

di Walter Baier -

I°

Increase in voter turnout from 43% (2014) to 51% Still a relevant range in the turnout rates between Slovakia 23% (13%) and Belgium 88% (90%, Compulsory voting).

The formerly big party families suffer significant losses.

EPP 24%, PES 19%,

ALDE scores a gain from 9% to 15%

This result does not allow for the continuation of the informal Grand Coalition between Conservatives and Social democrats. Anyway, together with the Liberals they arithmetically will still

be in the position of electing a commission.

However, this also might become a thorny exercise, since in the Council 9 PM belong to ALDE, 8 to EPP, 5 to the PES and 1 to EL .

As for the radical and nationalist Right: The three existing groups - ECR, EFDD, and ENF in total conquered 23% of the seats in the EP. This share might decrease to 20% in the wake of Brexit.

Projects of forming a joint group around Lega, RN and FPÖ are in the pipeline.

Greens grow from 6,7% to 9%.

Parties belonging to GUE /NGL and EL suffered a serious defeat. Its share of seats diminishes from 6,7% to 5,2%. In numbers of seats it decreases from 52 to 39 .

The losses are across the board. Exceptions are only Portugal, Denmark, Slovenia (unfortunately no seat was won) and particularly in Belgium. We suffered severe losses in Germany, Spain, in the Czech Republic in the Netherlands, while all parts of the fragmented Left in France performed badly to disappointingly. In Greece and Cyprus our parties maintained their important strong parliamentary power.

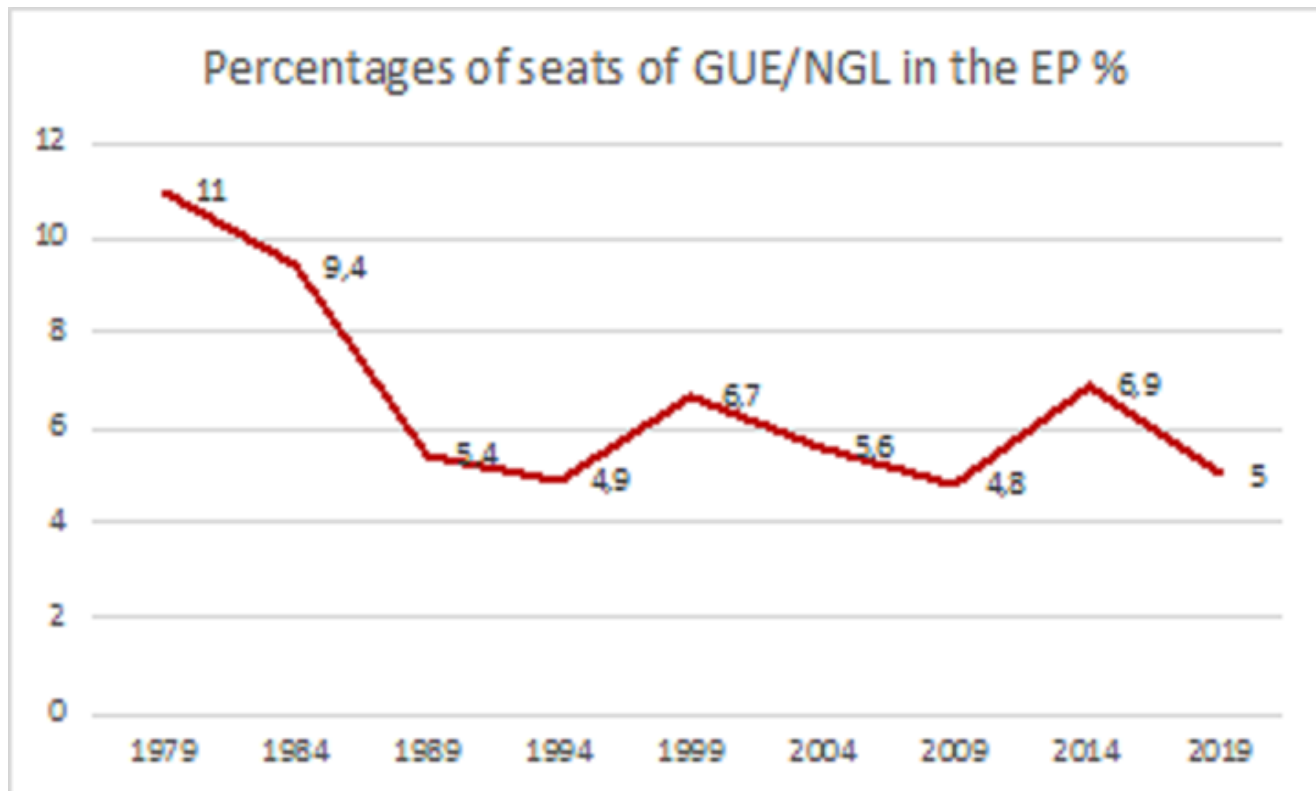
Sure, in each of the cases national factors need to be taken in account, problems in domestic politics, differences inside the parties, which became apparent, unfavourable age structures, organisational problems etc.

