. In this sense, those who tried to present themselves as the representatives of Hispanic Macronism, Ciudadanos (Citizens), have definitely ended up dying in these elections, going from eight MEPs to none.

It seems that we may have a new group in the European Parliament around the Italians of Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S or Five Star Movement) and the Germans of the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance. This represents a poorly defined political space built on parties that have in common their difficult fit into any of the other groups constituted in parliament, whether due to political differences or vetoes from other forces, as has historically been the case with M5S. A group similar to that of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) in the 2014/2019 legislature. Although it remains to be seen whether they can find allies to comply with the parliamentary rule of a minimum of 25 deputies from at least seven different EU countries.

More than one hundred elected deputies do not have a clear group in the European Parliament, a good example of the weight that the anti-political protest vote, outside the groups established in the European Parliament, has had in these elections. A good example of this phenomenon is Fidiás Panayiotou, a 24-year-old Cypriot tiktokker, who has become the second force, winning two seats in the European Parliament with more than 20% of the votes, and Alvisé Pérez, the candidate of Se Acabó La Fiesta (The Party is Over), one of the surprises of election day in Spain, which has obtained three MEPs with 800,000 votes.

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This is a protest vote mobilised to "recover the democracy kidnapped" by the corrupt political oligarchy, traditionally called "partyocracy", by the extreme right and with the consequent defense of a kind of anti-politics. The electoral success behind a banner that aspires to rescue a democracy kidnapped by the elites cannot be understood without assessing the democratic deficit of the societies in which it arises. In this sense, it is no coincidence that it is expressed especially in the European elections; of the systemic transformation of a globalised society; and the delegitimisation of politics and of the politics that have occurred within it due to the devaluation of ideologies. Within the framework inside and outside the system, the outside continues to recruit more and more political weight in the European Parliament.

The left may continue to occupy the last place in the European Parliament while waiting for the creation of a new group, but, unlike in 2019, it has managed to mitigate its fall and may even grow slightly in number, when the vote is confirmed in the coming weeks with the distribution of new deputies not registered in any group. Especially relevant have been the results in Finland as a second force; Italy, where the left regains representation; and that of France Insoumise (FI), which provides the largest group of deputies for the left.

These elections have once again shown the growing loss of legitimacy by the EU among social sectors throughout Europe; abstention is once again winning in almost all countries. It is increasingly difficult for the EU to be associated with those supposed "European values" such as democracy, progress, well-being or human rights. An organic crisis in the full Gramscian sense of the term, the result and deepening of the crisis of the post-Maastricht model of European capitalism that has meant a true neoliberal straitjacket, with a lethal combination of austerity, free trade, predatory debt and precarious and poorly paid work, the DNA of current financialised capitalism.

This crisis of legitimacy and institutionality not only sees community decisions trying to avoid national parliaments at all costs, but also means that any referendum or consultation of citizens that directly or indirectly concerns European issues is viewed with suspicion and fear. Every day more people wake up from the European dream and find themselves adrift between a neoliberal and militaristic Europeanism championed by the EU elites and an exclusionary nationalism on the rise at the state level. An organic crisis of the EU project that generates voids conducive to mutations, readjustments, recompositions, and above all the monsters that we have seen in these elections.

Elections that confirm: Europe's turn to the right, where the extreme right no longer appears as Euro-sceptic but as Euro-reformist, reserving a seat in EU governance; the bankruptcy of the old majorities of the grand coalition; the end of Macronism and its attempt at a great extreme European centre; the increase in outsider options for anti-system and anti-policy protest; and the growth of abstention and European disenchantment with the EU machinery. All this in a context in which the drums of war do not stop resounding in the chancelleries, bringing us dangerously close to the scene of a new confrontation of global war, against the backdrop of the climate emergency and the dismantling of multilateral governance and international law that has governed the world since the Second World War.

A dangerous cocktail that augurs new conflicts, a recomposition of actors, an expansion of the battlefield and, above all, an acceleration of new and old trends. Although one lesson stands out above the rest in these European elections: when you sow far-right policies - the Migration Pact has been one of many examples - you reap... the far-right.

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Translated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from [Publico.es](https://publico.es).

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