

Results of European Elections in Germany 2014

(translated excerpt by Benjamin-Emanuel Hoff & Horst Kahrs)

Around 400 million citizens of the European Union member states cast their vote for the 8th European Parliament from May 22 to 25, 2014.

This report will focus on results in Germany.

Due to the removal of the election threshold there will be 96 delegates from 14 parties from Germany represented in the European Parliament.



During European elections 2014 the parties of the German governing coalition gained four percentage points compared to 2009. The balance of power has, however, changed: The SPD can add 6.5 percent, the CDU remains widely stable with -0.6 percent, while the Bavarian regional party CSU clearly loses. Out of CDU perspective can be said: Angela Merkel helps winning elections, while Horst Seehofer (minister president of Bavaria, CSU) doesn't. In the Bavarian free state European elections were a good opportunity to teach the CSU a lesson, which cannot be said about the rest of Germany.

The strength of the governing parties can mainly be attributed to the prevailing perception of the populace that the overall and individual economic situation is good.

Furthermore, German politics played a bigger part in the vote decision than European politics. The election campaign of the two parties was tailored to Germany's role in the EU and to the advantages of EU and Euro for the economic situation in Germany.

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Share of seats in European Parliament; German parties, European Elections 2014

CDU	CSU	SPD	Grüne	LINKE	AfD	FDP
29 (-5)	5 (-3)	27 (+4)	11 (-3)	7 (-1)	7	3 (-9)
Freie Wähler	Piraten	Tierschutz	NPD	Familien	ÖDP	PARTEI
1	1	1	1	1	1	1

The resolutions and acts passed by the government and the majority of the great coalition in parliament in the run-up to the elections, among them the minimum wage, pension laws, etc., reinforced the positive internal policy perception and signalled a return to social democratic policies.

The latter may mainly explain the electoral success of the SPD, which, however, still lies clearly behind the CDU und below 30 percent. Even though SPD chair Gabriel and party whip Oppermann point to the fact that the SPD in no election before has ever gained so much, they refrain to mention that the SPD had to put up with landslide defeats in the past federal elections and started from a historically low level. Thus, it would have been most unlikely for the results to get worse. At the end of the campaign even the SPD put her eggs in the German, nationalist basket by canvassing Martin Schulz as a candidate „from Germany“ for Europe.

The Greens, as a federal oppositon party lose 55.000 votes and shares of 1.4 percent, nevertheless performed clearly better than in former federal elections.

DIE LINKE maintained her ground more ore less on the level of 2009 elections with a plus of 200.000 votes. As a result, she remained below her federal elections result and loses one seat in European Parliament due to the removal of the election threshold.

The results show a different picture on Land level for the party, even though a clear East-West divide cannot be discerned. In Brandenburg for example, the party gains absolute votes but loses 6.1 percent due to the increased turnout. In Lands like Schleswig-Holstein or Baden-Wurttemberg she improved clearly in absolute and relative figures but cannot exploit her full potential. Altogether it can be said: traditional voters have been fairly good activated compared to European elections 2009. On federal level the party, nevertheless, could not profit from the increased voter turnout.

The choice of issues of the Left party was tailored to the traditional voters – the focus was on redistribution, social justice, peace and a human refugees policy. „Europe“ played only a minor role in the campaign.

The aim of the strategy „to interest the disappointed social democrats voters after government formation“ could not be achieved. To the contrary – it seems the SPD can better close it voter ranks than in the first great coalition under the leadership of Merkel.

The old left rule of thumb „If the SPD governs – DIE LINKE wins“ does not remain directly valid. Rather, the need for the Left increases to open up to new issues and new constituencies authentically and seriously – without losing the traditional voters.

Nevertheless, the party demonstrates a stable condition during European elections 2014.

The biggest changes came about in the „conservative“ camp. The losses of the FDP underline their failure during federal elections. They will have difficulties to leave the 2-3 percent space.

On the other hand, the AfD celebrates her first victory. She receives protest votes and votes from the national-liberal-conservative, rather petty bourgeois milieu. The majority are non-affiliated economic-liberal and values focused voters. They believed their personal capability would be rewarded in the European market competition but see their Beside the AfD a number of other small parties, presumably six, will enter EP with one representative each.

