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Lei ZHANG

Associate Professor

Institute of European Studies

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

zhang-lei@cass.org.cn

Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences • Beijing 100732

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Lei ZHANG
Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
5 Jianguomennei Dajie, Beijing 100732
CHINA

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An Analysis on the European Elections in 2014

ZHANG Lei¹

Abstract: From 22nd to 25th May 2014, the European elections took place in 28 member states of the European Union, and the citizens have cast their ballots to elect the new European Parliament. The results of the elections were not beyond the predictions that the main political parties lost votes and the extreme right-wing parties gained more seats. The European elections in 2014 still had the characteristics for second-order national elections. The coalition formation of the new European Parliament will relatively maintain stable, and the rise of the extreme right will increase the co-operation between the main political groups, namely the grand coalition. Due to many reasons, the influence of the extreme right to the European Parliament is relatively limited. The Sino-EU relations will not have substantial change after the 2014 elections.

Key words: the European Elections in 2014, Second-order National Elections, Extreme Right-wing Parties, the Influence

The European election was an important event for European politics in 2014. The economic and financial crisis reduces the public trust on the integration and European institutions and a growing dissatisfaction with the EU spreads in many member states.² This election is the first one after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon which extends the European Parliament's co-legislative, budgetary and supervisory power. The European Parliament is playing a more and more important role in the political system of the EU. The new Parliament after the elections would be crucial to the legislation and future development of the EU. Besides, for the first time, the composition of the new European Parliament possibly could determine who will lead the next European Commission. So the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 drew lots of attention. The European Parliament put 'this time it's different' as the slogan for the election.

I . The results of the European elections in 2014

From 22nd to 25th May 2014, the 8th European election took place in 28 member states of the European Union, and the citizens have cast their ballots to elect the new European Parliament. The results of the elections were not beyond the predictions that the main political parties lost votes and the extreme right-wing parties gained more seats.

Changes of the seats for the Political Groups in the European Parliament

According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the total number of the European Parliament reduces to 751. In

¹ZHANG Lei, qualification of the associate professor, Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

²For instance, one survey reports that, 21% of the Dutch wish to leave the EU, while that 47% of those who wanted to keep the EU membership but they also called for reducing the power of the EU. Only 9% favoured the establishment of European institutions. The majority of Dutch respondents believed the EU was moving in the wrong direction, and the EU had a negative influence on matters such as the economy, employment, public finances and daily life. See Stijn van Kessel, "Euro-enthusiasm, Euro-rejection, and Various Shades of Grey: The 2014 European Parliament Election Campaign in the Netherlands", *EPIN Commentary No.18*, 29 April 2014, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/euro-enthusiasm-euro-rejection-and-various-shades-grey-2014-european-parliament-election-campai>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

terms of the composition of the political groups, the final results of the elections depend not only on the campaign and the elections, but also on the re-grouping after the elections.³ The period between the elections and the end of June was quite crucial for the political groups in the European Parliament because each group expected to enroll more new members. On the 1st July, the time for the first plenary session of the new European Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP) totally decreased its representation from 274 to 221 seats (see Figure: the results of the 2014 European Elections). But the EPP was still the largest group in the European Parliament which accounted for 29.43% of the whole Parliament. For its component, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany / the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CDU/CSU) was still the biggest national delegation inside the EPP with 34 seats. The French Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and the Polish Civic Platform (PO) ranked second and third respectively in the group.⁴ The total number of the S&D group was 191, which occupied 25.43% of the total seats in the new Parliament. Although the total number of S&D was equivalent to last parliament, its component modified slightly. Italian Democratic Party (PDI) became the biggest national delegation with 31 members in S&D, followed by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and UK Labour party with 27 and 20 seats respectively.⁵ S&D group was still the second biggest group in the Parliament and the gap between the first and the second largest group narrowed distinctively.

