

# Luxembourg: The first European Parliament—only vote

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## The context

For the first time since 1979, European elections were held separately from national elections in Luxembourg. The simultaneity of elections decided on before the first direct European elections (as Luxembourgish Members of Parliament were already elected for a five-year mandate and that the next scheduled election was to be held in 1979 anyway) and government stability made all seven previous national and European elections fall on the same day, with a number of consequences ensuing. For instance, as European elections are fought on a unique, nationwide constituency until 2009, all party heavyweights used to be present on both lists to ensure a good result for their European list (in Luxembourg, voters can cast a vote for a party, one or several candidates on the same or on *different* lists, what is termed *interparty panachage*). As their leaders were elected on both accounts, they would subsequently decide on which mandate they would choose according to the expected results of the national government formation. In 2009, it was decided among the main parties that there would be no more double candidacies (the smaller parties kept on practicing it, however). A second consequence was that the European election campaign was continuously eclipsed by the concurrent national one, making the election even more of a second-order type.

This context changed for the coming 2014 elections, as the Christian democrat–Socialist (CSV) government led by Prime Minister Juncker (who had been prime minister since 1995) collapsed in July 2013—for a series of affairs concerning, among others, the lack of governmental control of the national intelligence—leading to the first anticipated elections since the late 1950s. Not only this made the elections bound to be distinct, opening for the possibility of a genuinely ‘European’ campaign for the May 2014 elections, but these anticipated elections held in October 2013 led to the formation of a coalition excluding the largest party of the country that had only been out of government for

five years (1974–1979) in the postwar era. The CSV electoral losses (from 26 to 23 seats of 60) allowed for the formation of an alternative coalition made of the Liberals (13 seats), the Socialists who had triggered the government crisis by not supporting the Christian democrat PM (13 seats) and the Greens (6 seats), leaving Juncker the experienced and European-wide known leader (often cited as potential president of the European Commission and chairman of the Euro group for eight years) in the opposition (Dumont, Kies: forthcoming).

The 2009 national elections had been a high for the CSV who also kept its three seats of six at the European Parliament (EP), for only one for the LSAP (Socialists), the DP (Liberals) and the Greens despite losing approximately 6 percentage points at the EP election compared with their 2004 score (in 2004, Prime Minister Juncker headed the CSV list for EP election as well as the list of his party for the national election in the South constituency; in 2009, he was only candidate for the national election). In a country where there has never been a real cleavage amongst parties and voters on European issues, the main stakes of this first separate European election are (1) again the fate of ex-prime minister Juncker chosen by the European People's Party as lead figure and potential president of the European Commission despite not being candidate for the EP election and (2) the electoral fate of the new coalition parties and whether or not one of the largest of these three (the DP or the LSAP) will manage to gain a second seat to the detriment of the CSV. The few opinion polls published since the national elections are not quite informative regarding the likely distribution of seats after the May 25 election. They, however, show that despite this campaign, being the first 'Europe-only' one,<sup>1</sup> and that their previous prime minister is candidate for the presidency of the Commission (more than 80% support this candidacy and his party is still, by far, considered to be the most credible to represent the interests of Luxembourg in the EU) about a third of respondents are not interested in it.

## Campaign strategies

Altogether, no less than nine parties compete for the six Luxembourgish Member of the European Parliament (MEP) seats, most of which without

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<sup>1</sup> But short, as the five main parties decided to devote only three weeks to the campaign, and limit their expenses to 65,000 euros each. The lower interest shown by parties themselves can also be seen in the size of their manifestos, which are for the most less than 50 pages long (a couple of the smaller and less Euro-enthusiastic parties devote some more pages to their electoral programme), and therefore much shorter than for the national elections.

any hope of getting any of these but with the only ambition of displaying their continuous presence on the political scene after national elections where all of these small parties fared relatively well. This is the case for the Party for Integral Democracy (PID) that wants to reach the 2% it almost got at the October 2013 election, the Pirate Party that had managed to reach almost 3% then, and the KPL (Communist Party, 1.5% at the national election). The Left (on the rise in 2013) and the sovereigntist ADR (which always fared worse at European elections than in national ones and is continuously losing votes since 1999) cannot expect to score the double-digit result that would allow them to dream about being allowed to express their less Euro-enthusiastic stances in Brussels and Strasbourg. These five parties, that altogether make for 5 of 60 seats in the national parliament, are indeed the less Euro-enthusiastic: for instance, the Left competes under the slogan 'Basta! Rebuild Europe' (a critique of the neoliberal conduct of the current Europe), ADR under 'Less Europe, more Luxembourg' (with a Europe of sovereign nation states, stricter immigration policies) and the PID would want the euro to be abandoned and national currencies reintroduced. Surprisingly, for a Luxembourgish party (as it would lead to a move of the general secretariat from Luxembourg to Brussels), the Pirate Party campaigns for a single site of the EP, Brussels, and for the abolishment of any form of veto rights in the council. The four larger parties see in a stronger Europe the possibility of a stronger Luxembourg. The CSV campaigns along these lines and on its image of competence outside of the borders of the Grand Duchy, acquired in part by its quasipermanence at the helm of the national government and capacity for seeking consensus in European spheres under the slogan 'For Europe, for Luxembourg'. Together with the Socialists, the Christian democrats want a more social and solidary Europe (a message brought by Juncker as well in his campaign for the presidency of the EU Commission, which fits with his home party message but may fit less with the rest of the EPP) and highlight the Community method. The DP and the Greens largely share the latter stance but also campaign for a more democratic and transparent Europe. The first would like a convention followed by a European-wide referendum held on the same day to revise the treaties and to give the EP a real right of legislative initiative. The Greens also want to keep on enlarging EP powers but also support more recourse to popular initiatives. Finally, a number of parties (Greens, The Left, PID, Pirate Party and KPL) oppose TAFTA and would cancel its negotiation (Esch-sur-Alzette, the second-largest city of the Grand Duchy, even adopted a motion supporting this goal). The other parties consider that we are only at an early stage of the negotiations and await for further information, while declaring that they will devote a great attention to its scrutiny. Viviane Reding, outgoing commissioner and currently on leave for the electoral campaign, declared she would suggest a pause of TAFTA negotiations to inform citizens and stakeholders.