This became possible through the removal of the election threshold by ruling of the Federal Consitutional Court. It is highly unfortunate that also the neofascist party can delegate one representative und thus strengthen the group of extreme rights in the EP.

The election result in Germany was, as in many other countries, mainly a national result. It was determined by the question about domestic German policy and

only secondary by the question which delegates from Germany should represent German interests in Europe. European interests or ideas about what would be useful for further European integration towards a democratic and social Europe played, at best, a minor role in the campaigns.

The growing turnout could in general involve an increased interest in European elections: instead of 43 percent now 48 percent said to have a „strong“ interest in European elections. More interesting should be that the assessment of the EU clearly changed among the respondents. 44 percent said that EU membership

has clear benefits for Germany. At the same time 60 percent assess the economic situation as „good“ with only 6 percent assessing it „bad“. 84 percent are even of the opinion that EU membership is „important“ for Germany's good economic situation, only 14 percent deemed it „unimportant“, and 60 percent thought the Euro responsible for the good situation².

The tight connection which has been established between EU membership and good economic situation in Ger-

many could have been an engine for voter turnout. It should be assumed that the EU is perceived as positive for the personal economic situation as well as a solidary community in times of crisis; to be more exact: the German policy in the EU. Thus, no protest vote was to be expected but rather support for the EU course of the great coalition.



Gabi Zimmer

The election result demonstrates to the European partner states that the political power relations in Germany are stable. Right-wing and national populist parties exist but remain small, in contrast to countries like France or Great Britain, where „right-wing populists“ became strongest force and may exert high pressure on the national policy and within the EU Council of Ministers. Yet, further pressure from the CSU to increase nationalisation of migration and social policy can be expected.

Voter Turnout

In Germany 2.9 million voters more than in 2009 cast their vote, voter turnout increased from 43.4 percent in 2009 to 48.1 percent. The increase of turnout can not only be explained by ten simultaneous local elections¹ as well as a referendum in Berlin on construction plans for the former Tempelhof airport.

¹ For a summary see contribution in the newsletter.

² Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, <http://wahl.zdf.de/wahlen/wahlen-im-zdf-12838120.html>

Local and District Elections in Germany May 2014

27.05.2014, Julia Wiedemann. In 10 of Germany's federal states simultaneously to European elections local and district elections took place. On the local level DIE LINKE is traditionally much stronger in the East of Germany than in the West. The average results of local elections in the East lay between 16.5 percent in Saxonia and 21.9 percent in Thuringia. In most of the Eastern states DIE LINKE could slightly increase her results; except in Brandenburg, where DIE LINKE lost 4.5 percent compared to former local elections. DIE LINKE Brandenburg is part of a governmental coalition with the SPD.

In the West of Germany DIE LINKE could also improve her local representation with average results between 2.9 percent in Rhineland-Palatinate and 7.3 in Saarland. In two districts in Hamburg DIE LINKE even gained 14 percent.

Despite the success for DIE LINKE, the majority in Germany is voting for the political right. The CDU

could maintain her major position in most of the municipalities and districts. As a new party on the political field the right wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) in some districts gained results from 4 percent up to 10 percent of the votes and more. Also the neofascist party NPD could keep its share of votes and partially increase it. Its highest average result was in the North in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with around 5.4 percent. The ugly record of the NPD lies in a municipality in Saxony with 20.5 percent of votes.

Especially in smaller cities and communities many independent voter's associations took part in the elections. In some municipalities they even won the majority and can enter the local council and the so called established parties played just a minor role..

DIE LINKE Party Congress 2014 in Berlin

12.05.2014, Uta Wegner. Only two weeks away from European Elections DIE LINKE held its party congress in Berlin from May 9 to 11. The congress focused on changes to the statutes and, of course, the election of the new party executives.

For **Friday** a tough schedule was released for voting on due **changes to the statutes**. Despite earlier expectations of hot debates on some controversial issues as the reduction of the executive board from now 44 to 30 members as well as the number of delegates to the congress from the party alliances everything went smoothly and those motions were rejected with great majority.

