

EVALUATION OF THE COMMON CAMPAIGN FOR THE 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

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After the European Elections of May 2014, the EU is on one hand still where it had been prior to the campaign: at a crossroads. The election results have also made it completely obvious that business as usual is not an option. The EU has to change. It is already changing. Politics will focus on the question of which forces will dominate the change. This struggle has only been moved to a new level.

Anti-Europeans, chauvinists and right-wing extremists gained in the elections. In countries like France and the UK these groups came first among the different political forces. They increased their visibility and impact overall. There were also setbacks for populists, for example in the Netherlands and in Italy. Anti-European and anti-democratic populists managed to fill the political vacuum in situations where dominant traditional parties avoided attacking them, or even borrowed talking points from them, or the traditional parties' own credibility was beyond repair. Anti-European and anti-democratic parties have shown that they are capable of exploiting popular anger over any lack of European democracy, over the failed austerity policies represented by the Troika and over technocratic overreach.

The European Green Party and national Green parties have fought against anti-European populists and right-wing extremists. On the other hand their success must mobilise us to analyze the situation even more thoroughly and to come up with better answers that will resonate more broadly throughout our societies.

The biggest loser in the European Elections was the European People's Party (EPP), which campaigned to defend the European status quo. They lost about 60 seats in the European Parliament. Their insistence on austerity policies, their inability to offer the European public any new vision, their refusal to find just and sustainable solutions to problems ranging from climate change to youth unemployment, or from the plight of refugees to the infringement of human rights in a growing number of member states has not served them well with European voters. This notwithstanding, they were able to stay in first place among the political families, thus making any real change in direction of EU policies challenging over the next term. EPP politicians hold strong positions in the Council as well as in the new European Commission. In the new European Parliament the Greens will not seek a coalition with them, but formulate a clear alternative.

Socialists had hoped before the Election Day to become stronger and to pass the EPP, moving into first place. But their result was as stagnant as their policy had been. Liberals lost strongly in populist member states and they lost their third place in the European Parliament, even though they were willing to accept new members with questionable reputations into their group. Socialists and Liberals will try to form a permanent Grand Coalition with EPP in the European Parliament

and the Council. This will leave us Greens often in a rather lonely position. It also offers us the opportunity to emphasize Green strategies and solutions to the problems Europe is facing.

Parties belonging to the GUE profited from the deep crisis and from exploiting resentment in some member countries. However they remained more the expression of a protest vote than a clear and innovative proposal for Europe. Some new members from civil and social movements have joined GUE. Greens must work towards becoming more attractive to these new forces.

The Green electoral result is a mixed bag: in absolute numbers our strength in the European Parliament decreased by eight seats, but the result was better than any poll indicated. Overall, EGP member parties managed to mobilize better than expected. In more detail, the picture shows a mixture of defeats, setbacks, turnarounds, advances and successes. For instance, setbacks compared to 2009 numbers were suffered by EELV, Ecolo and Oikologoi Prasinoi, amounting to a loss of 12 seats between them. Turnarounds were achieved in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, where Greens successfully overcame stinging earlier defeats and managed to become stronger. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen lost 3 seats, partially owing to a change in the electoral law, but managed to overcome their weak showing in the previous national election. Advances were made in Ireland and the Czech Republic. In the former, Greens only narrowly missed a seat that even optimists have not expected them to gain, and managed to re-establish themselves on their country's political radar. The Czech Greens continued their re-emergence, although slowly. Some parties stayed strong (like the Luxembourg Greens), while others stayed weak (like the Polish, the Baltic and the Balkan Greens). As regards success, five countries stand out: Austria (2<3), Croatia (0<1), Hungary (0<2), Sweden (2<4) and the UK (2<3). We should all learn from these successes, as we should learn from defeats. We should also analyze the situation in those countries where member parties did not even get close to being elected.

The fact that Green political representation in the European Parliament now also includes Central and Eastern European countries - with MEPs from Hungary and Croatia - is great motivation for the whole European Green family. A disappointing situation still dominates in the south of Europe, even though in Spain Equo had a partially positive result, notably in view of the next year general elections. In Italy, for the first time in eight years, Greens were back on the ballot under their own logo. It is very clear that the Green family will have to develop a specific strategy directed at increasing Green presence and representation in the east and south of Europe. We must work with our member parties to that end, but also take into account what is happening in our political vicinity.

