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**The New
European Parliament
2019-2024**

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Introduction

The elections on 23-26 May 2019 resulted in a new parliament being elected for a term of five years until May 2024. In or out of the EU, the UK will be affected by the decisions that the Parliament makes on appointments to the senior EU posts, on legislation, trade treaties and other matters. The Withdrawal Treaty needs the approval of the Parliament, as would any agreement on the future relationship between the UK and the EU; as also would many of the arrangements needed should the UK leave without a deal.

The 2019 elections were notable for the highest overall level of turnout in 20 years (50.9 per cent) and for the fact that the two largest groups, the European People's Party and the Socialists & Democrats both lost a significant number of seats, losing the majority in the Parliament that they had had between them since direct elections were introduced in 1979. The 2019 elections also saw an increase in the number of Eurosceptic, anti-EU and nationalist MEPs but not by as much as some commentators had predicted. In addition, there was a significant increase in the number of centrist MEPs in the Liberal (ALDE & R) group (which was joined by President Macron's *En Marche* party) and in the number of Green MEPs.

This briefing looks at the results, including in the UK, the possible formation of groups in the Parliament, the implications of and for Brexit, and assesses the political impact of the elections on the EU.

The overall results

Number of MEPs by group

The results in terms of numbers of seats for each of the groups in the parliament were:

	2019	2014
European People's Party (EPP)	179	221
Socialists & Democrats	153	191
Liberals (ALDE & R)	105	67
Greens	69	50
European Conservatives & Reformists (ECR)	63	70

Europe of Nations & Freedom (ENF)	58	*
Europe of Freedom & Democracy (EFDD)	54	48
European United Left / Nordic Green	38	52
Non-attached members (rightwing)	8	52
Others	24	00

* group created in 2015 (see text below) bringing together many of the 52 non-attached Members

UK results

The share of the vote, the number of MEPs for each party in Great Britain and the change in the share of the vote since 2014 were as follows:

	%	MEPs	Change
Brexit Party	31.6	29	+31.6
Liberal Democrats	20.3	16	+13.4
Labour	14.1	10	-11.3
Green Party	12.1	7	+4.2
Conservative Party	9.1	4	-14.8
Scottish National Party	3.6	3	+1.1
Plaid Cymru	1.0	1	+0.3
Change UK	3.4	0	+3.4
UK Independence Party	3.3	0	-24.2

Turnout: 36.9%¹

(The results in Northern Ireland are not included in this table as their electoral system is different; see below).

The UK elections were notable for the short campaign period (because of uncertainties about the UK's participation), the slight increase in turnout (+1.5 per cent) but mostly for the record-breaking drubbing taken by the two main parties in the contest. The Conservative Party came fifth, its worst result in a national election since the nineteenth century and its poorest

¹ 'The UK's European elections 2019', *BBC News*, 24 May 2019

performance ever in a European Parliament election, and the Labour Party's third place (fifth in Scotland) was even worse than its exceptionally poor performance in 2009.

The Brexit Party had the largest share of the vote. Much of its support clearly came from former UKIP supporters. The party's share of the vote was less than predicted in some polls in the middle of May at 35 per cent or more but close to the final estimates of around 32 per cent.²

The Liberal Democrats also performed well to take second place, increasing their share of the vote compared to 2014 by over 13 percentage points and dramatically boosting their total of MEPs from just one to 16 today.

The Green Party had its best result since 1989 and the SNP dominated in Scotland with 38 per cent of the vote. Plaid Cymru came second in Wales to the Brexit Party, knocking Labour down to third place – the first time that has happened in an election in Wales.³

In Northern Ireland, where three MEPs are elected by Single Transferable Vote, the elections were significant for the loss by the Ulster Unionist Party of the seat it had held since 1979 and the first election of an Alliance Party MEP. The Alliance MEP will sit in the ALDE & R group with the Liberal Democrats, to whom they are allied. As in 2014, the other two successful candidates were from Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party.⁴

