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LETTER OF THE EDITORS

Europe is once again heading for the voting booths. With the rise of nationalist, populist and right-wing extremist parties across the union, this election is of critical importance. It is not only about which parties will win but also the type of values that the voters would like to promote at the European level. It is about the future of Europe, the type of cooperation it would like to pursue in the upcoming years, and the policies it would implement. It is an election between the right and the left ideologies.

The European Parliament Elections raises concerns in every aspect of life in Europe. How will the election impact feminist movements? What is the role of religion in the European elections and how do parties mobilize anti-Islamic rhetoric to attract voters? How can the youth in Europe be mobilized to participate in the election and increase turnout? These are some of the key questions which will be discussed by various articles in this issue.

Other articles look at the role of democracy in the European Union and how a higher turnout can increase the legitimacy of this polity. You will also read about how Swedish parties in the European parliament position themselves in relation to climate change, migration, and how they envision the future of Europe. The issue further covers articles on how recent events, such as Brexit and the rise of right wing parties, would impact the upcoming European parliament elections and shape the future of the union.

Categorization of political parties at the European level remains a mystery to a majority of voters in the upcoming election. This issue thus contains an article which looks at the different groupings within the European parliament and how different national parties ally with others at the regional level to maximize their interests and promote their political agenda, at home and in Europe.

Despite the continuous concerns, critical debates and the blurred future of Europe, a majority of the articles emphasizes a valuable point: to vote!

Since participation in the election is a key pillar of democracy, we hope that this issue will serve as an encouragement to take more youth to the voting booths and engage them.

**The editors,
Nazifa Alizada
Egil Sturk**

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CLIMATE, MIGRATION AND THE FUTURE OF EU

Panel discussion in Gothenburg

26th May, the Election Day for the European Parliament, is just around the corner. But, what political issues are of the most significance to voters in this election and how different political parties in Sweden position themselves in relation to each of these issues?

On 29th April, Utrikespolitiska förening i Göteborg in cooperation with Europa Direkt Göteborgs-regionen, Ungdomsperspektivet and Angereds Ungdomsråd have arranged a panel debate with representatives of all the nine Swedish political parties that are represented in the European Parliament. Climate, migration issues, and the future of the European Union were three of the main themes discussed by the panel.



CLIMATE CHANGE:

Climate change is one of the main issues both for the Swedish parties and voters in the upcoming European Parliament election. Although the issue has been debated a lot in the European level over the recent years, the discussions have barely led to any practical results. The global temperature continues to rise, glaciers continue to melt, the sea levels continue to rise, and worsening drought and floods occur in different part of the world.

Nevertheless, how do the Swedish actors within the European Parliament position themselves in relation to these challenges? How would EU as an organization work to save the earth?

While science has shown a clear relationship between human activities and climate change, some policy makers and politicians within the European Parliament remain skeptical and question the “reality” of climate change. Others, who accept climate change as a “reality”, suggest completely different approaches in tackling the issue, making it difficult to practically make changes in the European level.

The nine Swedish parties that are represented in the European Parliament have a broad consensus that climate change is “real” and should be taken seriously by political actors in the global level. According to the party Moderaterna, EU is an important arena for tackling climate change because as a unified body, it can make a huge impact in the global level. Liberalerna and Centerpartiet add that CO2 emissions move beyond borders and thus, EU is the best platform to handle climate change collectively. Socialdemokraterna also agrees that climate change should be addressed in the European level and that every member state should take their responsibility in reducing the emissions.



Sverigedemokraterna thinks that climate issue cannot be solved unless countries like India and China, with high CO2 emissions, are also involved in the process.

Kristdemokraterna mentions that the main challenge with global warming and climate change is that it has to do with economic growth and productions. Economy and employment are built on factors which lead to global warming, making it difficult to tackle the issue.

The green party, Miljöpartiet, however takes a more acute tone arguing that “we are the last generation who have the opportunity to save the world” and that we need to implement a more “radical climate politics”. Vänster party agrees that urgent concrete actions should be taken within EU to address climate change. Building on these two, the Feministiskt initiativ party highlights that women and low income countries are affected the hardest by global warming caused by the industrial part of the world.

As the debate shows, all the nine Swedish parties agree that climate change is a “real” threat and needs to be taken seriously in the present time, and that global and European solutions are necessary. The Swedish parties however have diverse approaches in achieving this broad goal when it comes to implementation and budget distribution, making the decision making process challenging at home and in the regional level.



MIGRATION:

In 2015, an unprecedented number of refugees from war-affected countries, like Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, took the hazardous Mediterranean journey to reach to Europe. The unexpectedly huge number of refugees reaching to Europe within a short amount of time, combined with the growing death of refugees during this journey, has turned the issue into a core agenda for the policy makers in Europe.

Four years since the so called 2015 refugee “crisis”, migration and integration remain as one of the most heated and vastly debated issues in Sweden and in Europe.

While some parties within the European Parliament argue for a more humanitarian, collective and sustainable refugee policy, others emphasize on helping refugees in their home countries and reducing the number to the minimum possible level. In the second part of the panel discussion, the party representatives have debated how Europe should position itself in relation to migration in the upcoming years.

Socialdemokraterna argue that all member states need to accept the collective responsibility in order to achieve a sustainable migration politics in the European level. In Socialdemokraterna’s words, “EU should not work as a cash

machine”, and countries like Hungary and Poland should not be able to receive grants from EU when they refuse to accept immigrants. Miljöpartiet supports Socialdemokraterna’s position and argues for a more humanitarian migration politics in the European level. Similarly, Liberalerna build their argument on the European Union’s “openness”, “tolerance”, and “free movement”. According to them, to protect these values, everyone should take their share.

Feministiskt initiativ and Vänster parties add that asylum is a human rights and needs to be strengthened and protected in Europe. Vänster party mentions the need for investing in life saving missions instead of building walls across Europe, and Feministiskt initiativ says that people who seek help in the European borders should be helped to come inside.

Sverigedemokraterna; on the contrary, argues that rather than spending the resources on immigrants in the receiving countries, it should be spent in the “local” scale and in the immigrants’ home countries so that they do not require the need to come to Europe. Moderaterna’s representative challenges Sverigedemokraterna’s position arguing that coming to Europe is not everyone’s ultimate purpose. Rather, people are forced to flee war, starvation, violence against women and other forms of challenges. Moderaterna and Kristdemokraterna argue that migration requires a long-term, European solution.

Similar to climate change issue, the “existence” of migration as a core challenge is the sole thing all the nine Swedish parties agree on. Questions such as who and how many should (not) be allowed to enter Europe, and how much resources should be invested in refugees, should the assistance be done more locally or globally, who should take the responsibility, and how to divide the responsibility continue to divide the Swedish as well as the European parliament.

THE FUTURE OF EU

Discussing the future of EU and each party’s vision about this institution is interesting in the post-Brexit context. The Brexit vote on its initial days has inspired the Vänster and Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden to call for abandoning EU. However, Brexit’s practical complexities combined with the upcoming EU-elections have made them to adopt a more cautious tone in this regard. At the present, both argue for being part of the institution as a way to bring changes from inside. The third part of the panel debate has focused on the participating parties’ vision of EU.