Even though Green numbers have not grown in the European Parliament, the Green base has been broadened throughout Europe. Analyzing our weaknesses and our defeats as well as our improvements and our victories, we should set a common goal for ourselves as a Green family of working hard over the upcoming five years, with a clear ambition of becoming the third political force in the next European Parliament in 2019.

The Green common campaign that the EGP ran together with the member parties and with valuable support from the Green Group in the European Parliament contributed positively to the national efforts of our EU member parties. This was our third common campaign and it was the

best one yet, with more member party involvement in its development and more member party usage of the different elements than ever before. Without going into detail, we want to point out that for instance, we became the EU party with the most interaction on Facebook. The leading candidates who we elected through the Green Primary played a very positive role in strengthening cooperation beyond national borders.

The work around the Green New Deal, work on the future of Europe, debates around the reforms necessary to ensure a democratic Europe and efforts to elaborate shared proposals on how to deal with the crisis made it possible to keep our political family united. We did not split between south and north. This ground work contributed to the fact that the Common Manifesto, adopted unanimously at the February Electoral Convention, provided a reliable basis for our political communication as a European Green family. This Manifesto has been translated into all official languages of the European Union as well as Catalan. Our common decision on TTIP helped develop a clear profile during the electoral campaign. Our Green New Deal strategy and in particular the Green jobs brochure that was translated in many languages proved applicable and useful in member states around Europe. 29 of 33 EGP member parties within the EU did make use of the visuals, the posters, the online tools or other elements of our common campaign – some of course more than others. We learned that probably the greatest potential for common campaigning is online. FYEG ran their own common campaign and successfully so, making a discernible impact.

Our unprecedented online primary organized prior to the proper election campaign, positioned the Green family as an innovative force in the development of European democracy, raised awareness before the real campaign started and resulted in the election of two outstanding leading candidates that played a very positive role in the presidential debates during the campaign and successfully supported many member parties around Europe. The online primary also showed some weaknesses, notably regarding participation. On the basis of our experience, we will also closely monitor our organizational and financial capacity for possible future primaries.

In the context of an increasingly disillusioned electorate, who is looking for improved mechanisms of political participation, the Greens successfully led the way in implementing just such a process at the European level that others are only starting to propose at the municipal or national level.

Part of our success with our campaign came from the fact that we did not get bogged down in an abstract pro-EU/anti-EU conversation, but were able to position ourselves as the one party among the pro-Europeans that clearly insists on major change, and the one party among change advocates that reliably defends the European project.

A very important dimension of this election campaign concerned the development of European democracy. Through the nomination of leading candidates and the organization of presidential debates we, together with EPP, S&D, ALDE and GUE helped to create more transparency regarding the political alternatives advocated by the different political families, by identifying the leading candidates as our common representatives – the faces and voices of this agenda. The successful fight for the shared goal of electing the new President of the Commission from among the leading candidates, taking into account the majorities in the European Parliament, has opened

the way towards a more visible European dimension of the electoral campaign, thus strengthening the visibility and role of the EP; it also created a dynamic, which contributed to successfully fighting back against the notion that the European Council should continue taking all the most important decisions behind closed doors. This has been a victory for the community approach over the inter-governmental approach.

However, those fighting for more European democracy have just won one battle. It will continue. More direct democracy, a strong alliance between Parliament from all levels of governance and a strong defense of human and civil rights in all EU member states and beyond will continue to be on our agenda from here on. The fight for European democracy will also take centre stage, if and when Treaty revisions are put on the agenda, for instance in the context of the ongoing Brexit debate and in the discussion on how to interpret the EU stability pact.

For our work over the next few years, the common Manifesto and the priorities that it defines can be used as the basis for a common agenda. On that basis we should also actively strive to broaden our alliances, to open our arms to cooperation with likeminded political actors wherever we can, and to strengthen the European Green family. With that goal in mind we are also willing to take our policies, our arguments and our proposals directly to the people more actively than we have done so far. Not accepting business as usual thus implies opening ourselves up for as intense conversations with the electorate as possible. We have to spread our message much more broadly, but we also must listen much better. We must not become part of the Brussels bubble, but rather be an active force for change. We will invite European citizens to “Change Europe, Go Green”.