Estimates of how the vote split between voters who had been Leave or Remain supporters in 2016 are complicated by the fact that some Remain supporters will have voted Conservative or Labour. However, an analysis by the respected pollster Peter Kellner, using data from Survation to estimate the Leave/Remain split in the Conservative and Labour votes, as well as the election results themselves, found a split of 55 per cent to Remain and 43 per cent to Leave.⁵ It has also been suggested that the election highlighted the Leave/Remain split in UK politics today more than the traditional left/right split.⁶

Composition of the groups

In order to form a group, at least 25 MEPs from seven different Member States must come together out of the 751 members of the parliament. Those who cannot find a group or who choose to sit as independents do not have the same financial support that is provided to groups, nor are they entitled to a share of the influential posts of committee and delegation chairs or to be rapporteurs. The composition set out here is the party groupings as they existed at the end of the 2014-19 parliament.

European People's Party (EPP)

The number of EPP MEPs peaked at 36 per cent in the 2004-09 parliament. Since then it has fallen at every election and is now 23.8 per cent. It is still the largest group in the Parliament but it now has 179 MEPs. The group had MEPs from all 28 Member States at the end of the last parliament, having added two MEPs since Brexit from the British Conservative Party

² For details of all the polls, see What UK Thinks EU, '2019 European Parliament Election Vote Intention', 22 May 2019

³ 'European elections 2019: Key points at a glance', *BBC News*, 27 May 2019

⁴ 'European elections: Long, Dodds and Anderson elected', *BBC News*, 27 May 2019

⁵ Peter Kellner, 'Pro-Europeans beat Brexiters 55% to 43% in EU vote', *In Facts*, 28 May 2019

⁶ See, for example, John Curtice, 'The Spill-Over Effect: Brexit and Prospects for Westminster', What UK Thinks EU, 6 June 2019

(neither was re-elected). The group's leader is Manfred Weber, a Bavarian MEP from the Christian Social Union. A key issue facing the EPP is whether the Hungarian rightwing party, Fidesz, currently suspended from its EPP membership after it made personal attacks on the President of the Commission, will remain in the group.⁷

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S & D)

The S & D also saw a fall in their number of seats, from 191 in 2014 to 153 in 2019 (to just over 20 per cent of the parliament). The group leader is Udo Bullman, a member of the German Social Democratic Party. British Labour Party MEPs are in this group; they lost half their seats this year and now have a total of 10.

European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)

The third largest group in the last Parliament, the ECR has gone down from 70 MEPs in 2014 to 63, largely as a result of the British Conservatives losing all but four of their seats (including that of ECR group leader, Syed Kamall). Other parties in this group include: the Law & Justice Party (Poland), who increased their number of seats; Fianna Fáil (Ireland); and the Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic).

Europe of Nations & Freedom (ENF)

After the 2014 elections a number of rightwing nationalist MEPs were unable to form a new group, as they had intended to, because of disputes between them. However, in 2015, the Europe of Nations & Freedom group was created, incorporating the French National Front and the Dutch Freedom party of Geert Wilders as well as the Freedom Party of Austria. Wilders' party lost all its seats in 2019 but a new formation involving the Lega Nord (Matteo Salvini's party) from Italy and AfD from Germany is actively under consideration.⁸

Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe & Renaissance (ALDE & R)

Having fallen to 67 MEPs in 2014, the ALDE group has sharply increased in size this year to 105, partly because of the election of 21 MEPs from President Macron's party, *La République En Marche*. The success of the British Liberal Democrats in winning almost 20 per cent of the UK vote and increasing their number of MEPs from one to 16 has also boosted ALDE. The group leader is the Belgian MEP and former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, who led the European Parliament's involvement in the Brexit negotiations.

European United Left / Nordic Green Left

This confederation of leftwing groups includes Die Linke from Germany, Syriza from Greece and Sinn Féin from the Republic of Ireland and the UK. Having seen its number of MEPs increase in the 2014 elections, it saw a fall in 2019 from 52 to 38 MEPs. Gabi Zimmer (Die Linke) is leader of the group.

