

PROFILE

The Greens in the 2014 European Elections

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Green parties entered the European election campaign of 2014 facing some major challenges. Austerity politics and the Euro crisis ensured that social and economic issues dominated the agenda and, with environmental topics marginalised, populist right wing and Eurosceptic parties were expected to make big gains in many countries. The Greens had been boosted in 2009 by record results for French and German Greens, but neither was expected to do as well. Given the broadly unfavourable conditions, green parties performed reasonably well (see Table 1). The European Green Party (EGP) won 38 seats in the European Parliament, compared with 46 in 2009. The Green Party-European Free Alliance (EFA) parliamentary group registered 50 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), including seven from various regional parties and five independents) in 2014, compared with 55 in 2009.¹

Insert table 1 about here

The Campaign

The European Greens enthusiastically embraced the idea of *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates) for the campaign and organised an online open ‘green primary’ in which not just green party members but all EU citizens could take part. A total of 22,676 people expressed a preference, electing Ska Keller from Germany and José Bové from France as the Greens’ ‘lead’ candidates. The press response to this was rather muted, however. The level of participation was considered a bit of a fiasco, at least by the German press, which calculated that about 0.005% of the targeted EU population had bothered to participate in the primary (Gathmann 2014).

The Greens again presented a common election manifesto (European Green Party 2014). The ‘Green New Deal’ theme that had dominated the 2009 campaign (Carter 2010) was present, but less prominent. New manifesto themes that attracted media attention in some national campaigns included opposition to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – a free trade agreement under discussion between the EU and the USA – and to ‘fracking’. Most national contests were, however, dominated by immigration and the rise of populist right-wing and Eurosceptic parties, thus the Greens found it difficult to get noticed in the campaign.

The ‘lead candidate’ option proved, however, to be a bonus for the Greens as it allowed the EGP to take part in high-level televised debates, with Ska Keller in particular receiving positive media coverage. However, national media attention to these debates varied dramatically between countries, attracting top billing in Germany and none in the UK.

Results

The Green share of the vote was highest in Sweden (15.4%) where the Greens benefited from the increasingly unpopularity of the centre-right government. Another success story was Austria where the Greens, building on their record performance (12.4%) in the September 2013 general election, polled 14.5%, an improvement of almost 5%.

The Greens also did better than in 2009 in Ireland and the UK. The Irish Greens were struggling to re-establish their credibility after losing their place in government and in parliament in 2011. Under new leadership, the party fielded candidates in all four constituencies. The unpopularity of the Fine Gael – Labour Party government enabled the Greens to benefit from an anti-incumbency effect, and, polling 4.9%, they came very close to winning a seat in Dublin and electing 12 councillors in the local elections held on the same day. In the United Kingdom, the campaign was dominated by the right wing anti-European UK Independence Party (UKIP). The media largely ignored the Greens, but they performed creditably, polling 7.6 % nationally, a slight decline compared with 2009, but a strong performance in the South West region – the only region in which they increased their vote – gave the Greens an additional seat to the two they retained in London and the South East. .

The largest group of Green MEPs – eleven – comes from Germany. After the disappointing September 2013 federal election (Rüdig 2014) the party had made some leadership changes but was still embroiled in debate about its future orientation. In this transition phase, the 10.7% vote was seen as a good step in the process of recovery. Following a change in the electoral system, abolishing the 5% threshold, the tiny Ecological-Democratic Party (ÖDP), formed in 1982 when right-wing ecologists split from the Greens, with 0.6% of the vote gained representation at national level for the first time.

Green parties have traditionally been strong in the Benelux countries but recent political fortunes have been mixed. The Dutch Green Left achieved a near catastrophic 2.3% at the 2012 national parliamentary elections, but during the campaign its poll rating increased steadily, and the party obtained a creditable 7.0%, but, almost 2% lower than in 2009, this lost them one seat. This improvement was achieved despite competition from *De Groenen* (The Greens), the tiny ecologist party and fellow member of the EGP, which polled 0.2% and the Party of the Animals, which achieved 4.2%.

In Belgium, where the European elections coincided with national and regional parliamentary elections, the Flemish Green Party, Groen, did well but the Walloon Ecolo had extremely disappointing results. While Groen polled 6.7% in the European elections, up from 4.9% in 2009, Ecolo saw its support halved, to 4.3% from 8.6%, and experienced similar massive losses in national and regional elections. While Groen attracted left-wing voters opposed to the nationalist party N-VA, Ecolo appears to have been punished for its governmental record at regional level, losing votes to a far-left party.

In Luxembourg, where the Greens entered a national coalition government for the first time in October 2013, with the Liberals and Social Democrats, the European elections were a first electoral test for the new government. Although all governing parties lost votes, the Greens lost fewer than their coalition partners, and with 15.0%, their sole MEP was safely re-elected.

Green parties were also punished for government participation in Finland, Denmark and France. In Finland, the Greens, a partner in multi-party coalitions since 2007, lost a quarter of their vote in

comparison with 2009, polling 9.3%. While the Left Alliance had departed the coalition in April 2014 in protest at austerity policies, the Greens stayed, despite misgiving about policies on nuclear power. The Left Alliance and the populist right-wing Finns Party increased their share of the vote, both benefiting from an anti-incumbency protest vote.