Sweden’s most pro-EU party, Liberalerna, highlights the positive aspects of EU, such as reduced unemployment, improved economic, free movement across borders, and better access to education. According to Liberalerna, EU is a functioning institution but there are spheres in which the cooperation between countries could deepen even further. Center party supports Liberalerna’s position arguing that Europe has a lot of positive aspects which have the potential to be strengthened even further.

Vänster party however challenges Liberalerna’s and Center’s arguments stating that majority of the issues discussed in EU level could be handled better and more effectively in the national level. Sverigedemokraterna too takes a different approach saying that they do support all sorts of cooperation between countries. Yet, they would like to see lesser EU influence and a greater responsibility for the governments in the national level.

Kristdemokraterna nonetheless disagrees with both the positions, stating that the debate is not about the institution itself, but about the politicians and policy makers who are part of the institution.

Socialdemokraterna says that they believe in EU

but the institution needs to impose stricter requirements on all its members to achieve equality and better employment opportunities in the European level. Feministiskt initiativ also defines itself as an EU-positive party and considers EU as a global actor for climate change and human rights. Similar to Socialdemokraterna, Feministiskt initiativ believes that EU should put pressure on the members such as Hungary and Poland to accept their collective responsibility.

As the content of the debate shows, the parties have by no means a shared EU vision and the future of the EU remains unclear and blurred.

The upcoming election is thus a defining moment in shaping the future of EU since the votes determine to what extent the corporations should continue and how would this organization look in the future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The panel debate has ended with a short question session from public. Censor in the internet and the latest internet privacy laws, IS fighters with European origins and whether or not the European countries should accept them, and same sex marriage and abortion rights in the European level were some of the issues brought up.

TEXT: Nazifa Alizada
PHOTOS: Mia Lindbäck

ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES ON TOUR IN EUROPE

So, here we are, in a still-not-post-Brexit time, with conservative winds shaking not just the barley but also perspectives on equality and feminism. In Sweden, we have spent the last year discussing on social media whether 'feminism' has become an outdated trend or not, a debate that somewhat culminated when Greta Thurfjell's article *Huskvinnans Återkomst* (eng; the return of the housewife) was published in *Dagens Nyheter* in October 2018. In this article, Thurfjell asks if it is possible to be "political progressive" and yet strive for conservative values and traditions in private sphere, challenging the classic feminist slogan "the personal is political". Feminism have become boring and untrendy, Thurfjell argues, and that is why there is a "forbidden excitement" to be a "bad" feminist; "It feels... a bit cool". She states that she can choose to be a housewife and just as easily choose not to be, and that she does not think there is an actual threat to women's rights,

"Sweden have always been on the cutting edge regarding women's rights, it is grounded".

In an unquestionable conscious way, Thurfjell continues to provoke the (supposedly) dominant feminist discourse throughout the article – i.e. stating that she "loves it when men explain things to her", that she wants to be provided for and that she feel progressive when she calls women, disagrees with, for "cunts" – but the most interesting part is not the article itself, but the very existence of it and the debates following it. With the EU- elections right around the corner, we cannot ignore the fact that Swedish feminism is under (white) conservative questioning, or even

more importantly, that it is not an isolated phenomenon.

As some scholars would argue, we have adhered to the imagination of Europe being on the path to "total" equality. If (and only if) racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic values still remain, it is considered to be a problem existing mainly in Eastern Europe or in Catholic countries like Northern Ireland – not in the "modern West".

The majority of research regarding anti-gender movements in Europe has been bound by state boundaries and explanations have been sought in the national context where the movements operate. Nevertheless, as Elzbieta Korolczuk states, "recent mobilization against 'genderisation', 'gender ideology' or the 'gender lobby' is not only a local trend". In fact, there are significant similarities between anti-gender movements in Europe, and they are not bound to a specific European country. The different movements find inspiration in one another, adapting each other's values, theories and rhetoric, and even though the understanding of 'gender ideology' (in Sweden adapted and reformulated as 'genusflum' by the party *Kristdemokraterna*) might shift, the main premise in all these movements is that gender studies, feminism, LGBT-movements and so on is a threat to the western society and even mankind as such.

The term 'gender ideology' refers to how activists and researchers try to force (horrid) ethical and social reforms like same-sex marriage, legal abortion, IVF and gender equality upon people. They fear that the outcome of these reforms will lead to restrictions of democratic fundamentals such as freedom of speech and the freedom of

choice. Or, as *Kristdemokraterna* writes on their webpage regarding feminism,

"Kristdemokraterna is a party that stands for full equality between men and women. Feminism has many different orientations and the word 'feminism' many different meanings. We are concerned about the growing left-feminism that wants to restrict the citizens' freedom in favor for gender theory."

theory and liquidate gender studies over time. As an answer, the party board wrote that they agree that universities and research should not be controlled by ideologies and political visions, instead "all research and education should be scientific and proven", and clarified that they "already is pursuing politics for sober gender studies". One must say that "sober gender studies" is rather unclear, however, it indicates that gender studies can be out of control.



So; apparently, gender studies equals restriction of rights – not a very unique thought in European anti-gender movements, and here a party in the Swedish and European Parliament merges it into their rhetoric. One of the top candidates of *Kristdemokraterna* for the European Parliament, Sara Skyttedal, tweeted that she "dreams of stopping the subvention to the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research", and even though it is a radical statement, she is not alone with that dream.

Sverigedemokraternas' youth association, *Ungsvenskarna*, wrote a nongovernment bill questioning the 'science' of gender studies in 2017. They stated that it is just a matter of opinion if power relations between gender, race, sexuality and class exist or not, and because many researchers wants to "change society into a feminist direction" it must be considered as a political and ideological orientation, not science. Therefore, they want to cut all the subventions to every educational program that involves gender

Nevertheless, it is important to underline that neither *Kristdemokraterna* nor *Sverigedemokraterna* would define themselves as anti-gender movements or parties, and that is a whole other discussion, but it is noticeable that the rhetoric about gender studies and feminism follow the same logic as the European anti-gender movements. These discourses are not isolated but often relate to right wing extremist formations.

Parties and other political formations with anti-gender agendas are experts of turning their (often hateful) messages into a rhetoric that feels somewhat reliable and sane, making them cross borders (a paradox, isn't it?) and gain ground around Europe. If there is one thing we can learn from this, it is that discourses and politics in European countries are affecting all of Europe, whether we like it or not. And we should not ignore that fact while voting in the European election.



DEMOCRACY AS A LEGITIMIZING TOOL FOR THE EU

“Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.”
(Treaty of Lisbon, 2007, Title II Article 8A.3)

The sovereignty principle allows all states to make decisions on their own without the interference of an external party. However, the EU is able to make states implement certain policies as the EU laws have supremacy over national laws. This among other things has led to the debate on the legitimacy of the EU.

International organisations like the UN and EU depend on legitimacy as a compliance tool. Unlike individual states, the EU does not have a monopoly on violence and therefore cannot use force to demand obedience; hence, the need for legitimacy. When people see institutions as legitimate, the cost of compliance is reduced as they willingly obey the decisions of the institutions. States cannot be pressured to delegate powers to the EU, so when they willingly give out such powers, they should in turn be ready to follow the laws decided by the EU.

The term legitimacy does not have a generally accepted definition in the academic arena. However, for an institution to be considered legitimate, it must be widely believed to have the right to rule and meet certain criteria.