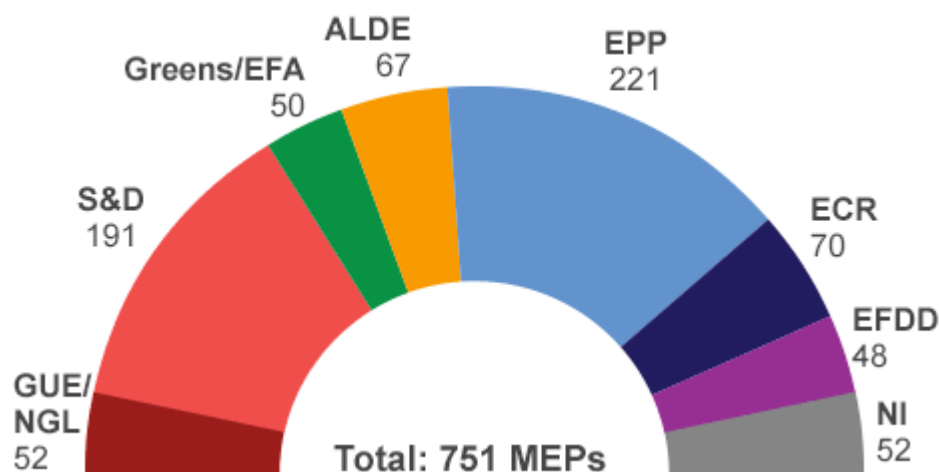


Figure: the results of the 2014 European Elections

Source of data: European Parliament website,
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) won 70 seats, becoming the third largest political group in the European Parliament. Some new members belong to parties in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Croatia, Slovak, Finland etc.⁶ The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats

³Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), November and December 2013.

⁴See the European Parliament website,
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-introduction-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See the European Parliament website,
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2014.html>,
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2009.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

for Europe (ALDE) got 67 seats and its place dropped from the third to the fourth in the new Parliament. Within the group, the Liberal democrats in the UK only gained 1 seat, totally 10 seats less than the last legislature. While the seats for Free Democratic Party in Germany decreased from 9 to 3 seats.⁷ The Confederation Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) group increased its representation from 35 to 52 seats, which was the fifth largest group in the European Parliament. Spain especially contributed to the increase of the number with 3 parties and 11 seats in the new Parliament.⁸ The sixth largest group in the 8th Parliament was the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) for 50 MEPs. Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group revised its name into 'Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy' (EFDD), which has successfully negotiated with other parties across Europe to increase its membership up to 48. Although it was the smallest group in the new Parliament, the total number made a big step forward compared to that 33 in the last legislature. The UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Five Star Movement from Italy, the Sweden Democrats, the Party of Free Citizens of the Czech Republic, Lithuanian Order and Justice Party, the Latvian Farmers' Union and one French independent MEP constituted the EFDD group.⁹ Although French National Front (FN) and Freedom Party from Netherland (PVV) lobbied heavily in the European level since 2013¹⁰, they still unsuccessfully found enough allies to form a new group.¹¹ So they could only sit as non-attached bench, the total number of which in the new European Parliament was 52.¹²

All in all, following the European elections in 2014, the party system in the 8th European Parliament becomes more fragmented and polarized. More radical groups both to the right and the left have become much stronger in the new Parliament. The total number of the biggest two groups EPP and S&D is 412, which is less than 58 seats compared to that in last legislature. The number of the third group ECR is quite similar to the fourth group ALDE. And the scale of the GUE/NGL is also equivalent to Greens and EFDD. This reflects the trend of the European Party politics in general that in a political system, there are 2-3 medium sized parties surrounded by 3-5 smaller parties and the multiparty systems are increasingly in flux.¹³

Coalition formation in the new Parliament from the perspective of manifestoes

In the manifestos for 2014 European Parliamentary elections, the main European Parties gave their positions on economic crisis, climate change, the reform of the EU and the role of the Union on

⁷See the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-introduction-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

⁸See the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-es-2014.html>, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-es-2009.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

⁹See EFDD website, <http://www.efdgroup.eu/newsroom/item/new-efd-group-formed-in-european-parliament>, last accessed on 1 July 2014.

¹⁰BBC, "Dutch Eurosceptic Wilders and France's Le Pen Unite", 13 November 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24924372>, last accessed on 1 December 2013.

¹¹According to the Rule of Procedures of the European Parliament, a group can be formed with at least 25 MEPs from seven different EU member states.

¹²See the European Parliament website, <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>, last accessed on 2 July 2014.

