



EU elections countdown #4

What about Germany?

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According to current polls, the conservative CDU/CSU (31%) and the Social Democrats (17%) could lose a substantial share of votes compared to the 2014 European Parliament elections whereas the Greens (18%) and Liberals (7%) are projected to perform substantially better than in the previous round. The Greens could even overtake the SPD and become the second-strongest party. Support for the Left party remains relatively unchanged at 7% while the far-right AfD could expand its share to 11%.

All major German political parties with the exception of the right-wing AfD and to some extent the Leftist party are firmly pro-European, and Germany will remain a largely Europhile country. EU and euro area membership are supported by an overwhelming majority of German citizens, and trust in European institutions is above EU averages.

Shifts in voter support between centrist parties will not have a substantial impact on Germany's generally pro-European stance. However, these parties still represent diverging views on the future of the EU and increasingly feel the need to differentiate themselves from each other. When it comes to EMU deepening, SPD and Greens support French plans for risk sharing and convergence of social insurance systems on the European level, while CDU/CSU and FDP are much closer to the Nordic countries, which call for fiscal discipline and enforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact.

The far-right and anti-immigration AfD remains strongly Eurosceptic but has backtracked from its previous outright calls for "DEXIT". This mirrors a trend among far-right parties across the EU that now call for closer alliances to "reform" the EU from within instead of leaving it. Compared to European peers, the appeal of the AfD to German voters remains far more limited.

Recent surveys show that most candidates leading the national lists are unknown to the majority of the German electorate. Manfred Weber, the lead candidate of CDU/CSU is also EPP frontrunner to become the next Commission President. His broad electoral "guarantees" might help him find the cross-faction consensus required for a majority in the next EP but might be less effective in mobilizing conservative voters in Germany.

The outcome of the EU elections is seen as a strong indicator for this year's elections in eastern German states and might also impact the stability of the current government coalition. The composition of the post-Merkel German government, whether following the 2021 general elections or earlier, will determine to what extent Germany will be open to further euro area deepening and broader policy collaboration.

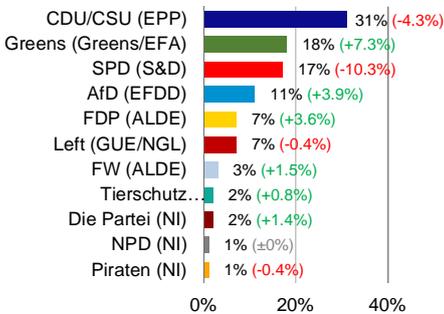


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German polls for the European elections

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Polls for the May European elections (vote share of German parties, %)



German parties and their groups in the European Parliament in brackets (left); vote share (polls) and change from 2014 EU elections in brackets (right).

Sources: Pollofpolls.eu, European Parliament

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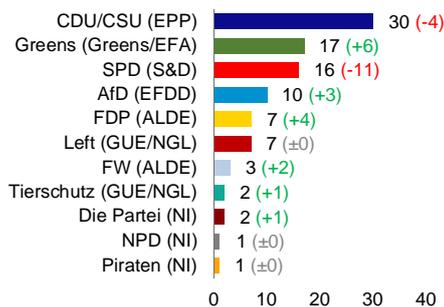
Less than 30 days until the May 23–26 European Parliament elections and the EU election campaign is in full swing now as legislative work in the EP has come to an end. In our previous EU elections notes we have focused on developments on the EU level and the related institutional aspects. But EU elections are as much a domestic topic as they are a European one. Some would argue that the domestic aspects prevail in general. Thus, the national political environment, the public mind-set and the perception of the EU play an important role.

In this issue, we focus on Germany, the EU's largest economy and its most populace member. Against the expected rise of Eurosceptic forces (EU elections countdown #3), uncertainty regarding the UK's participation in the elections (EU elections countdown #1) and the question of whether the German Manfred Weber will make it to the helm of the Commission (EU elections countdown #2), what is the mood in Germany? How do German parties position themselves e.g. regarding euro area reforms and how do they perform in opinion polls in the run-up to the EU elections? Will Germany remain predominantly pro-EU or will the EU "hegemon" turn more critical on integration? And what could this tell us regarding the Franco-German relations and a post-Merkel European policy course?

Projected German seats in the next EP

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Projection of seats in the next European Parliament for German parties (out of 96)



Note: German parties and their groups in the European Parliament in brackets (left); projected seats and change from 2014 EU elections in brackets (right).