There are different ways of achieving legitimacy, and this article focuses on achieving legitimacy through democracy. Critics of the EU claim

lem of democratic deficit.

The degree of democracy in the EU has been an issue of debate for a long time. Democracy to a large extent is one of the pillars of legitimacy; therefore, for an institution to be legitimate, it must be democratic. The concept of democracy has to do with participation and involvement of citizens in the decision making process.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, democracy is “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections”.

This definition of democracy has been incorporated in the EU whereby citizens of the European Union elect candidates they deem suitable to represent them in decision making at the EU parliament. Definition-wise, the European parliament

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that there is a democratic deficit in the EU and therefore doubt the legitimacy of the organisation.

A clear majority of Europeans are still pro- EU but the political participation of the citizens in elections may just as well be a depiction of the dissatisfaction of citizens which resulted in a 43% turnout during the parliamentary election. The EU has however taken steps to address the lack of democracy, but critics claim that the taken measures are inadequate in fixing the prob-

is a democratic organ because members of the parliament are directly elected by the people. On the other hand, the powers vested in other organs of the EU have been criticised as they are not directly chosen by the people and therefore not accountable to people.

The union has; however, put in place measures to ensure that the EU is more democratic. In the Lisbon treaty of 2007, which was meant to improve democracy in the union, more power was delegated to both the national parliaments

A Case of 'Us' and 'Them':

RELIGION IN EUROPEAN POLITICS

and the European parliament to increase the influence of the electorates. National parliaments were to act as a check and balance, and could challenge the laws that they believed to be decided at a national rather than EU level.

A critical drawback on the powers of the European parliament is its inability to propose laws. Instead, they must ask the commission to propose laws as the only law-making authority. To address this issue, under the Lisbon treaty, a citizen initiative scheme was introduced whereby proposals signed by at least one million citizens by a member state was to be considered by the European commission. The citizen initiative aimed to bring the politics of the EU to grassroots level and increase public participation in the affairs of the union.

Although critics say that this is an insufficient and ineffective way to tackle the democratic deficit as the commission is under no legal obligation to act on proposals initiated by citizens.

Another area of critic in the Union is that of accountability and transparency. The election process makes the EU parliament the only accountable organ to the people. Other existing organs within the EU are appointed positions and cannot therefore be held accountable.

Since its establishment, the EU has gone through different processes to improve the democracy within the system. However, reasons for the democratic deficit may not only lie within the EU itself but with the people. Some policies may require a high level of knowledge to comprehend and this may lead to a further lack of interest.

The lack of interest leads to apathy and furthermore towards lack of participation in the democratic processes such as election.

The more politically interested and actively participated in already existing channels of democracy the citizens of the European Union are, the more they can demand for change and more democracy.

For the EU to survive, a union which promoted peace among its members, as well as free movement of people, goods and service, the issues of the democratic deficit needs to be addressed and new ways to increase public participation must be encouraged. Because of the supremacy of European laws over national laws, the need for democratic legitimacy cannot be over-emphasized as these laws greatly affect the lives of the citizens in its member states. This raises the urgent need to ensure that EU citizens are involved in the decision-making process as greatly as possible.

For much of the western world, the separation of the state from religion has long been held as the ideal relationship between the two in the matter of governance. In Europe, this ideology arose during the Enlightenment period (17th to 19th century), espoused by philosophers such as John Locke, and manifested itself as an ideological response to periods of war and turmoil throughout Europe that stemmed from the intertwining of religion with monarch rule. In the United States, thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson have been held responsible for the idea of state secularisation, pointing to thoughts expressed in the early 19th century that placed emphasis on a line of demarcation between the church and the state. Secularisation ideology has become 'liberal' and 'progressive' over time, causing for boundaries to be established by nation states in how they interact with the church and the reduced reliance on religious doctrines to shape political ideologies and actions. The importance of theology is reduced, and rationalism takes the central stage.



Pope Francis talks with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, left, during their private audience at the Vatican, Monday, March 5, 2018. (Credit: Gregorio Borgia/AP)

What we now see to an even more profound degree, however, is what some academics have described as the “de-privatization” and “re-politization” of religion on a global scale.

In the case of Europe, Christianity has re-emerged in political discourse, finding itself well positioned in political campaigns, and its influence on political decisions being recognizable.

Political figures across Europe have been seen and heard from time to time, facilitating this re-emergence.

Chair of the European People’s Party (EPP) Manfred Weber, is set to become the leader of the European Commission. Having gained endorsement from Angela Merkel and being declared the ‘Spitzenkandidat’ (lead candidate), the German politician who is also a member of the conservative Christian Social Union in Bavaria officially launched his campaign for the European Union’s top post in April 2019. From time to time, Weber has shown that he is a proud Catholic, and has no issue speaking on his identity as a catholic. What I find interesting is how Catholicism/Christianity is used in Weber’s language, and that of other European politicians.



Manfred Weber, leading candidate for president of the European Commission. Photo by Patrick Seeger (2017)

In an interview, in what can be taken as a counter response to Angela Merkel’s 2015 comment that Islam “belongs to Germany”, Weber has expressed in a 2018 interview with German newspaper Die Welt, “As a religion that gives historical-cultural identity, Islam belongs just as little to Europe as it belongs to Germany... We must defend our European lifestyle globally. This requires a self-assurance...”. He further went on to say that Europe needs to be guided by shared Christian values.

President of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, has also been known to hold similar sentiments, having expressed overtime the need for the protection of Christian values and traditions from the ‘threat’ of immigration. So much so that literature has described him as some form of aspiring defender of European Christianity. Orbán has seemingly become an ally of the Vatican, pushing humanitarian efforts in Syria that seek to help the heavily-persecuted Christian population, and to gradually Christianize the Middle East.

Described as a populist conservative, Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz also shares some of Weber’s views and he, too, has presented Catholicism as a feature of his personal and political identity. The 32-year old is known to consult with religious priests and ministers in making political decisions.

In 2016, the Slovakian Prime Minister, Robert Fico, clearly stated he did not wish to see a large Muslim community in Slovakia. Fico also asserted that “Islam has no place” in Slovakia and he was unwilling to watch the changing of traditional Christian traditions due to Muslim influences. In 2015, The Council of Europe Secretary-General, Thorbjorn Jagland, condemned the Slovakian state’s stand on being hesitant to accept Muslim migrants and preferring to accept Christians fleeing from the Middle East and the Northern African region instead, “Refusing refugees on the grounds of their religion would be a blatant discrimination. Especially, during this unprecedented refugee crisis, there must

be no place for xenophobia and discrimination. Europe must show solidarity with these vulnerable people.” In 2016, the Slovakian government approved a law that prevents registering of Islam as an official religion in the country.

American politician, Steve Bannon has also garnered some support throughout Europe in his right wing, populist ideology campaign. With assistance from conservative Catholics, he is seeking to open an ‘alt-right’ academy in Italy. Bannon has had influence on Matteo Salvini, Italian deputy prime minister, who also calls for the unification of nationalist parties throughout Europe as the EU elections draw nearer.

What the likes of Weber are trying to do is to create a uniform, regional identity with Catholicism at the center.

In seeking to ‘unify’ Europe through Christian values and traditions, religion becomes a focal point in matters relating to migration and the interaction of EU members with external states.