The Greens / European Free Alliance

This group is an alliance of greens and regionalists (such as those from Latvia and Spain) that has 69 MEPs, an increase of 19 since the 2014 elections. Of the 10 British members of

⁷ Discussed in 'Fidesz and EPP: Break up or Make up?', Péter Cseresnyés, *Hungary Today*, 28 May 2019

⁸ Discussed in the 'Halla-aho: Nine parties to form new nationalist group in European Parliament', *Helsinki Times*, 28 May 2019

this group, seven are from the Green Party in England (an increase of four), two are from the Scottish National Party and one is from Plaid Cymru. The group is jointly led by Philippe Lambert (Belgium, Green) and Ska Keller (Germany, Green).

Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (EFDD)

First established in 2009, this group has been dominated since 2014 by the UK Independence Party and now by the Brexit Party. It increased its number of seats from 48 to 54 in the elections in 2019 but they now come from just three countries, meaning that EFDD is unlikely to be a recognised group in this parliament. Its three member parties are now: Alternative for Germany, who intend to sit with Lega Nord (see above); the Italian Five Star Movement, who however wish to leave the group; and Nigel Farage's Brexit Party, whose 29 MEPs will have to withdraw if the UK leaves the EU.

Analysis

Effect on the Parliament

The 2019 elections continued the trend of recent elections to the Parliament of greater fragmentation, with the larger blocs losing out and smaller groups expanding or new ones emerging. But the 2019 elections did not see the dramatic increase in nationalist and populist MEPs that had been predicted and that some had hoped for and others feared. While MEPs from such groups increased in number, notably in Italy, results were mixed elsewhere with, for example, National Rally doing less well in France than in 2014, the Dutch Freedom party losing their four seats and the Danish People's Party also losing theirs. In addition, as in previous Parliaments, populist parties are very likely to remain divided between various rightwing groups, weakening their potential influence. They have also been plagued by poor attendance and voting records. The 2019 elections did not see the populist/nationalist breakthrough that some had believed was likely and they do not hold the balance of power.

Fragmentation amongst traditional mainstream parties is however an issue. Voting coalitions in the Parliament will be more difficult to assemble. Both the EPP and S & D groups are going to have to take greater account of the views of ALDE and the Greens. There have been suggestions of a formal alliance between the EPP, S & D and ALDE but nothing has been confirmed.

In the short-term, the primary political issue for the parliament will be its role in the selection of the Commission President and in the confirmation of its members. Several party groups had nominated candidates for the Presidency but the fall in the number of both EPP and S & D MEPs, and the decision of the ALDE group not to have a single candidate for the Commission presidency, undermines the so-called *Spitzenkandidat* process. This fact, taken with opposition to this approach within the European Council to deciding the presidency, could mean that the final choice of Commission President will not be the nominee of the EPP or S & D.

The Parliament will also be heavily engaged in the next few months in the formation of the political groups and in the appointment of its officers and committees.

Impact on Brexit

The presence of UK MEPs is not without importance for the Parliament as a whole because the increase in the number of Liberal Democrat and Green MEPs has boosted their

respective groups in the Parliament and Labour's loss of 10 seats has weakened the S & D group. If the UK withdraws then the Parliament falls to 705 members but 14 Member States receive an increased allocation totalling 27 seats. These additional MEPs were elected in May but cannot take office unless and until the UK withdraws. Their arrival will affect the balance within (and between) the groups should that happen.

The greater fragmentation of party groups might complicate the process of ratifying any future partnership agreement between the UK and the EU with the UK. There is also the possibility that the Parliament may demand stricter regulatory requirements than the UK might want.

In terms of UK domestic politics, the poor performance of Conservatives and Labour is likely to shift opinion in opposing directions. Amongst Conservatives, the party's poor showing has been interpreted as the result of a swing to the Brexit Party and so the response has been to argue that the party must deliver Brexit as soon as possible, if necessary leaving the EU in October without a deal.

