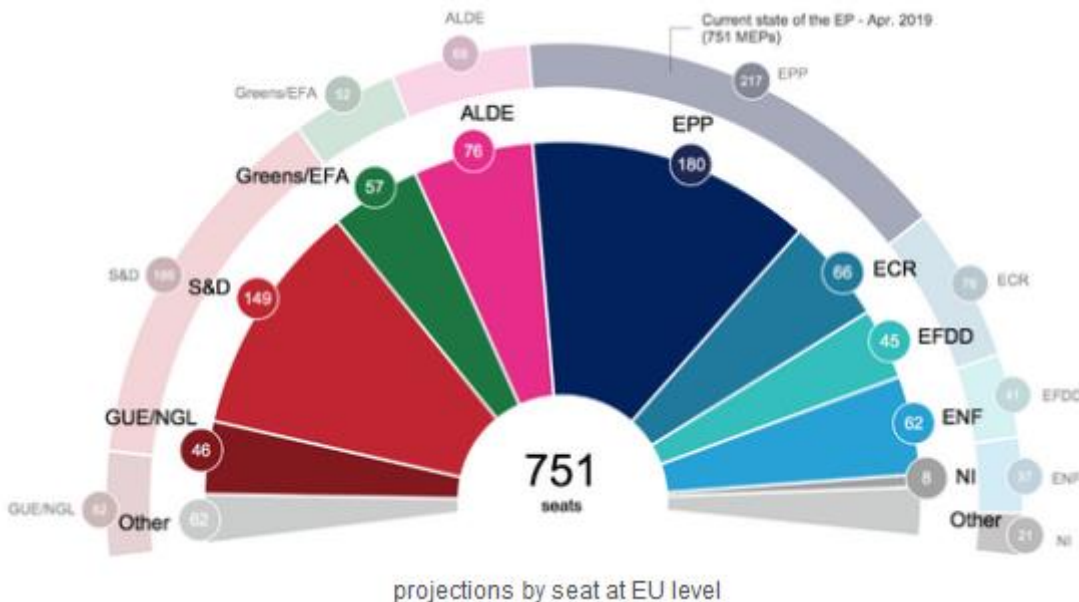


European Parliament Elections 2019 - an overview

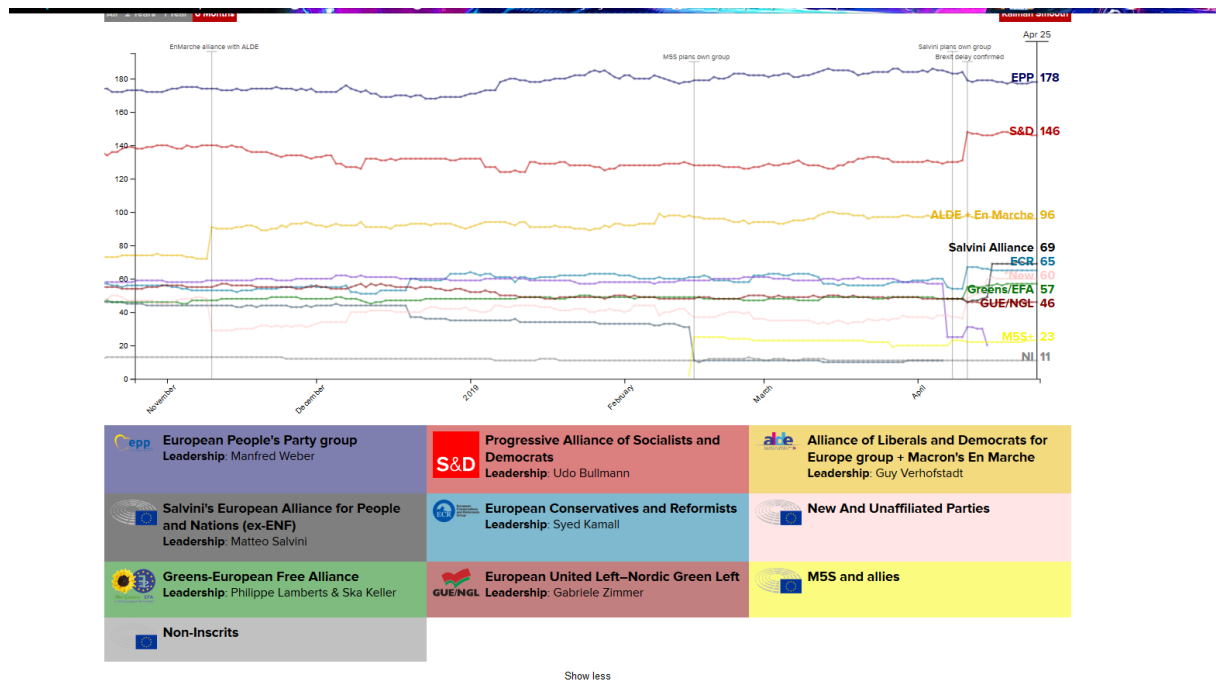
The next elections to vote representatives to the European Parliament will take place between 23 and 26 May across all 28 EU Member States (coincidentally, this period overlaps with the upcoming General Assembly in Edinburgh). This Parliament would be in office for a five year period from 2019 to 2024.