Weber is against the Islamic state of Turkey joining the European Union as he believes that member countries need to be bonded by ‘Christian values’ that will aid integration and European solidarity. Likewise, Orbán, Kurz and other European politicians safeguard this Euro-Christian identity through stringent migration policies which aim to not only stop Muslim immigration, but also hinder the fostering of Muslim communities in their respective countries.

The inward movement of Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East has triggered the straying from secularisation ideology and has prompted many throughout Europe to cling to their Christian identities in response to the increased religious pluralism. While Islam is being painted as a threat to Christianity, narratives are concurrently being established that tie Christianity to a form of European identity. Looking at how these politicians have politicized religion in

dealing with families fleeing regions of political warfare and drought, they are clearly suffering from Eurocentric nostalgia: a longing for a religiously homogeneous society where Islam is not a matter of concern. Weber seems to feed on this idealistic idea that religion is the force that will save Europe and unite all nations in love and harmony. One cannot help but to think of this as an out-of-touch approach that disregards religious pluralism and the high levels of religious detachment in the younger generation. The discourses put forward by these politicians would fit well under a published ‘MECA’ manifesto: ‘Make Europe Catholic/Christian Again’.

With Weber expected to occupy the highest position in the European Union, with his strong network of allies that share similar views that reek of xenophobia, it will be interesting to see how he will seek to channel these views into more solid political actions.

Collaboration between the Hungarian state with the Vatican, as well Catholic involvement in the nationalist movement in Italy are clear markers of increased de-secularisation and Christianization of political matters. Catholic influence on decisions linked to migration policies as seen with Kurz in Austria, even more so.

Also noteworthy, populist groups have been gathering much support throughout Europe and are set to rattle the political composition of the European Parliament. Many of these groups fuel on nationalism, which too has become tied to religious identity in a very political nature. It will also be interesting to see how the subject of religion will continue to occupy the political sphere after the upcoming elections. In all of this, let it not be forgotten the possibilities that can exist when there is a merger of state and church.

TEXT: Christopher Allen

WHAT'S NEXT? - An outlook on the 2019 EU elections



About a year ago, a reflection was made on the pages of this magazine on how different the European Parliament could look like after the 2019 elections, back then a fairly faraway worry. Many things have happened since then, and now that the elections are behind the corner, the reality of a rather different European political landscape can soon materialize. So, what can we make of the recent events in order to understand what path the EU is going to take in the next five years?

While several topics have made the front page and have had a role in steering the direction of these elections, few of them have been characterized by the frantic turbulence that keeps marking Brexit. Having been under the spotlight for months, the Brexit issue is understandably key to making sense of what is at stake in these elections, and not only in the UK. The political impasse in the country and the inability to reach any conclusion about its exit from the EU has led to a situation where the election could be – with due reservations – seen as a test of the popular support for Brexit. However, with an ambiguous Labour stance on the matter, and a political landscape utterly divided on the theme (both on the remain and leave sides), the outcomes are far from easy to predict.

Another key issue concerns the fact that for the last couple of years, different types of (tendentially right-wing) populist parties have notoriously gained ground in a number of national elections. Many have expressed fears over a large Eurosceptic coalition gaining a majority in the European parliament. But, while it is unclear whether this is the most likely scenario, a more topical question concerns the internal cohesion of this potential grouping. Many of the parties that are expected to gain seats, aside from a nebulous but impulsive souverainism and anti-immigration stance, do not necessarily agree on other major political lines. Moreover, such parties have often arguably tamed the rhetoric of dismantling the EU, speaking instead of changing it, with varying degrees of ambiguity. The uncertainty that this type of political formations bring about, however, remains a driver of destabilization risk that should be handled with caution.

Taking these situations into account, what would the new European Parliament look like more concretely? While parties in all EU countries align to different pan-European party formations, several polls tell a story, though it remains to be seen what turn it will take in reality. The two biggest parties, the center-right European People's Party (which includes members such as the German Christian Democratic Union and the Swedish Moderate Party), and the center-left Socialists and Democrats (consisting mostly European social democratic parties) are set to lose a substantial number of parliamentary seats in the elections, though they might retain their spots as the largest parties in spite of losing their combined majority. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, a pro-European centrist party, could get a slight increase in its number of seats, while the European Greens, with a good part of their voter base in Germany, are expected to keep a consistent number of seats (around 50). Most of the far-right parties are running under the flags of the Europe of Nations and Freedom and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy parties, and are projected to make substantial gains.

Aside from all of these, what remains an issue is the risk for a low turnout, which indeed hit a record low of 42,6% in the 2014 EU elections. This could possibly be explained by a relative lack of understanding of the dynamics and the importance of the impact of European politics if compared to national and local affairs. This disinterest should not be underestimated, as it can have widespread negative consequences. The European Parliament's powers are weighty enough to be given ample importance; make a good use of this chance.

TEXT: Mikael Lassa

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE LOCAL MUN SIMULATION

UF Göteborg invites you to join the MUN local simulation between May 30th and June 2nd 2019, on the theme 'Fridays for Future'! The simulation is open to all university as well as high school students.

You have probably heard of Greta Thunberg, who became a world known climate activist after starting a school strike and sitting in front of the Swedish parliament in August 2018. Her personal strike became an inspiration to many, and other students followed by striking. By mid-March 2019, estimatedly 1.4 million students in 112 countries around the world had joined the strike. Regular demonstrations were also organised as part of the 'Fridays for Future' movement. The main goal of the movement is to demonstrate against the lack of action on the climate crisis by policymakers. The responses from people and governments to these regular protests are varied. Whereas some do agree that urgent action needs to be taken regarding climate change, others are still in denial and are concerned about children skipping their classes. Since the topic concerns us all, the debates during the local simulation should be very fruitful and interesting.

You might wonder what MUN stands for and what a local simulation entails. MUN is short for Model United Nations, and hundreds of MUN conferences are organised globally every year. But what exactly happens during a MUN conference? The conferences usually simulate United Nations committees with role play and teach you how diplomacy, debating, writing resolutions, etc. work practically. As a participant, you choose the committee you would like to attend. You will then be assigned a country for which you write a position paper. This will provide you with the needed knowledge for a fruitful discussion during the conference. During the committee sessions, you will always represent the assigned country and its views on a relevant and recent topic. The goal of the committee sessions is to write a resolution and have it signed it by a majority of countries. The committees are led by knowledgeable chairs who make sure that the rules of procedures are followed. Besides learning writing skills, debating, public speaking, critical thinking, teamwork and leadership abilities, these conferences build international friendships. Most conferences also organise social fun events for participants after the simulation.

'Fridays for Future' Local MUN Simulation will give you a better understanding and insight into how a MUN conference works. During the simulation, we will discuss the 'Fridays for Future' movement and the standpoints of the different participating countries. You will be assigned a partner who will represent the assigned country with you. Together, you will present the countries' positions on the topic and try to find common grounds with other participating countries. In the end, we will write a resolution on how to respond to and deal with the movement as well as environmental problems.

A detailed programme will be announced in our Facebook page briefly, but here is a sneak peek to our two-day simulation:

FRIDAY, MAY 31ST:

Launch of workshops explaining the rules of procedures, voting regulations and writing a resolution. Not only will you learn about the procedures, but you will also get to know your fellow committee members and delegates. The day ends with a fun social event.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1ST AND SUNDAY JUNE 2ND:

Will be dedicated to committee sessions, debates and engaging discussions.