Sources: DB Research Projections based on Pollofpolls.eu data, European Parliament

Expectations for the 2019 EP elections in Germany

Germans will cast their vote on May 26, and current polls suggest that the three parties that currently form the German "grand" government coalition, the conservative CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats (SPD) will lose a substantial share of votes compared to the 2014 European Parliament elections. According to polls, CDU/CSU could lose more than 4 percentage points (pp) to 31% while for the Social Democrats, the share of votes could plummet by more than 10 pp to 17% (Charts 1 and 2). The projected outcome for the government parties would be worse than their performance in not only the 2014 EU Parliament ballot but also the September 2017 German federal elections (Chart 3).

Partly at the cost of the aforementioned parties, the Greens and Liberals (FDP) are projected to perform substantially better than in 2014. Current polls see the Greens increasing their share to 18% compared to below 11% in the last EP elections, further riding the wave of popularity that they have been enjoying in German national polls over recent months. Current polls see the Greens overtaking the SPD to become the second-strongest party in this year's elections. The Liberals could more than double their share from 3.4% to 7%.

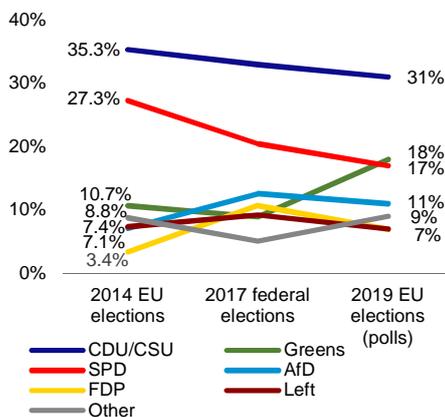
Support for the far-left Die Linke remains relatively unchanged at 7%. At the far right of the political spectrum, the strongly Eurosceptic and anti-migration Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) could expand its share to 11%, compared to 7%. However, they poll below their peak of around 16% in October last year.

Different from national elections, Germany does not have an electoral threshold for the European Parliament elections. Together with the large numbers of German MEPs (93), this explains why small parties entered the EP in previous rounds and are expected to do so this year as well. Altogether, 41 German parties and other political groups are registered for this year's EP elections. Of these, next to the seven major parties, five smaller parties accounting for 9% of the votes are expected to send MEPs to the next EP (Charts 1 and 2).

German votes over time

3

Vote share of German parties, %



Sources: Pollofpolls.eu, European Parliament

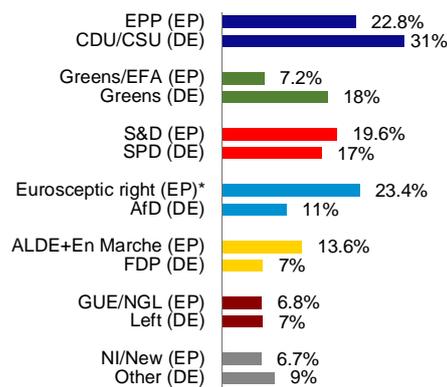


How do German parties perform compared to their European peers?

German parties versus their groups in the European Parliament

4

2019 EP polls for German parties compared to EP group projections, %



Note: Differing from our previous election notes, partially updated projections for the EP elections here include the UK due to the extension of Article 50 until October 2019.
* AfD here compared to projections for all far-right Eurosceptic parties included in ENF, ECR and EFDD as well as the Italian M5S.
Source: DB Research Projections based on PollofPolls.eu

The general trend of stronger fragmentation of the German party landscape and loss of seats for the CDU/CSU and Social Democrats towards the political fringes but also towards centrist alternatives is broadly mirrored in our projections for the European Parliament elections on the European level, even though there are also substantial differences. The loss for the CDU/CSU of around 4 percentage points in current polls compared to 2014 is below the projections for its party family in the European Parliament, the EPP, at almost 7 pp¹. And at still around 31% in current polls, the standing of CDU/CSU remains stronger than the EPP around 23% (Chart 4). The expected loss of votes of more than 10 percentage points (pp) for the German SPD almost doubles the anticipated loss of below 6 pp for its group in the EP, the S&D. And at projected 20% of total seats, the S&D is expected to outperform the SPD at only 17% in current polls.

The standing of German Greens in current polls is substantially stronger at 18% compared to our projection for their party group in the EP at only 7%. Vice versa, the German Liberals rank only fifth in current polls at 7%, while our projections for the May elections see ALDE, their EP group third strongest at almost 14% (including the French En Marche). The Leftist and its party group GUE/NGL both stand around 7%. The party family of the right-wing AfD in the current European Parliament, the EFDD has split up and is not expected to include sufficient members to form a group in the next EP. The three right-wing Eurosceptic groups in the EP, EFDD, ENF and ECR together with the Italian Five Star Movement (M5S) account for more than 23% of seats in our projections. In comparison, the performance of the AfD in current polls is rather moderate at 11%.

What do Germans think about the EU and EU elections?