¹³Cas Mudde, "The European Parliament Elections Show the Increasingly Fragmented Nature of European Party Systems", <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/06/12/the-european-parliament-elections-show-the-increasingly-fragmented-nature-of-european-party-systems/>, last accessed on 16 June 2014.

the world stage. EPP believes that the euro is a reliable currency and calls for reform financial markets in order to seek a better regulatory framework for financial markets. EPP expects Europe to be bigger on big things and smaller on small things. EPP believes in building a more open and more democratic Europe. EPP strives for sustainable growth based on a competitive and innovative economy, while respecting the environment. EPP vows to enhance Europe's foreign, security and defence capacities and welcomes the TTIP with the US. EPP favours judicious enlargement, taking the EU's capacity to integrate into consideration.¹⁴

The Socialists (PES) agrees that creating more jobs must be the number one priority. Austerity policies have harmed Europe while rewarding reckless speculation and it is time to relaunch the economy. PES will invest in a smart re-industrialization programme focused on innovation, research and training. The financial sector should serve all Europeans. They will fight for a social Europe that respects everybody's rights and obligations. Equality and women's rights are of utmost importance to the progressive family. The EU need to be a democratic union of equality and participation. They support clean technology and environmentally friendly production. They expect that Europe must be a global player and EU must retain global leadership in the fight against climate change.¹⁵

European Liberals want a Europe that boosts the economy and creates jobs. They believe in the power and success of the European single market. They want to find new opportunities for economic growth and greater innovation in order to boost the EU's competitiveness. They will work for an EU-US free trade agreement and also strive for FTAs with other major economic regions. They call for an extensive reform of the financial system of the EU and enhance economic governance. They are committed to building a stronger Europe to defend common interests and values. Last but not least, they want the EU to be stronger in the world and safer at home.¹⁶

European Green Party proposes a Green New Deal: fighting unemployment, poverty and all forms of social injustice; transforming the economies with innovation and eco-efficient solutions to tackle climate change and environmental degradation; re-regulating the financial industry so it serves the real economy. They reject the so-called pact on competitiveness and austerity. They want the comprehensive EU climate and energy legislation consistent with the fair share of global efforts, built on legally binding emission targets. Sustainability must be put at the heart of every major economic decision. They expect the EU to establish a value-driven common foreign policy and to play an important international role.¹⁷

The manifestoes mentioned above show that four European Parties have some similar preferences. They all expect to deepen the integration and reform the EU system, while increasing the

¹⁴European Peoples Party, "EPP Manifesto 2014", adopted by the EPP Election Congress in Dublin on 6 March 2014.

¹⁵PES Manifesto, "Towards a New Europe", adopted by the PES Election Congress in Rome on 1 March 2014.

¹⁶Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, "A European That Works", http://www.aldeparty.eu/sites/eldr/files/news/10204/2014_alde_party_manifesto.pdf, last accessed on 12 May 2014.

¹⁷European Green Party, "Change Europe, Vote Green", <http://europeangreens.eu/2014-manifesto>, last accessed on 12 May 2014.

influence of the EU in international affairs. But in terms of social and economic issues, they have different policy orientations. EPP and liberals are central right parties. Free trade and competitiveness are their priorities and they work for signing the TTIP with the US. Socialists and Greens are typical central left parties, which put more emphasis on social Europe. Social justice, gender equality and citizen rights are more important topics for them.

Additionally, the European Left Party resists austerity policy and plans to organise a conference on the issue of restructuring public debt. They want to rebuild Europe to give power to the people, workers and citizens. They refuse the TTIP, which in their opinion could lead to major social and cultural regression in Europe. They call for fair trade with the world and defend peace and political dialogue against violence and military coercion.¹⁸ The extreme right European Alliance for Freedom calls for the right to self-determination and improve democracy and transparency in the EU. They respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, which is a key element in safeguarding and enhancing Europe's cultural heritage.¹⁹ European Conservative Party did not pass any manifesto, but the core of this European Party, the UK Tory expects to safeguard the national interests and more powers back to member states. It also calls for reforming the EU.²⁰