In light of the wave of nationalism and protectionism that has emerged across Europe in recent years, it is generally predicted by a variety of news sources and think-tanks that the two largest factions in the parliament (the centre-right European Peoples Party- EPP- and the Socialists & Democrats) will likely lose their joint overall majority in this election (going by the projections of today, together they will take 324 out of a total of 751 seats). We are likely to see an increase in far-right representatives as well as MEPs pursuing a single issue (e.g. climate action). The liberal ALDE faction is likely to gain prominence as well, not least due to the participation of Macron’s ‘En Marche’ party in France. The picture in general will be more fragmented than it has been in previous legislatures.

The final projections (source: European Parliament - europarl.europa.eu) can be found below:



An illustration of projected outcomes (courtesy of POLITICO) can be found below. Projections are slightly more dramatic in terms of a swing away from the two big factions but more in less in line with the EP's own reflections:



What does all of this mean in practice? Decision making in general will be more complex, as the landscape becomes increasingly fragmented. It will take more of a push to get any motions through. From a trade agenda perspective, it might be more difficult for trade agreements to get the green light from the Parliament, i.e. with the normally trade-friendly centralist parties on the wane, there is an increased risk of trade mandates falling foul of ultra-protectionist and trade sceptic forces. We would of course hope that many of the established pro-trade voices in the current European Parliament would be re-elected and also realise that political standpoints are not necessarily black and white (e.g. an MEP with extreme views on immigration or the environment might be quite receptive when it comes to proposals on the functioning of the internal market).

Brexit

It is expected that in light of the Brexit 'extension' granted earlier this month, the UK will organise elections and will elect 73 members to the European Parliament. As the planned Brexit day was 29 March, 27 of these 73 seats were initially redistributed to some of the other Member States (46 seats were to be held back to cover future enlargements of the EU - 751 seats is the maximum permitted in the treaties). France and Spain were to get five extra seats, the Netherlands and Italy were to get three



extra seats, Ireland was to get two extra seats and a number of other Member States were to get a single extra seat each.

In terms of political developments on the ground in the UK, the Brexit Party has just been launched. No surprise as to what the main aim of this organisation will be. Nigel Farage leads it up. Should make some inroads on polling day.

Spitzenkandidaten and presidency of the European Commission

The system of 'Spitzenkandidaten' (lead candidates) was introduced in the 2014 elections. Each of the political factions in the European parliament has nominated a political figure to head up their campaign. In 2014, current Commission president Jean Claude Juncker headed up the EPP's campaign. This time around, Manfred Weber (DE) takes the reins. Frans Timmermans (NL) is the Spitzenkandidat for the socialists. Despite Juncker leading up the current Commission, it is not an automatic given that either of them will be Commission president in the next mandate. Margrethe Vestager (DK, current commissioner for competition policy) is reportedly interested and Michel Barnier (FR, EU chief negotiator in the Brexit talks) is also a contender.

Article 17 TEU sets out the procedure for the election of the European Commission president. Taking into account the results of the European elections, the Council will elect from a selection of candidates. The European Parliament must then endorse this decision with an absolute majority.