The majority of Germans tend to have a positive attitude towards the EU, this is shown by public surveys from various sources, whether on the national, European or international level. The overall pro-European mind-set of the German public is reflected in the fact that – despite considerable variations between the parties’ policy positions – all mainstream parties want to pursue policies (changes) firmly within the EU’s and euro area’s institutional setup.

Germans’ attitude towards the EU is more positive and Germans’ trust in European institutions stronger than the EU average (Chart 6). A clear majority favors EU and euro membership and feels that German interests are well represented in the EU. This results from the EU’s most recent Eurobarometer² surveys. More than two-thirds of Germans feel that their “voice counts” in the EU while more Germans trust the European Parliament than the German Bundestag. However, Germans consider national elections still substantially more important than EP elections and less than half of Germans consider themselves “very likely” to vote in the May elections³.

When it comes to the EU as whole, the majority of Germans support the current EU setup and close collaboration among its members, according to recent surveys, even though they tend to criticize various aspects of the EU and consider the current state of the EU as “unsatisfying” (charts 9 and 10).⁴

Political groups in the current EU Parliament

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- EPP - European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
- S&D - Socialists and Democrats
- ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists
- ALDE - Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- GUE/NGL - United Left/ Nordic Green
- GRESSN/EFA - Greens/ European Free Alliance
- EFDD - Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
- ENF - Europe of Nations and Freedom
- NI - Non-Inscrits (not member of an EP group)

Source: European Parliament

¹ Partially updated projections for the next EP with UK participation (in previous notes without the UK), based on PollofPolls.eu data.

² European Commission (2018). Standard Eurobarometer (November 2018).

³ European Parliament (2019). Spring Eurobarometer 2019.

⁴ IfD Allensbach in FAZ (28.03.2019) and Körber Stiftung (2018). The Berlin Pulse 2018/19.



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German voters' view of EU more positive than EU average

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German views on the EU (Eurobarometer, % of respondents)

EU membership

- Would vote remain in the EU: 80% (EU28: 68%)
- Membership of the EU is a good thing: 81% (EU28: 62%)
- Supportive of EMU and euro: 81% (EU28: 62%)
- National interests accounted for in EU: 72% (EU28: 49%)
- My voice counts in the EU: 70% (EU: 51%)

EU/national elections

- Interested in May EP elections: 62% (EU28: 51%)
- Importance to vote in national elections: 79% (EU27: 68%)
- Importance to vote in EP elections: 63% (EU27: 50%)
- Very likely to vote: 48% (EU: 35%)

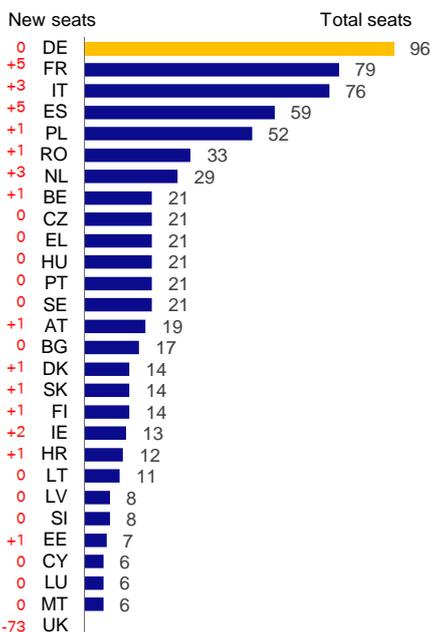
Trust in institutions

- National parliament: 58% (EU28: 35%)
- National government: 54% (EU28: 35%)
- EU: 51% (EU28: 42%)
- European Parliament: 60% (EU28: 48%)
- European Council: 44% (EU28: 37%)
- European Commission: 54% (EU28: 43%)
- ECB: 49% (EU28: 41%)

Sources : Standard Eurobarometer Nov 2018, Spring Eurobarometer 2019

Germany holds largest share of seats in EU Parliament

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Note: EU members' share of seats in the European Parliament are "degressively proportional" to their relative population; currently 751 total seats in the EP, post-Brexit reduced to 705, 27 will be redistributed to other members, 46 kept for future enlargements.

Source: European Parliament

Why do the German voters' decisions matter for the EP and Europe?

Influence. Germany as the most populous EU member state accounts for 96 MEPs out of the European Parliament's currently 751 (and post-Brexit 705, Chart 7). This means that even smaller shifts in the German electorate's party preferences can have a recognizable impact on the composition of the European Parliament. With a share of 12.8% of seats, the German influence in the European Parliament is substantial, even though most German representatives are also members of the EP's political groups and thus not only vote as representatives of their countries but also their European party families. And after Brexit, the German share of seats will rise further to 13.6%. Most votes in the European Parliament are conducted by simple majority (i.e. the majority of those present and voting) and some votes by absolute majority (i.e. the majority of the house, thus currently at least 376 out of 751). Germany's 96 MEPs have a substantial weight in the procedure, but they do not necessarily always vote coherently. Topics such as euro area reforms, EU investment initiatives or the EU budget remain controversial among German MEPs, depending on their party family.