However, since the decrease in votes seems to express a general trend, except for the aforementioned countries we must look for general reasons which concern all of our parties together.

One first observation is that none of the ideological trends (Diem25, 'Maintenant Le Peuple' and Mainstream EL) is exempted from the negative trend.

A second observation concerns the historic perspective.

The European Left, represented mainly by Communist Parties (Italy, France, Portugal, Spain and Greece) maintained since the first European elections in 1979 a considerable strength between 9 and 11%. After the fall of the wall it dropped to 4.9%. Since then it hovers around 5%. See the graph.



A third observation is related to the simultaneous rise of the nationalist Right and the Greens. It seems that our Left, somehow similar to Corbyn’s Labour party is trapped between reactionary nationalism on the one side and liberal pro-Europeanism on the other without a discernible genuine strategy.

II° First Conclusions

I) To see the European election only in the national perspective, meaning as reflection of national power relations and a possible tool to influence them is a mistake. Every national political space is defined and limited by the EU; and this tendency will increase in the foreseeable future. European politics is a relevant battle ground for the Left in its own right. Otherwise, it is difficult to fathom that the Left performs successfully in European elections unless it takes the European level of politics seriously.

II) The historic dimension has already been mentioned. It seems that results close to 7% represent the exceptions. They can be explained by certain historic factors (1999: the gains by the PCF, which formed together with the PS a government of the Left; in 2014: the struggle against austerity approaching its peak, with Syriza preparing itself to take over the

government. It is noteworthy that gains in 2014 mainly concentrated on two countries, Spain and Greece, while the electoral performance in the big Western European countries was already then mediocre. In other words, there are strong arguments to reckon 5% as the realistic structural electoral power, to which the radical Left after the collapse of state socialism is inclined to.

For me is obvious that all formulas – ‘Plan B’, ‘New Municipalism’, ‘Lexit’, ‘Left Populism’ – as precious as some elements of their reasoning might be, did not deliver the wonder recipe for exiting the strategic impasse. From this follows that deeper theoretical work and a scientific discussion on our strategy, on the state, on strategy, on European integration etc. is needed.

III) It seems that the Left still wrestles with the political conditions in Europe as they arose in 1990 ff. With the treaty of Maastricht (1994) and the subsequent legislation neoliberalism became the explicit basic law of the European Union. However, this triggered also a boost to the European integration, which not only deepened but also expanded the EU to the East, by this, shifting the balance of political forces to the Right. In fact, the Left in Europe still lacks a unifying and coherent political answer to the process of European integration. Without such an answer however it will not be in the position to cope with the projects in pipeline for reforming the European Union which seriously will impact the conditions of its struggles.