Gabi Zimmer, leader of the GUE/NGL group in EP hold her speech on this day full of memorable dates. On May 9, 1945 Nazi-Germany surrendered and thus World War 2 ended. Victory Day is celebrated in Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union where



the vast amount of victims is inestimable. DIE LINKE is celebrating May 8 as the day of deliberation and commemorates the victims of Germany's aggression. As a consequence, in 1950 the Schuman declaration led to the founding of the European Coal and Steel

Community, predecessor of the European Union. She further referred to the founding of the Party of the European Left exactly 10 years ago in Rome. She said in view of the strong growth of the party during that period from initially 15 member and observer parties to today 33 and its growing approval by the people in the European countries it is highly possible for the left to become the third-strongest group in the European Parliament. She said, it was a good and necessary decision to nominate Alexis Tsipras, head of the Greek SYRIZA for the office of the president of the European Commission. She ended her speech with a call to go to the polls. She said Europe, peace, and DIE LINKE belong to together.

The situation in **Ukraine** led to the issuing of several motions regarding the handling of the ongoing conflict within the country. They have in common to ask for an end of the confrontation and criticised both the approach of the Russian government as well as that of EU, NATO, the German and the U.S. government. The motions see the affiliation of Crimea to the Russian Federation as going against international law. „We oppose all threats of economic sanctions, military interventions or even immediate military employment.“

The debate on **Saturday** among other issues revolved around the situation in Ukraine and agreed on a consensus resolution based on the different formerly submitted motions. The delegates applauded the call for solidarity with anti-fascist comrades in the country. They agreed unanimously that it was highly important by all

involved parties, such as the EU, U.S., Germany or Russia to deescalate and not further provoke the innercountry conflict. The Ukrainian government should be asked to exclude the fascists from power and to disarm the fascist militia. Further, the safety of the antifascists and opponents had to be warranted. Financial support by Federal government and European Union should be suspended "as long as fascists are part of the Ukrainian government".

The resolution states that the Russian assimilation of Crimea was against international law, but other than the Federal government depicts the situation, Russia is not „in the first place“ responsible for the escalation of the situation in Ukraine. DIE LINKE "as a peace party has great political responsibility to clearly posi-

tion itself and to contribute to clarification." It was approved with high majority.

The delegates adopted **further resolutions**, including one proclaiming our party's solidarity with the Maduro government in Venezuela. Another addresses the rise of demagogue fascists and forces of the populist-right in Europe. The right to sexual autonomy of women was asserted by the resolution: "My womb belongs to me!"

Other issues were the European elections as well as the TTIP agreement.

Saturday saw also the **election of the executive board**. The incumbent party chairs, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, were re-elected with great approval. Old and new vice chairs will be Caren Lay and Axel Troost, with Janine Wissler and Tobias Plfuger as new additions. Matthias Hohn was re-elected as the party's General Secretary, while new federal treasurer



Party Chairs Katja Kipping, Bernd Riexinger

will be Thomas Nord. The day ended with the election of the women's list to the board.

In his speech **Bernd Riexinger** pointed out, that „nearly a quarter of the voters can imagine to vote for DIE LINKE. That is a positive sign for a still young and new party.“ He further explained: „We cannot change the country towards the better only in the parliaments. Therefore, social movements, struggles and disputes are needed. Furthermore, we will not rest, we will keep being a pain in the neck, we will keep forcing the other parties to face up to the social question.“ One main topic of his speech was the situation of workers in Germany and Europe and precarization.

Riexinger called for a new offensive for a reduction of working hours. He also addressed the topics of the public sphere, public services, and social justice. One example was the housing market. "What today is happening on the housing market is a violation of human rights. In many cities students can barely pay the rent for their room, if they find one at all. Migrants, people getting social benefits and families with many children queue up and have nearly no chance to get a flat. That's why we fight for public and cooperative housing." Another problem Riexinger addressed was lobbyism. Riexinger strongly called for a democratic economy. Decisions about investments, production and a socio-ecological transformation can not be left to well paid managers and invisible market laws.