Turnout. Germany not only has more MEPs than any other country, also the German voter turnout tends to be higher than the EU average (2014: 47.9% vs 43%, Chart 8). Germany is one of the few countries where turnout has increased lately against a general EU-wide declining trend. The increase in 2014 was partly attributed to the fact that for the first time the system of Spitzenkandidat was applied, with the German Martin Schulz running for S&D and Jean-Claude Juncker for the EPP. It remains to be seen if the candidacy of the German Manfred Weber, running for the EPP, will motivate as many or even more voters in Germany than in 2014. Recent polls indicate that Germans not really subscribe to the notion that this year's EP election might be a "Schicksalswahl" (vital election)⁵. However, two-thirds of Germans intend to vote this time, according to another poll.

Fragmentation. The number of parties and political associations that have registered for the election reach up to 41 – another significant increase compared to the 25 registered in 2014. Whether this can be assigned to an increased importance of the EU elections in the eyes of German voters or whether it merely reflects the fragmented German political landscape is difficult to answer. It might also just be due to the fact that for the EP elections, there is no German electoral threshold. And as Germany forms a single constituency in the elections (unlike some other EU members), this gives also small parties the chance to win seats in the EP. The flipside of this democratic opportunity is that it can be more difficult to leverage coherent German positions in the EP (even though a "German" position is not foreseen in the institutional setup of the EP anyway).

And why does it matter for the German domestic landscape?

National issues and parties' domestic popularity usually dominate EU campaign debates in Germany, as in other EU member states as well. The focus of media attention on the performance of anti-European populist parties will not significantly alter that. This trend is unlikely to change in 2019 – rather to the contrary. Uncertainty regarding the fate of the current "grand coalition" led by Chancellor Merkel remains elevated. To this adds the planned December review of the government coalition by the SPD to assess whether it serves the electorate (read: the party) appropriately. Differences in the coalition partners'

⁵ IfD Allensbach in FAZ (28.03.2019).



election platforms will therefore be scrutinized over signals of potential policy divergence and conflicts.

Moreover: Together with the EU elections there will be an election in the tiny German state of Bremen as well as eight elections in municipalities across the country. And important elections in the eastern states of Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia are looming in autumn. Parties will be inclined to interpret the EP elections as a signal for success or failure of their national strategies. For the CDU/CSU, media continuously speculate that a weak performance in the EU elections could trigger a faster transition from Merkel to her possible successor Annegret Kramp Karrenbauer (AKK), not least to improve the party's standing in the critical state elections in eastern Germany.

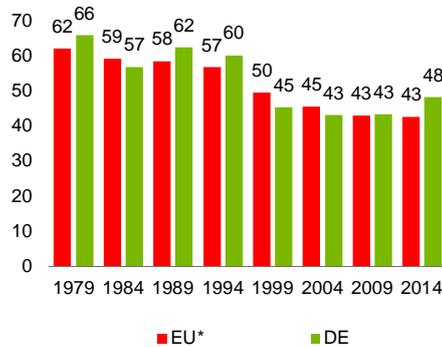
We would caution, however, to expect such a move in the short-term. Impediments to elect a new chancellor under the current coalition are high as are those to call for snap elections. In case of the SPD, a poor outcome of the EP elections and/or a loss of the Bremen elections could strengthen the camp within the party that calls for leaving the grand coalition and reposition the SPD as the largest opposition party. Again, however, there remain strong reasons against an early end of the grand coalition (Focus Germany Special, Jan 2019).

In terms of European matters one should also remember that Germany will hold the EU presidency in the second half of 2020 (for the first time in 13 years). The SPD might be less inclined to allow AKK to use such an occasion to improve her visibility beyond Germany. With the grand coalition still intact and Merkel in office, though, Finance Minister Scholz (SPD) could leverage his presence alongside Merkel on the European stage in order to strengthen the SPD's image and prepare himself for a chancellor candidacy in the 2021 elections.

German EU elections turnout above EU average

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European elections turnout (%)



Note: 1979: EU9, 1984: EU10, 1989/94: EU12, 1999: EU15, 2004: EU25, 2009: EU27, 2014: EU28

Source: TNS/Scytl in cooperation with the European Parliament

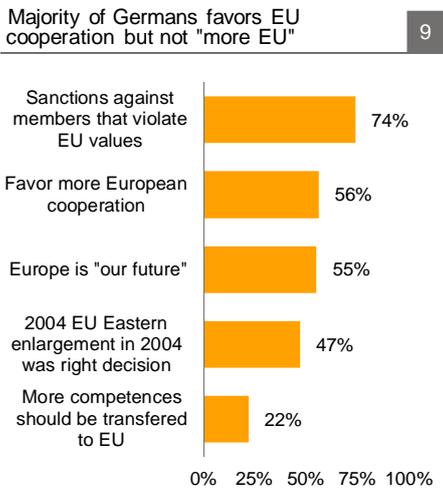
How are the efforts of CDU and SPD to sharpen their profiles reflected in their view on Europe?