## Results

The CSV is by far the winner of the 2014 European elections with over 37.6% of votes, 6.3 percentage points more than the 2009 elections, and even beating its record established at the 2004 election when Prime Minister Juncker was pulling the EP list. For the first time, it was the plurality winner in all municipalities of the country. This exceptional and largely unforeseen score is due to the participation of Juncker for the presidency of the European Commission (also defined as the seventh candidate of the list), to the good personal score of their chief candidate and incumbent European commissioner Viviane Reding and probably as well to the frustration of some voters that the CSV had been excluded from the outgoing national government despite remaining by fact the first party of the country at the unscheduled 2013 national election.

Another surprise was the score of the LSAP, which fell to 11.8%, losing 7.8 points over 2009, a score that corresponds to exactly half of its average result in the preceding seven direct EP elections (it had already lost 3.5 percentage points in 2009 compared with 2004, making its worst score at EP elections by crossing for the first time the 20% thresholds). With this score, the Luxembourg Socialists became only the fourth political force in the European elections, behind the Greens and the DP, while they had been the second force from 1984 to 2009. This important drop can be explained not only as a reaction of some voters to the coalition change after the anticipated national election but also, and probably more essentially, by the good score of the Left party (5.8%; +2.4 percentage points) and the absence of strong candidates on the LSAP list. Their six candidates competing for the election were all indeed newcomers in the European arena, and their leading candidate, Mady Delvaux-Stehres, a well-known figure in the country, had lost in terms of popular appeal by undertaking a controversial reform of the national education while minister in the government that collapsed in 2013.

The elections were finally characterised by the fact the Green party, despite also losing votes, became this time the second largest party with only 15%, bypassing the LSAP but also the Liberals, party of the new PM, who lost approximately 4 percentage points. This change in rankings of the parties was made possible by the good personal result of their leading candidate and incumbent MEP Claude Turmes, and conversely the disappointing personal score of the liberal head of list and also MEP candidate Charles Goerens.

Overall then, the parties of the new coalition lost no less than 13 percentage points compared with the previous EP election, a result as explained above that must be read as a reaction against the composition and first months of the new government as well as due to the usual better result of the CSV at the EP election when its leader is either candidate on the list or as this time compet-

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Table 1. Results of the 2014 European Parliament elections – Luxembourg

Party	EP Group	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (change from 2009)	Seats (change from 2009)
Christian Social Party (CSV)	EPP	37.7	3	+6.3	+0
The Green Party (déi Gréng)	G-EFA	15.0	1	-1.8	+0
The Democratic Party (DP)	ALDE	14.8	1	-3.9	+0
Luxemburgish Social Worker Party (LSAP)	S&D	11.8	1	-7.7	+0
Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR)	ECR	7.5	0	+0.1	+0
The Left (Déi Lénk)	GUE-N-GL	5.8	0	+2.4	+0
Pirate Party		4.2	0		+0
Party of Full Democracy (PID)		1.8	0		+0
Communist party (KPL)		1.5	0	-0.1	+0
Total		100.0	6		-
Turnout (%)		90		-0.8	
Legal threshold for obtaining MEPs (%)		None			

EP group abbreviations: EPP, European People's Party; S&D, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; ALDE, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; G-EFA, The Greens–European Free Alliance; ECR, European Conservatives and Reformists; GUE-NGL, European United Left–Nordic Green Left; EFD, Europe of Freedom and Democracy; NI, Non-Inscrits.

ing to become president of the European Commission. The CSV gains do not however correspond to the losses of the coalition parties (and the CSV result is only half a percent higher than the one obtained in 2004 and was its record until 2014). The other winners are the smaller parties who competed for the EP election. With their much less Euro-enthusiastic stances, and without much hope of reaping one seat, these all (except the Communist KPL) gained in votes in 2014: the sovereigntist ADR reached 7.5% (+0.1 points, still far for its 9.0% of 1999), Déi Lénk progressed to 5.8% (+2.4 points) and the Pirate Party made a successful first appearance with 4.3%.

Despite these changes in the score of the parties, the distribution of MEPs' seats remained the same. CSV kept its three seats, while DP, Déi Gréng and LSAP managed to keep their seat.

## References

Dumont, P. and Kies, R. (forthcoming). Luxembourg. *European Journal of Political Research*.