Generally speaking, the political system in the 8th European Parliament will relatively keep stable. In the decision making process of the European Parliament, different procedures require different majorities. Because no group can control the simple majority, let alone absolute majority, the political groups needs to form coalitions to push through the legislation. Following the European Parliamentary elections in 2014, three main coalitions still stay in the 8th parliament: the grand coalition by EPP and S&D (sometimes with ALDE and Greens together), the central left coalition by S&D, ALDE and Greens, the central right coalition by EPP, ALDE and ECR. There are no fixed coalitions and different coalitions will be formed in different policy areas. The percentage of the grand coalition will increase, especially facing the extreme right wing parties. EPP and S&D have already reached an informal agreement that they would cooperate to resist the extreme right wing parties in the new European Parliament.²¹ Looking at the certain policy area, the grand coalition is possibly on the winning side when dealing with the European integration, constitutional and legal affairs issues. Central left coalition has big chance to win in the field of environment, justice and home affairs. While in the economic and monetary affairs policy area, central right coalition will successfully push through the legislation.

II. The characteristics of the European elections

Although this European election in 2014 is already the 8th election, it still had the characteristics for second-order national elections. The notion of second-order national elections

¹⁸European Left, "EL Manifesto for the 2014 European Elections", <http://www.european-left.org/positions/electoral-manifesto-party-european-left-european-elections-2014>, last accessed on 12 May 2014.

¹⁹European Free Alliance, "2014 EFA Manifesto", http://www.e-f-a.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/EFA_3263_manifesto_ENG_230114.pdf, last accessed on 12 May 2014.

²⁰UK Conservative Party, "Conservative Party European Election Manifesto 2014", http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Downloadable%20Files/MANIFESTO%202014/Large%20Print%20Euro%20Manifesto_English.ashx, last accessed on 12 May 2014.

²¹Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), November and December 2013.

was first discussed by Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt. According to them, the first direct European elections in reality were second-order national elections in nine member states. For parties and voters, national parliamentary elections and presidential elections are most important, so they could be seen as first-order elections. While the importance and risk of other elections including by-elections, municipal elections, local and European elections are relatively less, these elections are only considered as second-order national elections.²²

The European elections in 2014 still had the characteristics for second-order national elections and the European issues had little influence on the election. The whole process of the campaign showed that European elections basically still consisted of 28 fragmented campaigns debating national issues in member states. As early as July 2013, the European Parliament passed a resolution on the 2014 European Parliamentary elections in which the Parliament called on each European party propose its candidate for the next president of the European Commission in order to improve the pan-European campaign.²³ Five European Parties proposed their candidates: Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, Guy Verhofstadt, José Bové and Ska Keller²⁴, Alexis Tsipras. These candidates took part in the campaigns in many member states and they also had TV debates. But they were only seen as the representatives for national parties instead of the candidates for the next European Commission. Both the discussion and support for the candidates of the next European Commission were quite limited. Firstly, national parties controlled the European elections²⁵ that they could decide the party candidates, manifestos and even the campaign strategies.²⁶ Secondly, debates in the campaign were mainly dominated by national issues. Although due to the impacts of the economic and financial crisis, some debates covered the issues on the austerity policy and EU membership, but these debates were not the core of the campaign. For instance, Spain has been confronted with the economic crisis and both elites and normal citizens had critical view on the EU-imposed austerity policy, but national social and economic policies, constitutional reform and the unity of the Spain were more important topics in the campaign.²⁷ In Latvia, with the general election scheduled to be held in October 2014, the European election became a part of national election and was dominated by the national situation. Economic policy in the context of financial crisis was at the centre of the debate. National parties would change their strategies based on the result of the European election in order to prepare for the national election later.²⁸ So, the real 'European election' was still far from the truth in 2014.

²²Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, "Nine Second Order National Elections A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results", *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol.8, No.1,1980, pp. 3-44.

²³European Parliament Resolution of 4 July 2013 on improving the Practical Arrangements for the Holding of the European Elections in 2014, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0323+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>, last accessed on 5 November 2013.

²⁴European Green Party proposed two Candidates for the next President of the European Commission.

²⁵Because of the Single Transferable Vote System, the situation in Ireland is different from other member states.