Since the beginning of the grand coalition, the SPD and the CDU/CSU have been trying to walk the line between cooperative policy making and strengthening their respective political profile ahead of the next federal election. The EU election manifestos now offer the chance to be more outspoken on certain policy positions without directly endangering the ruling coalition. In a sense, the manifestos, despite their focus on the EU agenda, can be regarded as a test run for singling out the programmatic differences between these mainstream parties.

The CDU – for the first time – has presented a joint European manifesto with its conservative Bavarian sister party CSU. This is a reconciliation between the two parties under the new leader Kramp-Karrenbauer but is also owed to the fact that Manfred Weber who hails from the CSU is campaigning as Spitzenkandidat of the EPP for the helm of the EU Commission with the explicit support of Kramp-Karrenbauer and Merkel. Thus, the CSU had to adopt a somehow softer tone in its European views than in previous European elections. Chancellor Merkel has notably taken a backseat in her party's electoral campaign, leaving it almost entirely to Kramp-Karrenbauer who succeeded her as CDU party leader last year and the CDU/CSU top candidate Weber.



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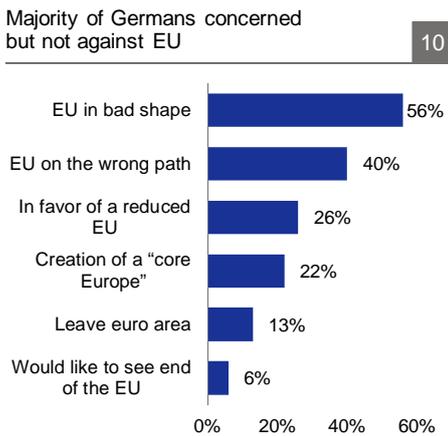


Sources: IfD Allensbach (FAZ, 28.03.2019), Körber Stiftung/Berlin Pulse 2018/19

The CDU/CSU manifesto includes a strong commitment to the EU and its institutions. It appears to be rather status quo oriented with slogans such as "For Germany's future. Our Europe" displaying a lack of appetite to push for changes despite the unresolved current debates over euro area stability, defence capacities or migration (Chart 11).

The reluctance to discuss a vision for future European reforms can also be read from AKK's response earlier this year to French President Macron's agenda for Europe. While Macron in his letter to the European citizens regards the upcoming elections as a fight against anti-EU populist forces and the need to defend Western/European values, AKK suggested that the elections should be about "getting Europe right" and adapt to the contest of systems with China and the US.⁶

The SPD is facing significant losses in the upcoming elections which has prompted the party to turn more to the left on fundamental issues. The string of initiatives it has unveiled on a national level to revive its social democratic credentials extend to its European manifesto as well. In a sense it also aligns more closely with Macron's visions for Europe. The SPD endorses a social Europe with EU-wide minimum wages, convergence of European social insurance systems and a European social fund. In that sense, it is much closer to the French proposals for further EMU integration and risk sharing than its conservative coalition partners.



Source: IfD Allensbach (FAZ, 28.03.2019)

Almost the (mainstream) antipodes in their EU approach – what are the Greens' and Liberals' positions? What about the Left?

The Greens could be on the way to replace the SPD as the second strongest party in the European elections. They are the only party that is explicitly campaigning on a strong integrationist approach to the EU. They propose a deepening of the economic, monetary and social union and demand more action on climate change and European foreign policy. The Greens back highly controversial issues such as EDIS, a euro area budget reaching 1% of EU GDP over the medium-term, a common fiscal policy with a double hat for the EU Commissioner for Economy and Finance and the Eurogroup chair and an EU-wide unemployment reinsurance system. They are rather restrictive on business-related topics such as the plea for a harmonized corporate tax, enforcement on climate targets or minimum wages.

As on the national level, the program of the German Liberals (FDP) for the EU elections is built around a clear commitment to market economy and the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. scrutinizing which responsibilities should be carried out by the member states' or lie on the EU level (Chart 14). They call for further strengthening of the single market, banking union (though keeping the deposit insurance on national level) and capital markets union. The EU budget should be reformed to allow more funds allocated to meeting the EU's future challenges such as digitization. EU cooperation in foreign and security policy or migration should be intensified. Euro area stability should be improved without sliding into a transfer union.