Has this sparked your interest? Would you like to join the local simulation, learn about the procedures of a UN committee and get to know new people? Then you're welcome to apply!

You can find the application form on our Facebook page: UF Göteborg Model United Nations.

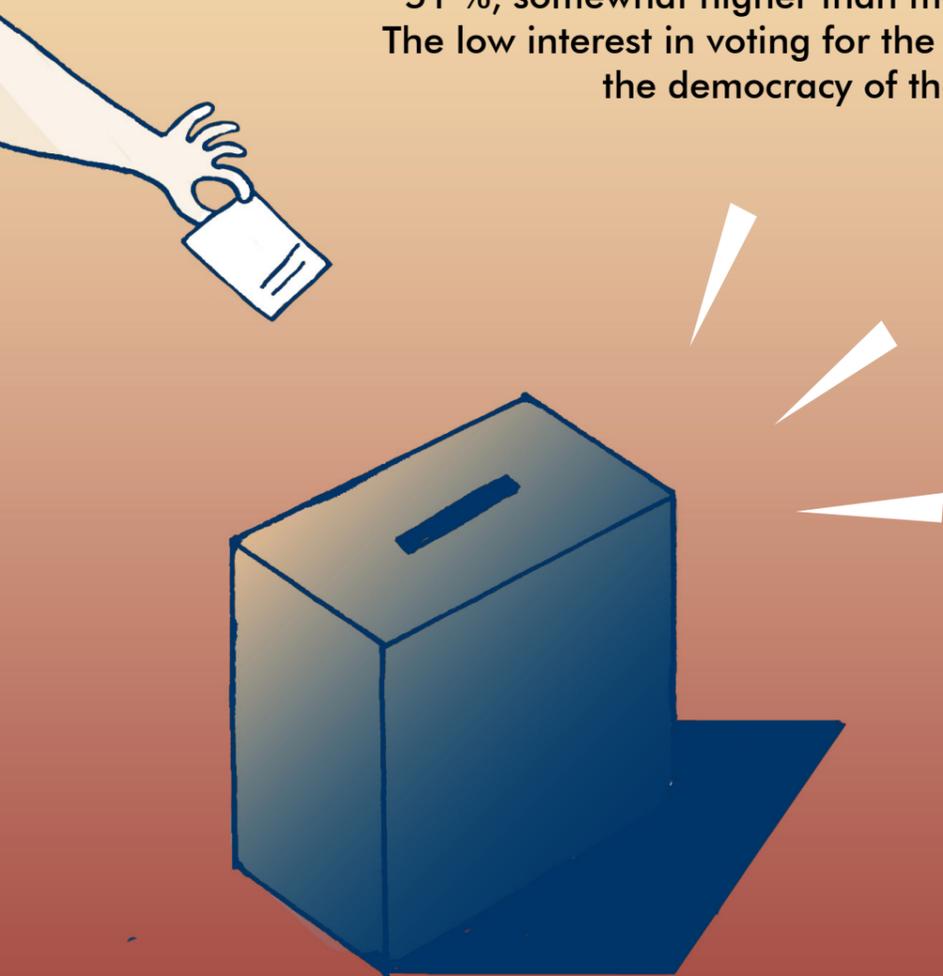
You can also always contact us via modelun@ufgbg.se



TEXT: Cressida de Witte

WHY VOTING IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IS SO IMPORTANT

In 2014 only 43, 6 % of the Europeans voted in the European Parliament elections. In Sweden that number was 51 %, somewhat higher than most countries in Europe. The low interest in voting for the elections is challenging the democracy of the European Parliament.



The European Parliament is often referred to as one of the most democratic institutions in Europe since people elect all the representatives and a new election occurs every 5 years. It is a prime example of how democracy should work. However, a turnout averaging below 50 % in most elections make me wonder if we are taking this democracy for granted. We fought for democracy for so many years and now are not using it.

The prevalent trend is that the supporters of more conservative and nationalist parties are some of the most active when it comes to elections. They understand the importance of voting, they realize the consequence of their vote and know how loud their voices can be.

The whole point of democracy is that the people elect representatives who will voice the opinions of the people. By having a low voter turnout, the representation of different political parties is only getting smaller and smaller.

If a national election had a voter turnout averaging below 50 %, you would question its legitimacy and whether or not it really is a democratic state. The whole point of democracy is that the people elect representatives who will voice the opinions of the people. By having a low voter turnout, the representation of different political parties is only getting smaller and smaller. In a lot of ways, the European Parliament is getting misrepresented in our daily lives. Most people are not even aware what the parliament does. You may think that the European Parliament does not have any real power, but you would be wrong. One of the most important roles of the Parliament is their legislative role. The European Parliament passes EU laws, which are to be implemented in all the member states. In reality, most of the disputes have some kind of connec-

tion to the EU. To exemplify, if you were to order something online, but regret it and want to cancel your order, the first thought might not be "Oh, this is EU-law". However, the Consumer Rights Directive, passed by the European Parliament, has harmonised national consumer rules through the member states so that the consumer has the same rights no matter what country within the EU they are in.

Another important role that the Parliament has is the supervision role. They make sure that the EU-laws are being followed, that the budget of the EU is being used in the right way and election observation. The European Parliament is very much present in our society, which is why representation is so important.

Not only is it important to vote, but also to know whom you are voting for. If you feel unsure, you could do the "Valkompass EU-valet" which SVT has published. By answering the ques-

tions, you can find out which party matches with your opinions the most. Several associations are also organizing panel discussions to get a better grasp of what the different parties and politicians prioritise and what their main focus will be.

Getting information today is easier than ever before; however, do not forget to be critical of the things you read. You should not make a groundless decision when you vote, but do not abstain from voting just because you feel like you don't know enough. If you want your voice to be heard, if you want what you consider to be the core issues to be raised, then you need to vote. It is impossible to make a change by doing nothing, because your voice is only getting smaller while others are speaking through boom boxes. And trust me, they are truly being heard.



Photo by DAVID ILIFF.
License: CC-BY-SA 3.0

EUROPE, A FAMILY WITH FAMILY TROUBLES

Imagine, your grandmother keeps on burping in the faces of the guests during Christmas dinner. But since she is family, you can't ask her to leave. Or imagine, same dinner, you invited your crush and hope he will show up - but in the end he doesn't. Or a less civilized family crashes your smooth family weekend. Or your youngest cousin keeps on asking if he can participate in cooking the dinner - but to you that's unrealistic.

Welcome to a not that random family, welcome to the European Parliament. Okay, it might be a little bit over exaggerated, but it is about the bottom line: some troubles are going on in the EP.

The European Parliament consists of 751 seats, including UK since it stays in the EU until (at least) 31st of October. The seats are filled with Members of European Parliament who are affiliated with national parties, usually just a few MEPs each party. Since it's just a small amount of MEPs representing their national party, it makes no sense to act as a loner. To be able to have some power and influence, MEPs belong to political families. All of them represent a political direction, going from the progressive Greens/European Free Alliance, to the christian democrats of EPP (European People's Party), to right-wing ENF (Europe of Nations and Freedom).

They are families on their own, consisting of delegations from national parties with the same political background. And as in all families, there are some troubles.