Relatively speaking, the campaign for the European election in Ireland is mainly dominated by the candidates instead of parties. See Rory Costello, "The Irish European Parliament Elections will be Fought on the Basis of Personalities Rather than Parties", 21 March 2014,

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/03/21/irelands-electoral-system-ensures-that-the-irish-european-parliament-elections-will-be-fought-on-the-basis-of-personalities-rather-than-parties/>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

²⁶Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), November and December 2013.

²⁷Carne Colomina and Elina Viilup, "The Impact of Spain's Economic and Political Crisis on the European Elections", *EPIN Commentary No. 17*, 2 April 2014,

<http://www.ceps.eu/book/impact-spain%E2%80%99s-economic-and-political-crisis-european-elections>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

²⁸Licia Cianetti, "Latvia's European Parliament Elections will be a Key Battleground in the run up to the general

Looking at the results of the elections, firstly, small parties did better than last elections. As a result, main political groups lost some seats. After the 2014 European elections, the total number of political parties that had representatives in the 8th Parliament is around 190²⁹, 20 more than last elections.³⁰ This time, 20 out of 28 member states saw new parties enter into the European Parliament. The anti-austerity party Greece SYRIZA defeated the governing party and got the first place in the country. Alternative for Germany gained 7 seats with 7.1% of votes. Due to the change of the threshold, 7 small parties in Germany won 1 seat respectively in the new Parliament.³¹

Secondly, traditional big parties lost seats. The European election was treated as a touchstone for national elections in order to reward or punish governing parties. French ruling party Socialist (PS) held less than 14% of the votes, after FN and UMP. UK governing party Conservative party gained 23.3% of the votes, less than UKIP and Labour party. Danish governing party also lost the European election to Danish People's Party.³² Meanwhile, the success of German and Italian ruling parties showed that voters support the current government in their country. The highest percentage of votes received by a single party in any country during the 2014 European elections was 53.4% (Maltese Labour Party). The lowest percentage of the vote gained by the largest party in a country was 15.4% (see Table: Party Statistics at the 2014 European Parliament Elections). In two-thirds of the twenty-eight EU member states, no party was able to win at least one-third of the vote.³³

Table: Party Statistics at the 2014 European Parliament Elections

Country	Largest party vote (%)	Vote for two largest parties (%)	No. of parties over 33%	No. of parties over 25%	Parties with MEPs
Belgium	16.4	28.9	0	0	10
Luxembourg	37.7	52.7	1	1	4
Malta	53.4	62.0	2	2	2
Italy	40.8	62.0	1	1	7
Greece	26.6	49.3	0	1	6
Denmark	26.6	45.7	0	1	7

election in October”, 7 May, 2014,

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/05/07/latvias-european-parliament-elections-will-be-a-key-battleground-in-the-run-up-to-the-general-election-in-october/>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

²⁹Statistics based on the data from the European Parliament website. Here the electoral coalition was treated as one party.

³⁰See the European Parliament website, <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/seats-member-state-absolut.html>, last accessed on 16 June 2014.

³¹See the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-de-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

³²See the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-introduction-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.

³³Cas Mudde, “The European Parliament Elections Show the Increasingly Fragmented Nature of European Party Systems”, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/06/12/the-european-parliament-elections-show-the-increasingly-fragmented-nature-of-european-party-systems/>, last accessed on 16 June 2014.

Ireland	24.0	46.0	0	0	3
Sweden	24.4	39.7	0	0	9
Germany	35.3	62.6	1	2	13
Spain	26.1	46.1	0	1	12
Austria	27.0	51.1	0	2	5
Lithuania	17.4	34.7	0	0	7
Cyprus	37.7	64.6	1	2	4
France	25.0	45.8	0	1	7
Finland	22.6	42.3	0	0	7
Netherlands	15.4	30.4	0	0	10
Estonia	24.3	46.7	0	0	5
UK	26.8	51.5	0	1	10
Bulgaria	30.5	49.6	0	1	5
Portugal	31.5	59.2*	0	2*	5*
Romania	37.6*	52.6	1	1	6
Latvia	46.0	60.0	1	1	6
Hungary	51.5	66.2	1	1	6
Croatia	41.4*	81.3*	1*	2*	5*
Poland	32.3	63.6	0	2	5
Slovenia	24.9	40.5	0	0	5*
Czech Rep	16.1	32.1	0	0	7
Slovakia	24.1	37.3	0	0	8
EU	30.1	51.3	10	25	6.7

Note:*indicate that at least one of the parties is an electoral coalition

Source: Cas Mudde, "The European Parliament Elections Show the Increasingly Fragmented Nature of European Party Systems",

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/06/12/the-european-parliament-elections-show-the-increasingly-fragmented-nature-of-european-party-systems/>, last accessed on 16 June 2014.