The German Die Linke ("The Left") ranks close to the FDP in EU election polls. It presents itself as an anti-establishment party highly critical of free trade agreements, EU defence spending, German NATO membership and EU austerity policies. The Left cannot be categorized as fundamentally Eurosceptic, even though the party is internally divided on the issue, frequently criticises EU treaties, institutions and policies and struggles with a clear commitment to the

⁶ Kramp-Karrenbauer (2019). Making Europe Right. Die Welt (10.03.2019).



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German parties' EU election manifestos (excerpts)

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CDU/CSU

"Our Europe – our Strength. For Security, Peace and Prosperity"

Reject European minister of finance as well as the mutualisation of debt or risks (e.g. through issuing Eurobonds or introducing a joint unemployment insurance); strict observance and enforcement of Stability and Growth Pact and of the Fiscal Compact; develop the banking union and capital market union with focus on stability aspects, requires reduction of risks in the banking system; adoption of basic European labor standards as well as health, environmental and consumer protection standards; prevent abuse of the social welfare system of individual EU members; effective protection of external borders, strengthen FRONTEX, fight illegal migration on EU level, keep number of refugees permanently low; majority decisions in foreign and security policy and abandon the principle of unanimity, establishment of a European Security Council with UK, joint European armed forces by 2030; give the European Parliament right of legislative initiative.

SPD

"Come together and make Europe strong!"

Supports euro area budget and economic government for EMU stability and investment incl. European economics and finance minister, upgrade of ESM towards EMF; financial transaction tax; European minimum wages, convergence of wages within EU, European social insurances, improvement in social and labor standards, establishment of European workers' councils, European fund for unemployment insurance; Dublin system on European asylum policy through-based distribution key, expansion of EU resettlement program, European rules for legal immigration; European army; European foreign minister; right of legislative initiative for the European Parliament, European party lists; increased German contribution to EU budget, link receipts from EU budget to observance of EU rule of law.

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Greens)

"Renewing the promise of Europe"

Euro area budget of at least 1% of GDP for EMU stabilization and investment, European unemployment insurance scheme, finalization of banking union including EDIS, transformation of ESM into EMF under control of the European Parliament and national parliaments; increase EU budget to 1.3% of GDP, more spending on climate change and social/energy union; European unemployment insurance, European minimum wage, free movement of labor also for non-EU member countries citizens; legal and secure ways for migration and refugees, common migration policy and laws within Europe with fair distribution of migrants; majority votes on European foreign, defence and tax policy; joint European defence and security policy, no increase of defence spending.

Sources : CDU/CSU, SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen EU elections party manifestos

European Union. Its reform agenda for a "social" Europe focuses of EU-wide social minimum standards, a European unemployment insurance, EU-wide minimum wages and pensions and public initiatives against youth unemployment.

Will the AfD be able to leverage the pan-European populist sentiment?

The "**Alternative für Deutschland**" (AfD) was originally founded as a conservative Eurosceptic party but, following the 2015 migrant crisis and a change of the party leadership, it moved increasingly to the far-right with a strong focus on migration and identity politics (see Chart 14).

Anti-EU and anti-euro sentiment is not strongly established among Germans compared to several EU peers and anti-EU rhetoric does not seem to resonate strongly among a larger share of the electorate. This might also be the reason why the AfD – like other Eurosceptic parties across the EU – has backtracked from an outright call for Germany to leave the Union. However, "DEXIT" is still listed in their party manifesto as an option of last resort, in case the EU does not succeed with "fundamental reforms" in the next electoral cycle. These "reforms" call into question the fundamental legitimacy of the European institutional setup, by calling for the abolition of the EP as an undemocratic institution and for returning full legislative power to member states.

Compared to other EU countries where Eurosceptic parties are among the frontrunners in the EU elections such as in Italy, France and the Netherlands, the performance of the German AfD is rather modest. In fact, in recent months, the AfD's share in polls has leveled off at around 11% which is close to its result in the federal elections in 2017 (12.6%). The AfD and its top candidate for the EP elections Jörg Meuthen have joined Italian Lega leader and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in his effort to form a new "European Alliance of Peoples and Nations". The aim of this alliance is to unite right-wing Eurosceptic parties in the EP currently divided mainly among three groups in the EP (ENF, ECR and EFDD).⁷ We remain doubtful, however, to what extent anti-EU and nationalistic groups in the EP will be able to overcome their previous discrepancies and build a significantly more united bloc.

Weber & Co – what about the top candidates that lead the German parties in the election campaigns?

The seven parties currently represented in the German Bundestag have nominated nine top candidates to lead their parties' campaigns for the European elections and to top their national lists of candidates for the next EP.