In Denmark, the major pre-election development in green politics was the decision by the Socialist People's Party (SF) to apply for full membership of the EGP. In January 2014, the SF left the coalition with the Social Democrats in protest at increasingly neo-liberal policies. Following a leadership change, joining the Greens indicated a step into a new direction to enhance their green identity. However, the SF's result (11.0%) represented a loss of almost one-third of its support since 2009.

In France, the Greens resigned as junior partner in the Socialist-dominated coalition government a few weeks before the European elections. This decision was prompted by the dismissal of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and his replacement by the more right-wing Manuel Valls, the former interior minister, who had clashed with the Greens before. The Greens felt that President Hollande had betrayed the governmental project they had agreed in 2012 (Dufлот 2014). The unpopularity of the Socialists prompted a massive anti-establishment vote. As a recent member of the government, the Greens were not well-placed to benefit from this wave of protest, especially since the retirement from active politics of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had steered the Greens to their greatest election triumph in the 2009 European elections. The Greens thus had to rely on their core vote to deliver a respectable 9% vote share, broadly in line with the support achieved in the 1999 and 2004 European elections.

In Eastern Europe, the Greens generally continued to struggle. In Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, green parties polled well below 1%. Slovenia was the only country where no EGP member ran in the elections, but a small independent green party polled 0.7%. A newcomer, the Lithuanian Green Party, formed in 2011, performed creditably with 3.6% but did not win a seat. More successful was the Union of Farmers and Greens (LVZS), not a member of the EGP, which polled 6.6% and elected one MEP who joined The Greens-EFA group as an independent. Historically strongest in Eastern Europe have been the Czech and Latvian Greens, both with a significant record of participation in government. In Latvia, the Greens continued their alliance with the right-wing Farmers Union, but with 8.3% of the vote, no Green was elected, the Farmers Union MEP joining the right-wing Europe of Freedom and Democracy group. In the Czech Republic, the Greens' 3.8% improved on their 2009 result but fell short of the 5% threshold. The rival Liberal Ecological Party, founded by former Green Party leader and government minister Martin Bursik, polled just 0.5%.

The main green success stories in Eastern Europe came from Hungary and Croatia. In Hungary, Politics can be Different (LMP) polled 5.0%, just enough to secure representation. Also successful was the Dialogue for Hungary (PM) party, which had broken from the LMP in a dispute over joining an electoral alliance led by the socialists. PM ran in alliance with another left-wing party to win 7.3% of the vote and one MEP, a former leading LMP politician who was accepted in the Greens/EFA parliamentary group as a 'Green MEP'. Both parties probably benefited from the continued decline of the Hungarian Socialist Party.

In Croatia, where European elections took place for the first time, the green, left-wing party Croatian Sustainable Development (ORaH) won 9.4% and one seat. ORaH, formed in 2013 by a former

Environment Minister and Social Democratic Party MP, merged in early 2014 with the Green List, a green party founded in 2005.

Throughout southern Europe, the election campaigns were dominated by the impact of government austerity policies. Green parties generally found it difficult to compete with left-wing parties opposed to austerity. In Greece, where SYRIZA has emerged as the main party of the left, the Ecologist Greens polled only 0.9%, down 2.6% on 2009, and lost their sole MEP. In Spain, green parties continued the strategy of joining a large electoral coalition to improve their chances, which helped to maintain representation. The green party EQUO joined various regional left-wing and ecologist groups and parties in the European Spring list, which won 1.9% of the vote and one seat (to be held first by a regional list representative and then by EQUO in the second half of the five-year parliament). The eco-socialist Initiative for Catalonia – Greens (ICV) fought the elections as part of a left-wing electoral alliance, The Plural Left, headed by the United Left (IU). The Plural Left won 10.0% and six seats, including one ICV candidate. The surprise success of the Spanish elections was the new *Podemos* (We Can) party; founded in 2014 by leading activists of the anti-austerity protest movement, it won 8% and secured five MEPs. The party joined the parliamentary group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left.

Elsewhere, the strategy of joining electoral alliances was less successful. In Cyprus, the Ecological and Environmental Movement contested the election in alliance with the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK). The alliance obtained 7.7%, sufficient to elect one EDEK MEP. In Portugal, the Green Party (PEV) continued its alliance with the Portuguese Communist Party. This alliance increased its vote to 12.7%, securing three MEPs none of them Greens. However, the *Partido da Terra* (Earth Party), a conservative green party, which had existed since 1993 as a tiny group associated with various centre-right parties and groups such as the Eurosceptic Libertas list in the 2009 European elections. Standing on its own for the first time in 2014, it polled 7.1%. Two Earth Party MEPs were elected and joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group. In Malta, the Democratic Alternative continues to struggle against the dominance of the two major parties, securing a marginally improved result with 3.0% of the vote, but no MEPs.