Thirdly, the turnout of 2014 elections is not high. 42.61% is slightly lower than that 43% in last elections.³⁴ From the first direct elections in 1979, the turnout continues going down (see Figure: Turnout for European elections). In order to increase the turnout in 2014, many institutions and organisations held many activities. For instance, on 10th September 2013, the European Parliament launched its awareness and information campaign, which covered four phases, until the newly-elected parliament elects the next European Commission President. The vice president of the European Parliament stressed that the only way to legitimize and influence EU decision-making was through the European Parliament, which was the citizen's voice in the EU decision-making process.³⁵ Although 2014 European elections hold high expectations, the declining trend remains unchanged. High difference were among member states that the turnout in Luxemburg and Belgium was 89.64% and 85.55% due to the compulsory voting requirement,

³⁴See the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html>, last accessed on 5 March 2015.

³⁵European Parliament Press Release, "European Parliament Launches Information Campaign towards 2014 Election", 10 September 2013, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20130906IPR18827/html/European-Parliament-launches-information-campaign-towards-2014-elections>, last accessed on 12 September 2013.

while in Slovak, the turnout was only 13.05% which was the lowest in all EU member states.³⁶ Some scholars argue that the turnout is the result of the combination of apathy and anger from citizens.³⁷ However, if people compare the turnout with that in other local elections and mid-term elections for US congress, the turnout of the 8th European election is still ok.³⁸

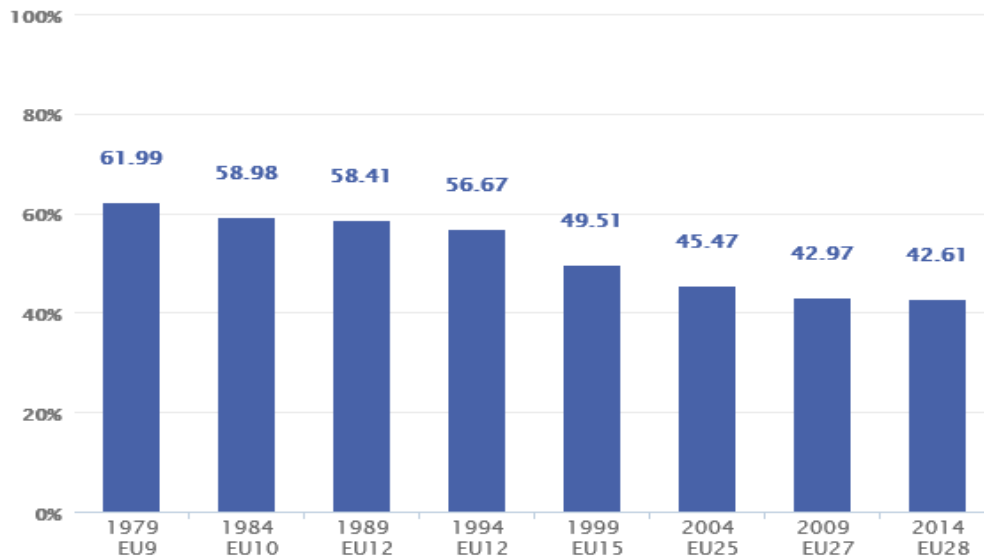


Figure: Turnout for European elections

Source: the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html>, last accessed on 5 March 2015.

III. The impacts of the European elections in 2014

The European elections are quite different from the parliamentary elections in EU member states. After the national parliamentary election, that which party becomes the winner is crucial to the politics in the future. But the political system of the EU is unlike the national political system that the political groups do not need to support or oppose certain government and the main challenge for them is to make legislative majorities. The operation of the European Parliament is mainly based on the coalitions of the political groups. EPP and S&D are still the biggest two groups in the new Parliament. The working of the European Parliament will not suffer a fundamental change that most important legislations require the cooperation between EPP and S&D.

