

## **We have elected the new MEPs: election results and lessons for Europe**

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The results from the European Parliament elections are already out. 43.23% of us, the European citizens, have cast our votes and have thus chosen who the new 736 MEPs and their parties will be. What characterized the voting process in the different EU member states and, most importantly, what lessons Europe can draw from the voting and the results? This is the subject of today's feature Interacting with the European Parliament of Radio Bulgaria, the European Institute, Gateway Europe and the Center for Policy Modernization.

The four-day election marathon for choosing MEPs has ended with a victory for the right wing European People's Party (EPP). The Party of European Socialists (PES) came second. Third was the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Diana Chepishева followed the events and politicians's reactions to the elections in Brussels for Radio Bulgaria. EPP celebrated their victory with a cake and champagne – it remains the largest party in EP having secured 264 seats. The party's chairman Joseph Daul did not conceal his contentment:

“This was a wonderful evening. I'd like to thank all voters who have cast their votes of support for us and all men and women who have worked for us. I am very happy with the results. EPP won by a large majority while the socialists lost.”

PES chairman Martin Schulz confessed that he was bitterly disappointed by the results – from 217 before, PES now has only 161 seats in EP:

“This is surely a very sad night for social democracy in Europe. We are very disappointed because we hoped for better results. Unfortunately, in some member states, social democrats have lost due to internal issues.”

ALDE remains the third political formation in EP, this is what its chairman Graham Watson said:

“The Liberal-Democrat Group will come back into the new parliament at about the same size as we were in the last parliament that means we should continue to hold the balance between the Left and the Right; we should continue to be the force which determines the outcome of most of the votes, and we should be able to continue to provide a solid, pro-European force at the center of our house.” In the Czech Republic – currently holding EU's rotational presidency – the right-wing party “Civil Democrats” headed by former Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek has secured most seats in EP. The opposition social democrats (CSSD) have become second. Evgenia Iotova comments for Bulgarian National Radio from Prague:

“The new parties that have betted on anti-European politics and also against the Lisbon Treaty will not gain seats in EP. Another divide in the election campaign was the introduction of the euro as Czech Republic's state currency. There is no set date for that. Most parties stood firmly by the Czech koruna.”

Now, a look at the country that takes up EU's rotational presidency from 1st July – Sweden. There, social democrats have won nearly 25% of votes followed by the conservatives with

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18.5%. In Sweden, all major political parties have diminished their electoral potential on the expense of smaller ones – one of them being the Pirate Party, which won one seat in EP. Tanya Stoilova from Stockholm says more to Bulgarian National Radio:

“The Pirate Party was founded in 2006. It is fighting for the legalization of file sharing on the Internet as well as for the protection for private life of citizens on the Net. Not long ago, the Swedish Parliament passed a bill allowing authorities to eavesdrop on every phone call and record it and to read emails of citizens. Severely criticizing that bill, the Pirate Party made a parallel to totalitarian societies from the Cold War era. The scandalous lawsuit against 4 employees of the Swedish “The Pirate Bay” – one of the most popular torrent sites in the world – who have been sent to jail, has greatly contributed to the election success of the party. Its supporters tripled within days. The Pirates are also against the Lisbon Treaty which, according to them, will increase the lack of democracy in EU.”

France. Elections there were marked by record low turnout – 60% of legible votes did not go to the polling stations. From Paris, BNR correspondent Julia Taleva has more:

“With a victory of the right-wing majority and considerable but fragmented left, the French representation in the new EP will be diverse. The right, which won 28% of votes, maintains its victory was due to EU’s French presidency and that’s also in the words of Prime Minister Francois Fillon. For the socialists, 16.8% is a disaster. Their spokesman said they had no excuse.”  
Now towards Romania where by “blows below the waist”, the co-governing social democrats secured 11 seats while the democrat-liberals 10. Romanians introduced some color to the new EP by electing 29-year old beauty Elena Basescu – called “Carpathian Paris Hilton” and famous for her photos in fashion magazines and passion for night life. More from Georgi Vasilski, BNR correspondent there:

“From 33 seats in Brussels, Elena Basescu – president’s daughter – has won one as an independent candidate. The nationalistic party, which returned to parliamentary life, was headed by businessman George Becali – owner of football club Steaua and especially released from custody to take part in the elections. The Union of Hungarians gained 10% of votes – a considerable success for them.”

In Greece, PASOK wins convincingly despite being in opposition. The situation after the elections was summarized by BNR correspondent Katya Peeva:

“Even sociologists in Greece were surprised at PASOK’s 4% lead. According to political commentators, the reasons for that result are high unemployment, high taxes, pensions, disorder, health and social security system and least but not last constant corruption scandals in the high ranks of power. PASOK’s victory is a warning to the governing conservative “New Democracy”.  
What was the key message that EU citizens came across with during the European Parliament elections? For some insights Radio Bulgaria talked to Piotr Maciej Kaczynski, political analyst from the Centre for European Policy Studies, an influential NGO based in Brussels.