The top candidate for the European Parliament elections of CDU/CSU is **Manfred Weber** from the CSU, currently chairman of the conservative EPP faction in the EP. He was also elected as the EPP's lead candidate and frontrunner to succeed Jean-Claude Juncker at the helm of the European Commission. It is the first time that CDU and CSU run with a joint candidate (CDU abstained from an own candidate after Weber's nomination for the EPP). Even though Weber's campaign is supported by Chancellor Merkel and the CDU/CSU leadership, he has been keen to stress that he is the EPP's candidate first and foremost and is not just representing German views. His 12 "guarantees" for a "strong", "smart" and "kind" Europe presented to the voters are broad enough to cover voters' views from a rather wide spectrum ranging from conservatives to liberals, greens and social democrats. While this might

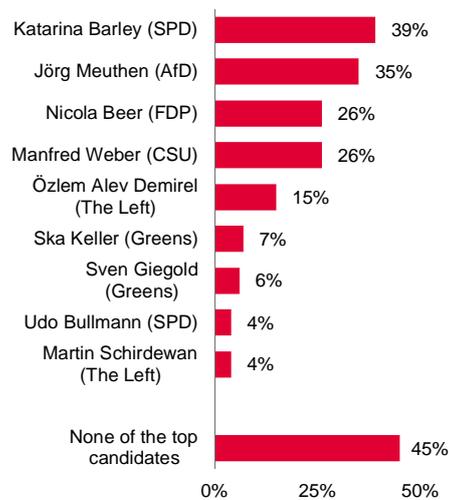
⁷ euronews (08.04.2019).



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Most top candidates for EU elections unknown to German voters **12**

2019 survey: Do you know German parties' top candidates for the EU elections? (Yes, %)



Sources: YouGov/dpa

help to find the cross-faction consensus in the next EP required to become Commission President, it might be less effective in mobilizing conservative voters at home. With his most recent intervention against the building of Nord Stream 2, Weber even puts himself against the official German government position.

The SPD's top candidate for the European elections, [Katarina Barley](#) is currently Germany's Federal Minister of Justice. After the May elections she will switch to the European Parliament. The SPD's second lead candidate, [Udo Bullmann](#), is currently chairman of the S&D group in the European Parliament.

The two top candidates for the Green party [Ska Keller](#) and [Sven Giegold](#) are also members of the EP already. Ska Keller was also nominated as one of the two co-lead candidates of the European Greens for the next President of the European Commission (even though her chances to win the post are considered negligible as the European Greens range in polls for the next EP at only 7% and are not represented in the European Council).

The Liberals' top candidate for the EP elections is the party's general secretary, [Nicola Beer](#). The far-left Linke starts with two top candidates, [Özlem Alev Demirel](#) and [Martin Schirdewan](#), both without previous experience in European politics. [Jörg Meuthen](#), the top candidate of the far-right AfD has been a member of the current EP since 2017 and known for his controversial political rhetoric.

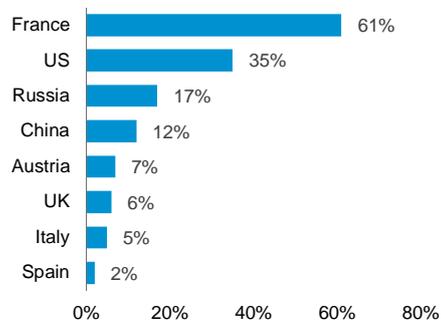
While the nomination of lead candidates is supposed to give German parties' electoral campaigns a more personalised profile, a recent survey shows that most candidates are unknown to the majority of the electorate (Chart 12)⁸. Only 39% stated to know SPD top candidate Barley while in case of the CDU/CSU top candidate Weber the number is even lower at 26%. This further underlines the fact that despite the EU's and national parties' efforts, the European elections appear to remain rather secondary in voters' perception.

Do Franco-German relations play a prominent role in the parties' campaigns?

No, not really. At a time when differences in the German-French relationship seem to prevail, reference to a shared vision for Europe cannot be found in the parties' electoral programs. This appears to be left to more symbolic actions such as the so-called Treaty of Aachen signed by Germany and France in January 2019.

Germans consider France their most important partner **13**

2018 survey: Which country is Germany's most or second most important partner?



Quelle: Körber Stiftung/Berlin Pulse 2018/19

Chancellor Merkel remained rather silent on more fundamental ideas for Europe's future. Instead of her, CDU party leader Kramp-Karrenbauer responded to Macron's call for a renaissance of Europe⁹. While the two agree on the need for a common external border control and asylum policy and to strengthen defence efforts, AKK rejected any vision of a centralistic European "superstate" and stressed that the work of EU institutions cannot claim any moral superiority over the joint effort of national governments. This shows that also under a possible chancellor AKK, it seems rather unlikely that Germany's European policy agenda will become more ambitious, in particular with regard to proposals for deepening the euro area.