³⁶See the European Parliament website, <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html>, last accessed on 9 August 2014.

³⁷Sonia Piedrafita and Anne Lauenroth, "Between Apathy and Anger: Challengers to the Union from the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament", *EPIN Papers*, 20 May 2014, p.11, <http://www.ceps.be/book/between-apathy-and-anger-challenges-union-2014-elections-european-parliament>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

³⁸Daniel Gros and Sonia Piedrafita, "Common Misconceptions about the European Parliamentary Elections", *CEPS Commentaries*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/common-misconceptions-about-european-parliamentary-elections>, last accessed on 1 June 2014.

The elections to the European Parliament in 2014 to some extent modified the political landscape, which would have important consequences for the formation of majorities to pass legislation and adopt decisions. Firstly, because the EPP had a big loss and the proportion of its representation in the new Parliament declined, the ‘social Europe’ supported by central left groups will possibly become more important. Secondly, it will be difficult to form coalitions on important or sensitive legislations. The grand coalition between the EPP and the S&D will become a ‘must’ and, with only 412 seats, will require stronger internal discipline and support from the Liberals (and the Greens when possible).³⁹ The new Parliament won’t reach agreements easily on a reform agenda or on deep economic achievement. The EPP prefers austerity but the S&D put more emphasis on growth.⁴⁰ And the negotiation on TTIP will also be a tough task. Thirdly, extreme right parties will face limitations to exert influence in the new Parliament although they made significant gains and many extreme parties are quite active in member states. There are lots of divergences among extreme right wing parties and they pursue different policies and ideologies. The EFD group in last legislature had a relatively low cohesion rate compare to other groups. The Rule of Procedure in the European Parliament also sets barriers to extreme parties. They are still minorities in the whole Parliament and main groups do not see them as coalition partners. So, it is difficult for them to push through legislation which they support.⁴¹ Besides, participation rate for extreme right wing parties are less than other groups.⁴² They gave more speeches in plenary, but write fewer reports and opinions because they focus their role on gaining publicity rather than participating in policy-making activities in the European Parliament. All of the above means that they may have little influence over the policy-making process in the Parliament.⁴³ But much caution is still needed to deal with extreme right wing parties. Main groups should think about the reasons behind the rise of extreme parties, citizens’ real interests and priorities.

After the European Parliamentary elections in 2014, although the total seats of radicals and Eurosceptic parties account for 20% of the whole Parliament, they cannot change the trend that the main groups in the European Parliament still support European integration. On the whole, the Europhile consensus of the main groups still dominates the new Parliament.⁴⁴ But this does not exclude the possibility that at some certain time, anti-EU parties could produce negative opinion and influence the perception of normal citizens. As a result, some policy area for instance the immigration policy may be affected. Additionally, it should be noted that to characterize the election result as a rejection to Europe simply is not fair. Recent poll suggest that, across Europe, about 40% of the population still trust the European Parliament, where only 25% trust their

³⁹Sonia Piedrafita and Karel Lannoo, “The New European Parliament: Workable but Impaired?”, *CEPS Commentaries*, 27 June 2014, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/new-european-parliament-workable-impaired>, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

⁴⁰Euractive, “Europe on Course for ‘Grand Coalition’ after Election”, 26 May 2014, http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/europe-course-grand-coalition-after-election-302386?utm_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm_campaign=8458d0e091-EU_ELECTIONS_LIVE__5_26_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bab5f0ea4e-8458d0e091-245461569, last accessed on 05 June 2014.

⁴¹Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), December 2013.

⁴²VoteWatch, “The Activity records of MEPs analysed by EP Groups and National Party”, *VoteWatch Europe Special Policy Brief 3/2014*.

⁴³Marley Morris, “Conflicted Politicians: the Populist Radical Right in the European Parliament”, pp. 49-50, 61-62, <http://counterpoint.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Conflicted-politicians-the-populist-radical-right-in-the-European-Parliament.pdf>, last accessed on 5 January 2014.