He encouraged the members to go out into the election campaign with self-confidence. „We put the finger into the wound. We don't accept that people are exploited, treated without respect and deprived of their rights and their future.“



Alexis Tsipras, SYRIZA

„When we look into the world, shouldn't rather those who are not left explain themselves? Being left means to face people, life and future.“

Katja Kipping kept true to her motto of listening and asking questions. She said: „Sometimes the art of politics is to put the right questions. (...) Generations of left repeatedly questioned the ruling power and property relations. For a good reason. (...) Let's again and again put this question: Who owns the world? And who should own it? Let's put the question so it be heard. Let's put it such so that it motivates resistance. (...) This is one of the great tasks of demo-

cratic socialists - equally historically as up to date. Let's do it. Let's ask questions and act together.“

Another highlight of the Saturday was the speech of the head of SYRIZA and prime candidate of the European Left for the office of the president of the European Commission, **Alexis Tsipras**. He reminded the congress that the upcoming elections were a vote „to shape the balance of political forces in a Europe, which is at a critical crossroads.“ The vote is necessary „to overcome the North-South division. A division that cancels the European idea and Europe itself.“ He called to them to „all together, let's march ahead, with the European Left, with DIE LINKE and SYRIZA!“ and was sure, that „SYRIZA, DIE LINKE and the Party of the European Left become ambassadors of a new unity between Greeks and Germans among all peoples of Europe.“

After his speech, which was met with frantic applause, singing, and flag waving, the chairs symbolically presented him with a cake in order to celebrate the **10th anniversary of the European Left**. Together with Gabi Zimmer, leader of the GUE/NGL group in EP the cake was cut and shared among the delegates and guests.

On **Sunday** elections of the party executive board presumed after the speech of **Gregor Gysi**, who announced to fly to Moscow directly after the congress to contribute to the deescalation of the conflict in Ukraine. He once more pointed to the importance of DIE LINKE being a party of peace. „Since 1000 years wars are waged out of economic reasons whereby the death of so many people is willingly accepted. And there must be a power, that says: No. This is not the way to solve the problems of humanity...!“

As regards the approach to the East four points were paramount: „First, diplomacy. Second, to respect the interests of the East. Third, solidarity and fourth, close economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation.“ In respect of the elections for European Parliament he stressed that „We want Europe, dear comrades! European integration initially was also a left idea. But we want a Europe of peace. We want a Europe of human rights. We want a Europe of democracy. We want a Europe of social justice and social welfare and we want socially shaped ecological sustainability.“

New Security Order in Europe not without, let alone against, - only with Russia



05.05.2014, Gregor Gysi. The Federal government committed serious mistakes by the OSCE intervention in Eastern Ukraine under leadership of the Bundeswehr:

- 1) The German parliament was circumvented. Without parliamentary approval no German soldiers should have been dispatched.
- 2) With this mission Berlin did not ensure the deescalation of the conflict with Moscow but again provoked Putin without any need.
- 3) Russia as OSCE member state should have been part of the mission.
- 4) Only then this mission would have contributed to deescalation, instead of contributing to escalation.

A second Geneva agreement regarding the Ukraine conflict can only then successfully put off all participants from escalation if the West as well as Russia credibly strive for collective security, as is the aim of the OSCE.

Sigmar Gabriel (SPD): More Arms Delivered to Dictatorships and Crisis Regions

„It's a shame that Germany is one of the biggest arms exporting countries. (...) I am for a restrictive position regarding arms exports.“ Said Sigmar Gabriel, Vice Chancellor and chair man of the Social Democratic Party, by the end of January 2014 during an interview. In the weeks following this statement the Minister for Economic Affairs signed new arms deals with countries such as Saudi-Arabia, Algeria, Brunei, and Singapur. On request of DIE LINKE MEP Jan van Aken the Federal government disclosed that between January and April 2014 arms exports worth of nearly 1.2 billion Euro were newly approved without any contracts present. The share of arms exports to so called third countries increased massively from 520 million to 650 million Euro and now lies at 55 per cent. Third countries are not part of the EU or any other mutual agreement. At the very front regarding arms deals are countries like Singapur, Brunei, and Saudi-Arabia. Already during the

conservative liberal government in 2012 Saudi-Arabia was number one recipient of German armaments.