FAMILY TROUBLE 1: ORBÁN

Christmas dinner. While it's a no-brainer for all guests around the table to use a napkin and do not eat too fast, your grandmother keeps on burping in the faces of other guests and tells awkward racist jokes. In a way, you want to kick her out of your house, but it's Christmas eve and you know she will get you some presents.

In the last few months, there was an ongoing discussion inside and outside EPP: should the biggest political family kick Fidesz, the party of controversial Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, out or not? He is known for his heavy anti-European and anti-migration politics. According to critics, he also does not respect the concept of a democratic state, abandons critical media and political opponents. In 2015, Orbán built a fence at the border with Serbia to 'protect' his country against migrants. Recently, he came up with a poster campaign linking the faces of European Commission president Juncker and vice-president Timmermans to a conspiracy claim about endangering Hungary's safety.

For 30 national parties within the christian democratic family, this campaign was the limit. They wanted to force Fidesz to leave the EPP fraction, but others like the German CDU and CSU thought that was a bit too harsh, so the compromise is a suspension. This means Fidesz is not allowed to attend EPP meetings anymore and cannot come up with candidates for important positions. Orbán himself considers it as a "voluntary break" though. An internal EPP commission investigates if it is best to just throw Fidesz completely out or give them another chance. They will announce their findings after EU elections.



*Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán
Source: European People's Party*

FAMILY TROUBLE 2: MACRON

You are self-confident, aware of your strengths and weaknesses as a person. And then there is this really attractive guy that enters the village. An instant crush, or at least from your side. You know for sure this needs to be a match, he is good looking and can make you prosper. After a few dates, when you are confident to change your Facebook status into 'in a relationship', he lets you know by a Whatsapp that you are not the love of his life. You even shaved your beard into a hipster one - nothing helps, he is gone.

Even though within the EU there are a lot of liberal parties, liberal family ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) is only the fourth largest group in the European Parliament. To strengthen their position, they counted on La Republique En Marche, the national party of French president Emmanuel Macron that participates for the first time in EU elections (and so on still needed to find a political family to belong to).

This was meant to be ALDE. During the past months all important ALDE politicians such tried to convince Macron (and his expected 20 seats in EP) to join them, which almost succeeded. But then, French populist politician Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National) brought up ALDE gets donations by Bayer-Monsanto. This is a seed development company that is heavily criticized in France (and in other countries) because of their genetic modified crops and the use of glyphosate in weed killers. Since Macron wanted to go to EU elections with a blank agenda, En Marche let ALDE know they don't want to have anything to do with them anymore. ALDE cutted tires with Bayer-Monsanto, but even this did not help anymore. Macron and his important seats and power are gone, En Marche is going to be an independent group in the European Parliament, not affiliated by any political family.



*French president Emmanuel Macron.
Source: Creative commons*

FAMILY TROUBLE 3: NEW ANTI-EU FAMILY

It's Easter holidays and as you used to do, you spend them with some befriended families in a huge cottage near the coast. Even though though the children of those other families are sometimes a little bit annoying, you pretty much enjoy cottage life. After posting a selfie with all families on Instagram, a vague friend replies he is on his way to same village as your cottage is in. And guess what, upcoming two days he and his uncivilized kids join the cottage weekend without any shame.

Rassemblement National (formerly known as Front National) in France, FPÖ in Austria, AfD in Germany, Lega in Italy, Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden and Forum voor Democratie in The Netherlands: during the past years, it seems almost all countries got their (quite successful) populist movement.

Up to now, populist parties took shelter under the umbrella of the three right wing/ conservative families in the European Parliament. After current EU elections, they want to form a new families with all European populists together. To do so, Italian vice prime minister Matteo Salvini (Lega) invited leaders of twenty populist parties to Milan to 'take the first step' to collaboration. Only AfD, Dansk Folkeparti (Denmark) and Perussuomalaiset (Finland) showed up.

This could be seen as a problem: the only common thing among these populists is their anti-European attitude. Other than that, all have their own agendas and are not that eager to collaborate since each wants to be seen as the strong leader in their own country. Time will tell if and how this is going to develop.



Beginning of a new anti-EU political family. Source: AFP

FAMILY TROUBLE 4: A EUROPEAN PARTY

You like your youngest cousin, he is always enthusiastic, wants to build sand castles all the time. You find it cute that he is still that naive who thinks ruling the world is a possibility. The moment he asks if he can help preparing dinner, you are confused. Your solution: you don't want to take too big risks, so you let him help to decorate the table.

Averse to a contemporary political climate which might tend to EU scepticism, Volt Europe is a new initiative solely built around more European collaboration in all fields. To get influence, these young adults first need to win 10 seats spread over seven countries. This are the requirements to start a new political family in the EU parliament, exactly what they want.



Members of new political party Volt Source: VoltEuropa's social media

Remarkable point about Volt is they are the first European party - going to the elections with the exact same program in every country, something never seen in EP elections history. Almost every member state does have a (usually progressive) party known for its excitement about the European project. By having program points as a European president, European army and a better migration policy, the party could partly fit in some of the of political families. The reason they do not want this is they argue people vote for something unknown - since most people might not know programs of other home parties of MEPs in the same family as the party of their preference is. Even though with their vote they provide the whole family (and so on this unknown MEPs) with support. On the other hand, and this goes for Volt as for a bunch of other initiatives that will not have the amount of votes as a colleague newbie La République En Marche might get, being affiliated to a family still seems to be the most realistic way to let your voice hear in the enormous European Parliament.

COMING TO AN END

Obviously, describing EU developments by metaphors of family struggles results in things being really simplified. However, there are some actual similarities. Both real families and alliances of political alliances thank their existence to the identity they share. Whether this is one conducted by blood or by visions, it is what keeps them together. Otherwise they would just be a small amount of humans randomly living under the same roof or politicians accidentally sharing the same zone of chairs in the plenary room in Strasbourg. So on, promoting this common identity might be a first step to convince the voters. And so on his or her family, of course.

HOW EUROPE'S YOUTH MIGHT FINALLY GIVE A F***

If you are considerably famous, whether loved or hated by the public, there is one thing for sure you will have. Drake has it, Keanu Reeves has it, and even Obama has at least several ones - a meme dedicated to them. Every social media user is by now probably familiar with the internet phenomenon that the meme marks, and one's ability to pronounce it correctly will give one away as either a connoisseur of internet forums such as reddit or 4chan or an aficionado of questionable humor (or both).

The life cycle of a meme is considerably short, and by the time it has reached the mainstream social media such as Facebook, it is already considered to be dying. The fame and fortune of memes started in 2008 with rage comics, small scribbles complaining of everyday struggles but soon developed into something much bigger that now includes stock photos, movie scenes and gifs that somehow made it big online. Some of the main characters in memes reached some popularity such as the overly attached girlfriend or the success kid, others are taken from movies or popular figures in the real world whose facial expressions can be related to totally out of context situations.

The masses love memes so much that when the new Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, an extremely strict new copyright legislation in the EU, was under discussion to be threatening the carefree use of memes, all hell broke loose. Especially in Germany, young people took to streets to demonstrate against the

'meme ban' coined law, holding up signs which read for example "no meme is illegal" with the connotation of the popular slogan "no human is illegal" used often at pro-immigration demonstrations.