⁴⁴Janis A. Emmanouilidis and Corina Stratulat, “Post-European Parliament Elections”, *European Policy Centre Publications*, 27 May 2014, p.2, http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=4&pub_id=4464, last accessed on 5 June 2014.

national parliaments. The deeper roots of the surge of Eurosceptic and other protest parties originate with the general dissatisfaction with the state of the economy and dysfunctional national political systems. Reform is need at home, in national capitals.⁴⁵

Since political balances remained broadly unchanged in the European Parliament following the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, the Sino-EU relations will not have substantial change. Due to the nature of the parliament, the European Parliament sees itself as the representative of European citizens and the guardian of human rights. So the European Parliament will continue passing resolutions concerning human rights, Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Additionally, extreme right wing parties prefer to give speeches in the plenary, so possibly they may have some negative views on China, which to some extent play a role in influencing the public opinion in Europe. Meanwhile, it is important to note that many MEPs point out that after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament extends its power not only in internal legislative area, but also on external trade policy. They sincerely hope that China could see the European Parliament as an important player.⁴⁶

Generally speaking, although some MEPs are critical to the human rights situation in China, more and more MEPs realise the importance of the Sino-EU relations and expect to further the party exchange and parliamentary communication with each other. The EU-China Investment Agreement will be one of the priorities for the new European Parliament. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament has consent power to the agreement and it will prepare to exert its influence.⁴⁷ In the speech at CASS, the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Martin Schulz said, the world has become so interdependent and complex that many of today's problems cannot be solved by one player alone. China and Europe need each other today more than ever for dealing with challenges such as sustainable growth, climate change, terrorism etc. This year is the 40th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic relations. The president expressed that he was convinced that EU-China relations are already on a positive track and have great potential. So China is at the top of his foreign policy agenda. Mr. Schulz attached high emphasis on China's active and constructive role for all questions of global governance. "In the last 30 years China has made a stunning ascent to an economic superpower lifting millions of people out of poverty. Today China is a heavy-weight in global economics and finance and its impact on world politics is increasingly felt." "Our successful future will depend on us working together".⁴⁸

⁴⁵Daniel Gros, "Europe is still standing", *CEPS Commentaries*, 6 June 2014, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/europe-still-standing>, last accessed on 10 June 2014.

⁴⁶Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), November 2013.

⁴⁷Interview MEPs in the European Parliament (Brussels), December 2013.

⁴⁸Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, "Marking the 40th anniversary of the EU-China relations: what next?", Speech at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 18 March 2015.

Appendix

Table: Seats by Political Group and Member State for 2014 European Elections

Member State \ Political Group	EPP	S & D	ECR	ALDE	GUE/NGL	Greens/EFA	EFDD	NI	Total
Belgium	4	4	4	6	0	2	0	1	21
Bulgaria	7	4	2	4	0	0	0	0	17
Czech Republic	7	4	2	4	3	0	1	0	21
Denmark	1	3	4	3	1	1	0	0	13
Germany	34	27	8	4	8	13	0	2	96
Estonia	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	6
Ireland	4	1	1	1	4	0	0	0	11
Greece	5	4	1	0	6	0	0	5	21
Spain	17	14	0	8	11	4	0	0	54
France	20	13	0	7	4	6	1	23	74
Croatia	5	2	1	2	0	1	0	0	11
Italy	17	31	0	0	3	0	17	5	73
Cyprus	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	6
Latvia	4	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	8
Lithuania	2	2	1	3	0	1	2	0	11
Luxembourg	3	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
Hungary	12	4	0	0	0	2	0	3	21
Malta	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Netherlands	5	3	2	7	3	2	0	4	26

Austria	5	5	0	1	0	3	0	4	18
Poland	23	5	19	0	0	0	0	4	51
Portugal	7	8	0	2	4	0	0	0	21
Romania	15	16	0	1	0	0	0	0	32
Slovenia	5	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	8
Slovakia	6	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	13
Finland	3	2	2	4	1	1	0	0	13
Sweden	4	6	0	3	1	4	2	0	20
UK	0	20	20	1	1	6	24	1	73
EU	221	191	70	67	52	50	48	52	751

Source: the European Parliament website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2014.html>, last accessed on 5 July 2014.