Finally, in Italy, the Greens were looking to recover ground after the disastrous national parliamentary elections of 2013, which saw many leading activists defect to the Left Ecology Freedom (SEL) party. Among former Greens who stood (unsuccessfully) for SEL was Monica Frassoni, co-chair of the EGP, who subsequently founded the movement Green Italia, which sought to unite people from a variety of political backgrounds from left to right, as well as movement activists, green economic entrepreneurs and intellectuals. Green Italia and Italy's green party, the Federation of the Greens, entered the European Elections on a joint list, but attracted only 0.9% and secured no MEPs. SEL joined other left parties and the Greens of South Tyrol on the list 'The Other Europe with Tsipras' (a reference to the SYRIZA leader), which won 4.0% and elected 3 MEPs to the European United Left/Nordic Green Left parliamentary group.

Conclusions

The general pattern of green success and failure across the EU's 28 countries in 2014 broadly follows the trends established in previous elections. The Greens continue to do fairly badly in Eastern and

Southern Europe, although some green MEPs were elected for the first time in the former Communist bloc, partly as a result of disaffection from social democratic parties. The anti-austerity movement in Southern Europe mainly benefited parties that see themselves as part of the radical left rather than green politics. In North-Western Europe, the Greens generally maintained their position. Here, the fortunes of green parties were tied up with the specific contexts of national politics. Where Greens were in government at the time of, or shortly before, the European elections (Denmark, Finland, France, Luxembourg), they lost votes. The only parties to increase their representation (Austria, Sweden, UK) campaigned as opposition parties. Overall, the elections showed that established green parties can rely on their core voters to turn out and maintain their position in national party systems even in challenging circumstances. Although 2014 was no great leap forward in green party history, it again confirmed that green parties are here to stay and remain a key part of European politics.

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Table 1: European Elections 2014 results (Green Parties*)

Country	Party / List	% (2014)	Change from 2009	Green MEPs 2014	Change from 2009
Austria	The Greens – The Green Alternative	14.5	+ 4.6	3	+ 1
Belgium	Green	6.7	+ 1.8	1	0
	ECOLO	4.3	- 4.3	1	-1
Bulgaria	The Greens	0.6	-	0	0
	Green Party of Bulgaria	0.4	-	0	0
Croatia	Croatian Sustainable Development (ORaH)**	9.4	-	1	+ 1
Cyprus	Ecological and Environmental Movement	(7.7)	(-3.7)	0	0
Czech Republic	Green Party (SZ)	3.8	+ 1.8	0	0
Denmark	Socialist People’s Party (SF)**	11.0	- 4.9	1	- 1
Estonia	Estonian Greens	0.3	- 2.4	0	0
Finland	Green League	9.3	- 3.1	1	- 1
France	Europe Ecology – The Greens (EELV)	9.0	- 7.3	6	- 7
Germany	Alliance '90/The Greens	10.7	- 1.4	11	- 3
Greece	Ecologist Greens	0.9	- 2.6	0	-1
Hungary	Politics can be different (LMP)	5.0	+ 2.4	1	+ 1
	Dialogue for Hungary (PM)**	(7.3)	-	1	+1
Ireland	Green Party	4.9	+ 3.0	0	0
Italy	Green Italy – European Greens	0.9	(-2.2)	0	0
Latvia	Green Party of Latvia (LZP)	(8.3)	(+ 4.6)	0	0
Lithuania	Lithuanian Green Party	3.6	-	0	0
Luxembourg	The Greens	15.0	- 1.8	1	0
Malta	Alternative Democracy	3.0	+ 0.6	0	0
Netherlands	GreenLeft	7.0	- 1.9	2	- 1
	The Greens	0.2	+ 0.0	0	0
Poland	Greens	0.3	+ 0.1	0	0
Portugal	Ecologist Party ‘The Greens’ (PEV)	(12.7)	(+2.1)	0	0
Romania	Green Party (PV)	0.3	-	0	0
Slovakia	Green Party (SZ)	0.5	- 1.6	0	0
Slovenia	-	-	-	0	0
Spain	EQUO	(1.9)	-	1***	0
	Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV)	(10.0)	(+6.3)	1	0

Sweden	Environment Party – the Greens	15.4	+ 4.4	4	+ 2
UK	Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW)	6.9	- 0.9	3	+ 1
	Scottish Green Party (SGP)	0.7	+ 0.1	0	0
	Green Party in Northern Ireland	0.1	0	0	0

* Only includes members of the European Green Party (EGP) and parties whose elected members are listed by the Green Party-European Free Alliance parliamentary group as 'Green MEPs'.

** Parties that were not members of the EGP at the time of the elections.

*** The EQUO MEP will take his seat in the second half of the parliamentary term.

() Results, and/or comparison with results of 2009 elections, for electoral lists that involve an alliance of green and non-green parties.

Source: National election institutions, <http://europeangreens.eu/results> ; UK: own calculation of UK share of the vote based on Hawkins et al. 2014.

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¹ See the official site of the parliamentary group, <http://www.greens-efa.eu/up-to-date-list-of-the-meps-for-the-new-legislative-period-12490.html> [accessed 31 August 2014].