“Well, the clear message that voters have delivered to Europe is first and foremost that they do care about European integration. The turnout that was lower than last time, was nevertheless much higher than expected. Therefore in some countries public support for the process of European integration was so high that these countries have received the highest turnout ever. And that refers to countries like Denmark and Sweden, or Estonia and Latvia. So it is not a one-sided event that the turnout is only going down. The main political message is that there is a very strong support message for the parties grouped

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in the European People's Party, the conservative group, and a big, so to speak, yellow card to the socialist and social-democratic parties across Europe. The other big winner at these elections is the Green Party, though they failed to have a single elected member in the new member states. Now that the ratio of the political forces in the European Parliament is clear, is it fit to deal adequately with the big challenges of the Union – the global crisis and the Lisbon strategy?

“This is the parliament we have just elected, so this is the best parliament possible. But it is impossible to say whether it will stand up to the challenge. The question is whether they have the tools to stand up to the challenge. And of course the tools are limited and there will be some problems with that. However I think that the fact that there is clear determination of the rightwing parties in the EP, and the fact that there is domination of the center-right parties in the European Council can only be beneficial in the process, as it may basically ease their decision-making mechanisms. Can we outline any relevant differences and patterns of voters' conduct in the old and in the new EU member states?

“Of course there are patterns. But it is difficult to point out to one pattern that would be correct for all new member states or for all old member states. One of them is of course the lack of green politicians elected to parliament from the new member states. When we already talk of turnout, one of the highest turnouts was in Latvia or Cyprus and Malta and one of the lowest was also in the region – in places like Slovakia or Lithuania. So, it is not one East-versus-West divide pattern. The same can be said about the rise of extreme rightwing politicians, because they rise both in the East and in the West. The radical right has been defeated at least partially in France and Poland, as well as in Belgium, and has been gaining support in the UK or Hungary on the other hand.

We also talked to Martin Klepetko, Czech Ambassador to Bulgaria. France Presse Agency reported that EU skeptics in the Czech Republic have virtually crashed and burned. How will the outcome of the EP elections in the Czech Republic impact on the issue of the Treaty of Lisbon that the president is expected to ratify?

“I am a bit surprised by the comment that EU skeptics have failed in the Czech Republic. I don't know who that news agency believes is an EU skeptic. In fact, the winner was the rightwing Civic Democratic Party which is believed to be EU skeptical from time to time. In fact the Lisbon Treaty problem has almost been resolved. It has been voted by both houses in parliament. Now the president should also sign it, but he is not likely to be influenced by the outcome of the EP vote. What do Czech citizens expect from their deputies in the European Parliament?

“In the Czech Republic the MEPs are expected to clearly back all freedoms stipulated in the EU statutes. The hot topic on top of the agenda is trying to contain Brussels centralism. There are no discussions about national interests – unlike the discussion in Bulgaria. In the Czech Republic voters are keen on freedoms and on the ways to limit centralism.

The end of the EU Czech Presidency is now close. What have been its achievements?

“The Czech Presidency had to deal with two major challenges in early 2009 – one of them was the gas dispute and the other one was the Middle East crisis. The successes had to do with the summit meetings held during the Czech Presidency. There was particularly keen interest in the summit meeting with the participation of the USA. The visit of President Obama to Prague was a major success of the presidency, as well as meetings with Russia, Canada and China. Besides, there were two initiatives that were among the key priorities of the Czech Presidency – the summit meeting of the countries from the former Eastern bloc, or the so-called Eastern Partnership, and under the energy plan –

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the summit meeting for the Southern Corridor Project. Time will tell which of them will remain on the agenda during the next presidencies.&rdquo;

The 2009 European Parliament elections are now history, and, unsurprisingly the question of the Treaty of Lisbon rejected by the Irish voters, is back into the spotlight. Under the treaty, the EU should receive further powers. What is your forecast about the fate of the Lisbon Treaty? This question goes to Bulgarian European Affairs Minister Gergana Passy.

&ldquo;As you might remember, there were several groups of issues that made Irish voters reject the Lisbon Treaty at a referendum. These issues will be addressed in a special document of the Council of Foreign Ministers. Apart from institutional preparation, it is up to Ireland&rsquo;s national authorities to decide when the second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty will be scheduled. There is a positive trend in this sense, and it is that public opinion polls suggest some, though still modest, predominance of Lisbon Treaty supporters.&rdquo;

In Bulgaria the most seats in the European Parliament &ndash; 5 out of 17 have been won by center-right opposition GERB party. If however, the Treaty of Lisbon gets enforced, Bulgaria will have 18 MEPs. What mechanism will be used to appoint the 18th MEP?

&ldquo;Once the Lisbon Treaty takes effect, this extra seat will go to the party with the largest unused vote, in other words, to the party with the most votes that have not transformed into a mandate. After the elections this is the case with the Blue Coalition and I think that with the enforcement of the Treaty of Lisbon, this party is very likely to have one more MEP.&rdquo;

*What about you? What do you think of the European Parliament elections? Do not hesitate to write or to call. We will make sure to include your opinions in the next installment of our series. It is broadcast by Radio Bulgaria under the project Interacting with the European Parliament carried out by the European Institute with financial support from the Directorate General Communication of the European Parliament. Your questions, comments and suggestions are welcome in our office, as well as at [info@europe.bg](mailto:info@europe.bg). For more details, please, look up the website <http://parliament.europe.bg>*

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