We have learned that Germans truly care about their memes. Germans however also care very highly about internet safety and often prefer to stay anonymous online much more than many other EU countries' citizens. Advertisements for Facebook or Tinder are not unfamiliar on German streets, showing a lack of interest in giving up one's personal data online. Exactly the question of safety of data should concern us much more about the new law rather than the demonization of its article 13 as being a fun killer.

The meme situation was settled simply by stating that caricatures and humorous criticism will not be banned under the new law which allows the continuing use of memes. What should be worried about is the extreme strict viewpoint on copyright

infringement even in the smallest sequences of music film and any other copyrighted material, since websites will be in danger of paying hefty fines if they do not adhere to the new regulations. These, however, can only be applied if huge upload filters of content are introduced since websites such as YouTube or Facebook have no possibility of skimming through every single upload. These filters are the real big bad wolf for our internet freedom and we should definitely be afraid of them. One main reason is that companies that could provide those filters will have extreme access to personal data, another one is that it is in many ways for platforms just not feasible and threatens the very livelihood of services such as Wikipedia, which went on strike before the final decision on the new legislation was made.

The good news, nonetheless, is that people found a common cause to fight for,

170.000 people took to the streets in different EU countries to demonstrate against the filter law.

In Germany, the issues of the new copyright legislation are in the top five of young people's concerns regarding the upcoming election of the EU parliament, right after Brexit and climate change.

It is a well-known truth that EU elections do have a considerably low ballot turnout, people simply do not care whether there is a law about banana curvature (there is) or simply feel that they cannot make any difference after all, since the decision makers seem so far away and the decisions so abstract. The ballot turnout has been consistently sinking from a bit over 60% in the 70s to just a little bit over 40% in the last election in 2014.

Since back in the time, many things have changed and the EU has had to face severe crisis, some of them still ongoing.

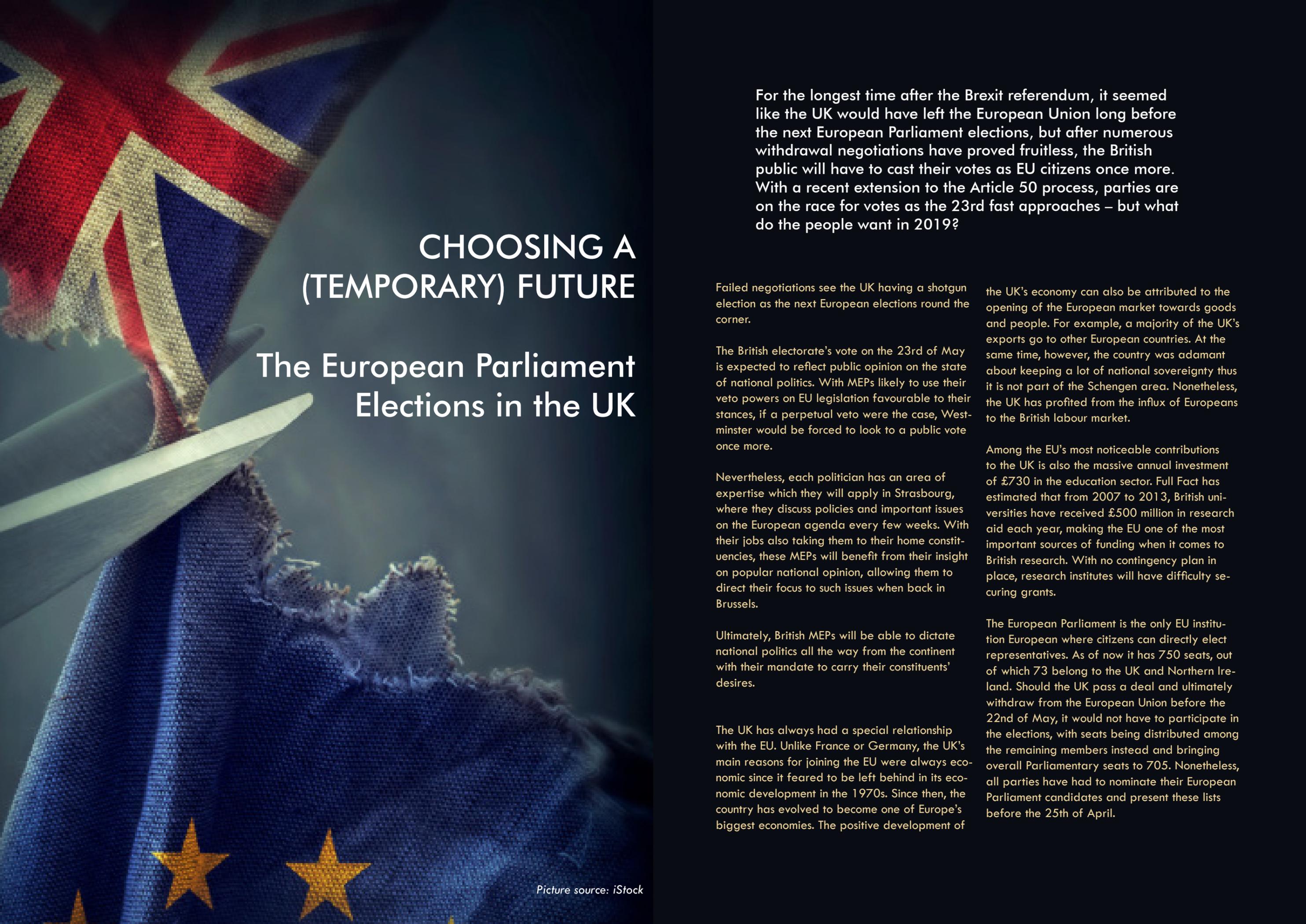
One thing however is clear since the Brexit divorce has been up and running:

we do have to come closer again and discuss what exactly we want to reach together, in which kind of future we want to live.

Baby Boomers and Millennials nowadays find themselves in an endless ring of blaming and shaming, who ruined the climate and the economy and who just play computer games all day long and blog about avocados, but in times of crisis, a family has to come closer together and not grow apart. If the new law will bring more people to the voting booth, especially the young ones, as many internet platforms suggest they will do after seeing the impact of EU laws so directly so close to home, then we should rejoice. There has still a legislation to be implemented that cannot be revoked with a good old power trip on the democracy train. So let's take the anger and show them how it's done.

We should not ask what the EU can do for us but what we can do for the EU.





CHOOSING A (TEMPORARY) FUTURE

The European Parliament Elections in the UK

For the longest time after the Brexit referendum, it seemed like the UK would have left the European Union long before the next European Parliament elections, but after numerous withdrawal negotiations have proved fruitless, the British public will have to cast their votes as EU citizens once more. With a recent extension to the Article 50 process, parties are on the race for votes as the 23rd fast approaches – but what do the people want in 2019?

Failed negotiations see the UK having a shotgun election as the next European elections round the corner.

The British electorate's vote on the 23rd of May is expected to reflect public opinion on the state of national politics. With MEPs likely to use their veto powers on EU legislation favourable to their stances, if a perpetual veto were the case, Westminster would be forced to look to a public vote once more.

Nevertheless, each politician has an area of expertise which they will apply in Strasbourg, where they discuss policies and important issues on the European agenda every few weeks. With their jobs also taking them to their home constituencies, these MEPs will benefit from their insight on popular national opinion, allowing them to direct their focus to such issues when back in Brussels.