This export policy is continued by the Great Coalition of conservatives and social democrats. The Federal government thus goes against its own guidelines and against regulations of the EU: They prohibit delivery of weapons to countries, who are „at risk“ to violate human rights. In the regulations of the Federal government it is stated that „permissions for arms exports (...) are principally not granted if there is ample suspicion they will be misused for internal repression or other ongoing and systematic violations of human rights.“ This ample suspicion applies for many countries. Still, arms exports have been approved.

Gabriel bluffs it out by stating that his permissions are based on decisions of the former Federal government. But only weeks ago, Minister for the Interior, de

Maizière, declared before the Federal Constitutional Court, that pre-arrangements are not binding. Every single permission is signed by Gabriel. And every single signature might as well have been refused. The newspaper „Süddeutsche Zeitung“ reports that two former parliamentarians of the social democrats received a fee of five million Euro by armaments concern Krauss-Maffei Wegmann. There are many ways to feel obliged. DIE LINKE wants to end all businesses with war and all

arms exports. No funding of arms exports through taxes! Armaments research in public and publicly funded universities has to stop. Under participation of the employees we want to rebuild the armaments industry for civil use.

In parliament DIE LINKE stands alone with her demands. But we have many allies: the peace movements and all the people fighting for a peaceful world.

No rag rug minimum wage! Comprehensive Must Mean: For All!

Equal pay for equal work! The demand is fair, even the SPD used it in her campaign and promised a comprehensive legally fixed minimum wage. Now it is about to be introduced. That is good. With 8,50 Euro it lies below the low-pay limit of 9,53 Euro. That is not enough. The low pay sector will thus be regulated but not abolished. Until 2017 a number of transitional provisions apply. Setting 8,50 Euro against inflation leaves only 8 Euro – Germany thus comes in last in Western Europe.

Discrimination of Unemployed

In a press release of Andrea Nahles' Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of April 2nd is stated that all promises are being kept: „Not falling within the scope of the regulation:“ youth under age 18, trainees, interns in obligatory intership, volunteers, and long time unemployed not employed under collective agreement can be paid below minimum wage for six month. With this the minimum wage is neither comprehensive nor waterproof, not after 2017 either.

For long term unemployed being employed by a company with collective agreement the six month special rule does not apply. Thus, companies not bound by collective agreement are favoured. This is probably meant as a kind of privatised reintegration: instead of wage subsidies from job centres the company may fall below minimum wage for six month. On time with the start of the dismissal protection the minimum wage becomes effective. An invitation for hire and fire. And a discrimination against the unemployed.

Discrimination against Youth

Exceptions for young people are explained with them otherwise not getting any training. Youth unemploy-

ment is linked to them being the first to be dismissed in a crisis and not to them earning „too much“. Young people are indeed interested in getting an education that offers them chances for an income above low wage level. Whether young grown ups start a training mainly depends on the availability of sufficient vacancies. In the last year of training alone 60 000 vacancies were missing and the number of concluded contracts lay 20 500 below the number of the previous year. Initially the Federal Government did not do anything against this lack of vacancies – and then it excludes those who have to work from the minimum wage.

Nahles' minimum wage:

Too low, too many exceptions

Concerning voluntary work and internships there is also the danger, that regular tasks and employment relationships are rededicated. The neoliberal cutback of public services and welfare state created many gaps which are supposed to be filled by volunteers.

The exceptions undermine the minimum wage! Sense and purpose of the minimum wage is to draw a line at the bottom and to stop the underpricing competition for wages. The trade unions should be free to conclude better collective agreements so that wages altogether can rise. This is urgently needed! As long as there are exceptions the pressure on wages and tariffs remains and so salaries decrease. Equal work will further not be paid equally. And still people remain poor even though they work.

A truly comprehensive minimum wage, sufficient to sustain life, has yet to be contented for.