

CRS Insights

The 2014 European Parliament Elections: Outcomes and Implications
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Political Context

Between May 22-25, 2014, the 28 member states of the [European Union](#) (EU) held elections for the next [European Parliament](#) (EP), a key institution that represents the citizens of the EU countries. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serve five-year terms. The new EP, which began work on July 1, 2014, has 751 MEPs from 186 national parties (for background, see CRS Report RS21998, [The European Parliament](#)).

The [recent EP elections](#) are notable for several reasons. They were the first since the entrance into force of the EU's [Lisbon Treaty](#) in December 2009, which increased the power of the EP. The Treaty also explicitly links the EP elections to the selection of the next President of the [European Commission](#) (the EU's executive). Although the leaders of the member states still decide on the next Commission President, the treaty now requires that they take into account the results of the EP elections. Thus, for the first time, five of the EP's main political groups nominated candidates for Commission President.

Additionally, Europe's recent economic and financial crisis has contributed to the rise of anti-EU or "euroskeptic" parties in several EU countries. Many of these parties—which are predominantly nationalistic, populist, and on the far right, although a few are on the far left—made gains in the EP elections, with potential implications for the functioning of the EU and for certain issues in U.S.-EU relations.

Election Outcomes

MEPs are organized into political groups, which caucus according to ideology rather than nationality and must consist of at least 25 MEPs from a minimum of 7 EU countries. Like the previous Parliament, the new EP has seven political groups, as well as a number of "non-attached" or independent MEPs. Political groups give MEPs more influence as groups receive funding from the EP, more speaking time, and have a formal role in EP decision making; the relative size of the political groups also helps to determine EP leadership and committee posts.

The European Parliament (2014-2019)

751 Members

| Political Group | Seats |
|--|--------------|
| European People's Party (EPP; center-right) | 221 |
| Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D; center-left) | 191 |
| European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR; right-wing/euroskeptics) | 70 |
| Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE; centrist/liberals) | 67 |
| European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL; far-left/former communists) | 52 |
| Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA; greens/regionalists) | 50 |
| Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD far-right/euroskeptics) | 48 |

The two traditionally largest groups in the Parliament retained their dominant positions, with the center-right EPP securing 221 seats and the center-left S&D winning 191. Compared to the previous Parliament, however, the EPP lost a considerable number of seats (-53) due to voter dissatisfaction with economic austerity measures and the appeal of far-right euroskeptic parties. As the largest group still, the EPP was best positioned to influence the decision of the EU member states on the next Commission President. Despite a contentious process and British opposition, in late June 2014, member states nominated the EPP candidate put forward during the campaign—former Luxembourg prime minister [Jean-Claude Juncker](#)—as the next Commission President; Juncker was confirmed by the Parliament in mid-July.

While euroskeptics are not an entirely new phenomenon in the Parliament, up to 25% of seats in the new EP appear to have been won by MEPs opposed to further EU integration. This percentage includes a wide range of euroskeptics, from those that advocate for EU reforms and greater member state sovereignty to those that call for an end to the EU's single currency or even to the EU itself. The relatively moderate euroskeptic ECR emerged as the third largest group in the new EP; despite losses for one of its leading national parties, the British Conservatives, the ECR was able to gain MEPs from other right-wing parties across the EU. Hardline euroskeptics were unable to form a political group given their disparate outlooks, competing nationalist agendas, and diverse personalities.

Potential Implications

Ahead of the EP elections, some EU officials expressed concerns that the formation of a far-right, hardline euroskeptic group could help block legislation and hinder EU decision making, especially if such a group forged a united front with other euroskeptic groups (such as ECR and EFDD). While many EU policymakers are relieved that that hardline euroskeptics failed in forming a political group, analysts point out that hardliners in the new EP could still have consequences for the EU:

- Hardliners could use the Parliament as a venue from which to espouse their anti-EU views—possibly further eroding public support for the EU—and as a platform from which to advance themselves in national politics in their home countries;
- Euroskeptic parties could shift certain EU policies if they prompt mainstream EP political groups and established EU leaders to embrace similar positions, possibly producing a greater emphasis in the EU on promoting economic growth, tightening immigration policies, and slowing further EU enlargement and integration.

Observers also suggest that the increase in euroskeptic MEPs could have ramifications for U.S. interests, including the following:

- **The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).** Although many MEPs support this proposed U.S.-EU free trade agreement, far-right and far-left MEPs opposed to free trade or fearful that it might dilute national brands could heighten reservations in the Parliament, which must approve any eventual TTIP agreement for it to take effect.
- **U.S.-EU Counterterrorism Information-sharing Agreements.** The increase in far-right MEPs at the expense of the center-right EPP group could weaken support for renewing U.S.-EU accords on tracking terrorist financing and sharing airline passenger data. The EPP has been a key backer of these agreements, which have long been controversial because of data privacy concerns and opposed by many left-leaning MEPs.
- **Relations with Russia.** Several far-right euroskeptic parties have taken pro-Russian stances on a range of issues, from energy to the conflict in Ukraine and Crimea. Some analysts are concerned that these parties could enhance support for Russia in the Parliament and across the EU.