Ultimately, British MEPs will be able to dictate national politics all the way from the continent with their mandate to carry their constituents' desires.

The UK has always had a special relationship with the EU. Unlike France or Germany, the UK's main reasons for joining the EU were always economic since it feared to be left behind in its economic development in the 1970s. Since then, the country has evolved to become one of Europe's biggest economies. The positive development of

the UK's economy can also be attributed to the opening of the European market towards goods and people. For example, a majority of the UK's exports go to other European countries. At the same time, however, the country was adamant about keeping a lot of national sovereignty thus it is not part of the Schengen area. Nonetheless, the UK has profited from the influx of Europeans to the British labour market.

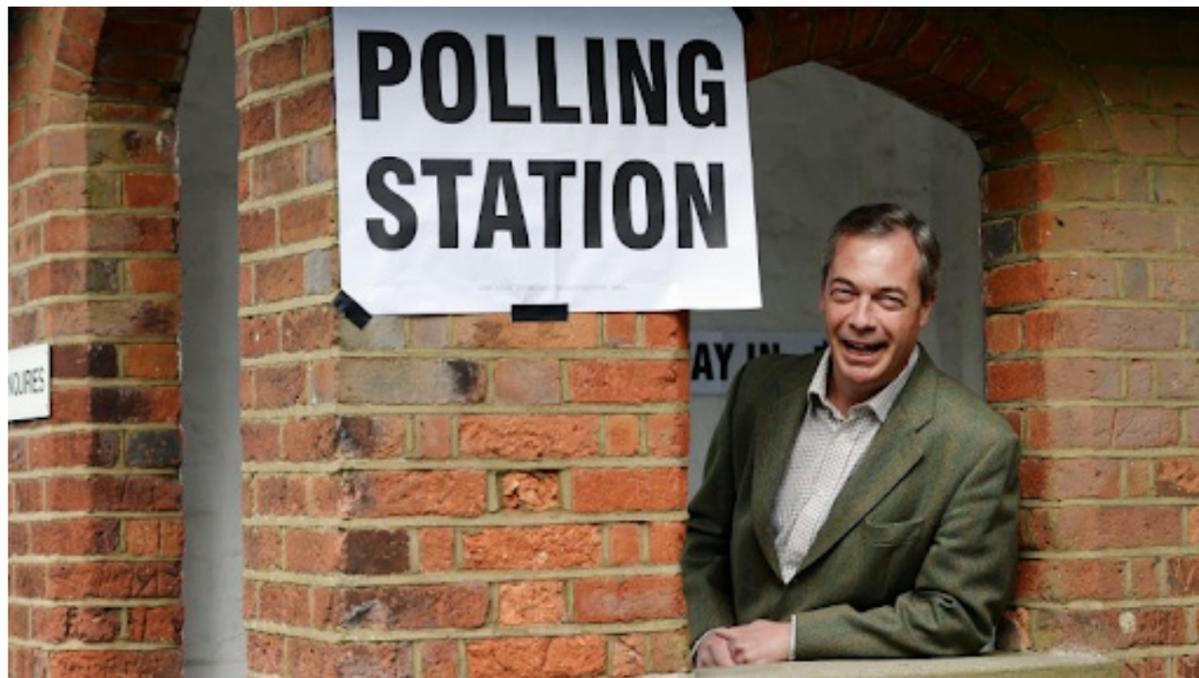
Among the EU's most noticeable contributions to the UK is also the massive annual investment of £730 in the education sector. Full Fact has estimated that from 2007 to 2013, British universities have received £500 million in research aid each year, making the EU one of the most important sources of funding when it comes to British research. With no contingency plan in place, research institutes will have difficulty securing grants.

The European Parliament is the only EU institution European where citizens can directly elect representatives. As of now it has 750 seats, out of which 73 belong to the UK and Northern Ireland. Should the UK pass a deal and ultimately withdraw from the European Union before the 22nd of May, it would not have to participate in the elections, with seats being distributed among the remaining members instead and bringing overall Parliamentary seats to 705. Nonetheless, all parties have had to nominate their European Parliament candidates and present these lists before the 25th of April.

The voting process differs across the EU but each member state is required to use a proportional voting system, meaning that seats will be distributed according to the relative vote share each party gets. In England, Scotland and Wales the electorate vote for closed lists in 12 different regions while Northern Ireland applies the single transferable vote system. The closed list is simply where candidates are fixed and no change can be made. Unlike in some other member states, the UK does not have a threshold for parties to be elected into the European Parliament. This means that as long as a party gains enough votes to mathematically gain 1 seat out of the 73, the party will be in Brussels.

As of the last 2014 elections, Labour and the Conservative Party have 18 seats each, the Brexit Party 14 and the remaining seats go to the various other parties. During the last elections, however, this distribution looked quite different. Back then UKIP had 24 seats, Labour 20 and the Conservatives 19.

Unsurprisingly, new British parties have already managed to put members in the European Parliament, something possible when MEPs change their party affiliation. Among these new parties, the most prominent are the Brexit party and the Independent Group which are supporting and opposing Brexit respectively.



Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage is set to gain seats as the Brexit Party gains momentum.
Source: Andy Rain/EPA/EFE

Currently, the polls expect Labour to be the party with the largest vote share, with approximately 20 seats, followed by the new Brexit party at 16 seats. The Conservative party is predicted to lose seats in comparison to 2014, ending up with 12 seats. Since national parties are organising themselves in political alliances that consist of various parties from all member states, the seat distribution of the political groups is of great importance.

Due to the rise in popularity, new and unaffiliated parties, such as the Brexit Party, UKIP, and the Independent Group represent the largest group with approximately 24 seats, followed by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) at 20 seats.

Surprisingly, the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), which is the largest group in Brussels, does not have a party member in the UK that is expected to join the European Parliament. This expected election outcome reflects the divided positions and opinions in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the predicted results will likely serve as an opinion poll for measuring the level of approval with Westminster's approach to Brexit. Especially, since the Independent Group, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, and the Scottish National Party are anti-Brexit. On the other hand, the Brexit Party, Labour, Conservatives and UKIP are pro-Brexit. Regardless of these stances, there is even less agreement regarding future negotiations with the EU on Brexit.

From Labour and Conservative parties, around three-quarter of the current MEPs are campaigning again for the upcoming elections, they have also been given relative free reign as parties refuse to decide on official stances.

Both Labour and the Tories are torn between carrying out the people's 2016 will or pushing for a second referendum, while the latter are seeing a fringe group planning on boycotting the elections as a protest against May's government.

The Greens, Liberal Democrats and newcomers Change UK are rallying to gather as many votes as possible, on the pretense of the elections being a direct reflection of popular support for Brexit.

UKIP, on the other hand, is running on a pro-Brexit platform while facing renewed accusations of links with far-right movements. Although this last point is unlikely to affect the outcome for UKIP, the party which is projected to benefit from the anti-Brexit sentiment of many of the electorate along with the new and unaffiliated parties, representing a variety of views.

On the 23rd, voters will flock to polling stations as one of the first EU countries to vote. With results published on the 26th after every vote has been cast, Westminster will have to await the people's decision.

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The Society of International Affairs Gothenburg is a non-governmental organization with the ambition to spread knowledge and spark discussion about foreign policy issues. We organize lectures and trips, host movie screenings and publish the magazine Utblick

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