By contrast, the reaction by many in the Labour Party has encouraged those who wish to see an unequivocal endorsement by the party of a second referendum and a commitment to campaign for Remain in such a referendum. Polls suggest that three-quarters of Labour voters in the election were Remain voters (as opposed to a 50/50 split amongst those who continued to vote for the Conservative Party).⁹

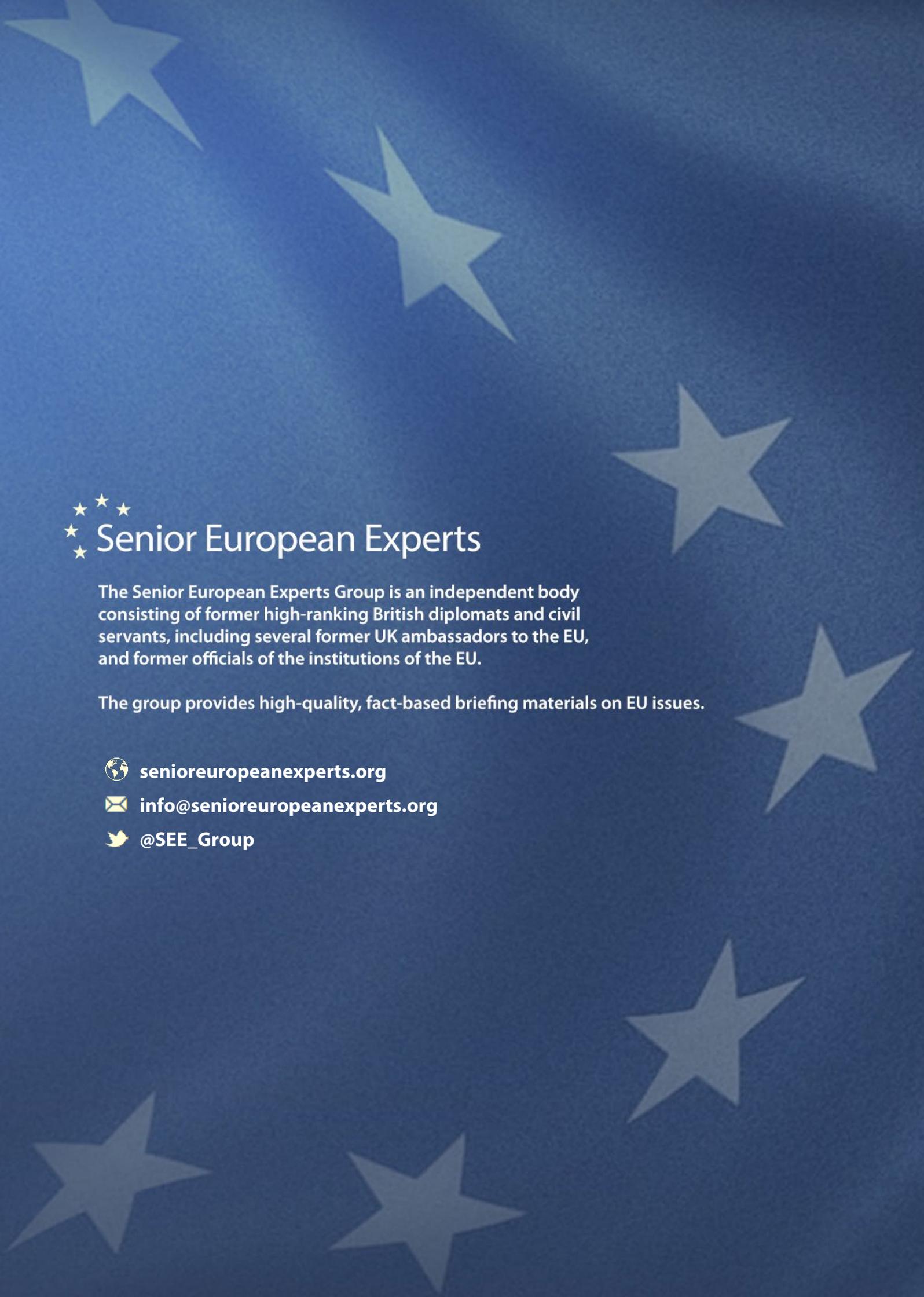
A sharp swing towards no deal candidates in the Conservative Party's leadership election was predicted by some commentators if the Brexit Party won the largest share of the vote (as it did) but the reaction amongst potential candidates was more mixed with several arguing strongly against a no deal Brexit.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper shows that, Brexit or no Brexit, the new European Parliament elected in 2019 will be of continuing importance to the UK.

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⁹ Survation polling data cited by Kellner, *supra* n. 5



Senior European Experts

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