Where Franco-German interests overlap, though, the two countries are likely to continue their traditional cooperation and push ahead with joint initiatives on the EU level. One case in point are demands for a new EU industrial and competition policy as laid down in the initiative of the German Economy Minister

⁸ Die Welt (24.04.2019).

⁹ Kramp-Karrenbauer (2019). Making Europe Right. Die Welt (10.03.2019).



EU elections countdown #4

German parties' EU election manifestos (excerpts)

14

AfD

"Out of love for Germany. Freedom instead of Brussels"

Leave euro area, reject further EMU integration such as the strengthening of the ESM, against European finance minister and further consolidation of banking union; "Dexit" as final consequence if reforms not undertaken, abolishment of European Parliament due to "democracy deficits"; return decisions on migration to national level, against closer cooperation in border control (Frontex) and defence, re-establishment of national borders and the abolition of the Schengen area; rejection of taxes on the European level, no harmonization of corporate taxes; rejection of European social union, rejection of European social policies and standards; no increase of EU budget, cut budget to compensate for post-Brexit shortfalls, end cohesion spending, reduce EU administration costs.

FDP

"Use Europe's Opportunities"

New stability pact for euro area, upgrade ESM to EMF, strengthening of banking union (but deposit insurance on national level), warrant independence of ECB, completion of capital markets union, rejection of transfer union; strengthening of the federal character and principle of subsidiarity of the EU; establishment of European migration policy based on labour market requirements, reform of the Dublin-system towards a common European asylum system, upgrade of Europol/Frontex; European minister of foreign affairs; expansion of European armed forces; establishment of European armed forces; no increase of EU budget, improve spending efficiency, more spending on R&D/digital infrastructure investment, reform of cohesion/ regional policy.

Die Linke (The Left)

"For a Europe of solidarity of the millions, against a European Union of the millionaires"

Change of EU treaties (Maastricht, Lisbon); full employment as further ECB objective, bring ECB under "democratic decisions and control" of European Parliament; end of austerity policy; transfer of power from Commission to Parliament, give Parliament legislative initiative; European minimum wages, abolishment of temporary employments, public employment programs for EU members, EU-wide social minimum standards and social insurances; abolishment of free trade agreements; abolishment of NATO, abolishment of arms exports, reject European defence agency and defence cooperation; against defence spending from EU budget, increase environmental budget, not cuts to cohesion spending.

Sources : AfD, FDP, Die Linke EU elections party manifestos

Peter Altmaier and his French counterpart Bruno Le Maire. Back in Germany, however, this advance to nurture national champions and provide politicians with an instrument to overrule competition and anti-trust decisions by the Commission is meeting increasing resistance. In a post-Brexit world, the German-French relations might face some rebalancing as well.

What do German EU election polls imply for Germany's post-Merkel European policy course?

All major German political parties with exception of the right-wing AfD and to some extent the Leftist party are firmly pro-European. Shifts of voters' support between these parties – either in the European Parliament or in the next German federal elections – will therefore not have a substantial impact on Germany's generally pro-European stance. However, these parties still represent different views on the future of the EU.

When it comes to EMU deepening, SPD and Greens support French plans for risk sharing and convergence of social insurance systems on the European level while CDU/CSU and FDP are much closer to the "Hanseatic League" of Nordic countries which call for fiscal discipline and commitment to the stability and growth pact instead of what they see as additional vehicles for transferring funds between EU members. Also in other European policy areas such as size and spending priorities of the next EU budget, European collaboration on defence and migration as well as industrial and tax policy, German parties differ. Increasingly feeling the need to set themselves apart from each other and to return to their ideological roots in order to mobilise disenfranchised voters, centrist parties' room for compromise is narrowing both on domestic and European politics.

This dilemma has accompanied the current grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD from the beginning and is also reflected in the European chapter of the coalition treaty. But also alternatives, such as a CDU/CSU coalition with the Greens – often referred to as a distinct possibility – would have a long list of controversial EU positions. This would become even more difficult should the idea of a Jamaica coalition with the FDP be revived. But also a leftist SPD-led coalition together with the Greens and the Leftist party would face similar if not even larger obstacles. As none of these parties currently consider a coalition with the far-right AfD, the number of options remains limited.

Which of these will be pursued will also determine to what extent the post-Merkel German government, whether following the 2021 elections or earlier, will be open to further European deepening and collaboration, in particular regarding euro area reforms; or to what extent the government could become more reluctant to further compromise and more defensive on what it considers as German interest in Europe and beyond. On the European level, the election of the next Commission President will also require broad consensus across several pro-European groups in the next European Parliament. This could serve as a case study for coalition building and compromise in the German Bundestag and government following the next parliamentary elections.

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