IV) The European Left Party has to question itself regarding all three components of its name “European”, “Left” and “Party”. The stakes are high since, even substantially weakened after the elections it remains the main protagonist of the extra-parliamentary political Left.

a) As an organisation, the EL disposes of two options.

— It either can become a loose political Forum, in which parties meet, exchange opinions and occasionally agree on joint campaigns, a sort of NELF. In variation of this concept, it could also

dedicate its funds and capacities in creating a broader Forum, where the parties meet and discuss with civil society actors, trade unions and movements. Such a concept would be reasonable and coherent. It would require a slim office structure with low political profile and ambition.

— If the EL opted to become a Party in the political sense of the term, it would have to develop a political and communicative capacity. Obviously, a Party on the European Level (PEL) cannot be

designed after the model of parties on the national level. A PEL must be based on inter-party-agreements. It would require a slim political program which does not contain a whole world view

but delineates the political frame in which the party is commissioned to ‘do politics’, issue

statements, take initiatives and interfere in European public debates.

Such a programmatic platform would have to be flexible and wide enough to allow for the inclusion of all national sensitivities and relevant currents of the radical Left, while it must at the same time be sufficiently binding to orientate the political initiative towards the commonly agreed direction.

This can only be developed on the basis of trust of all its components. Can we achieve this? Politics always is about compromises. However, the design of such a programmatic platform requires acquaintance with the different national realities, unorthodox thinking and theoretical research.

b) Concerning 'Europe'

Cornerstones of a political new deal among the Left could be:

— There is an overwhelming agreement on the items of a progressive socio-economic feminist, human-right-based and ecological agenda. The problem lies in identifying ways of implementing it under the current institutional power relations. But the Left still lacks a strategy, how struggles on the European and the national level can be effectively interrelated. Let's be clear regarding the concepts: The issue of institutions and their interrelation is the issue of democracy. It points to the core of the Political.

— Democracy on the European level can only operate in the respect of national self-determination.

Being internationalists means to sustain the ties of solidarity between Leftist parties and movements independently of their respective national allegiances. Consequently, we respect the right of every country to leaving the EU. It is necessary to state that every party of the EL has the right to support such an option of its country and that this would not hamper by any means its relation to the other parties or the EL.

— EU as institutionalized by the current treaties, cannot carry on in this way. As already said, the issue of the Institution is the issue of Democracy. The current institutional arrangement has not only created technocratic, allegedly policy-free spaces which impose the neoliberal agenda upon the member states; moreover, they are designed to prevent democratic change from happening, instead of providing the political space for it. Added to the socially devastating effects of neoliberalism, this constitutes the deepest source of the loss of legitimacy of the European integration among the people. If the Left wishes to cope with the challenge posed by the nationalist Right, it must address the issue of European democracy.

c) Our "Left"

Most likely 21 MEP of 38 GUE/NGL MEPs will commit to the EL. Empirically, we are the Party of only the half of the European Left. We cannot content ourselves with this state of affairs which has not been the goal when founding the party in 2004.

And the moment to change this is now. We need a new effort to put the party on a broader

basis.

V) Steps

It is boring to talk on “re-foundation”. What we need more than a formula is a new agreement. To achieve this, I would recommend:

- 1) to start a dialogue, in particular with parties outside the EL (Left Party Sweden, France Insoumise, Workers Party Belgium) and parties inside the EL who have expressed criticism towards its modus operandi (Red Green Alliance, Left Bloc) about conditions of achieving/maintaining unity.
- 2) The party should start discussing about the possibility of a programmatic statement which aims at including new forces and at the same time allows it to interfere in in selected thematic areas on common positions in the public debate.
- 3) In preparation of the forthcoming congress the party should agree on launching a common political campaign at the congress.
- 4) A concern in the run-up of the congress should be the question if a more participatory party structure is wished. Experiences with already operating models (e.g. on-line instruments) should be collected and discussed.
- 5) Focus the work of the office on internal and external communication, including the pondering about the creation of a medium (maybe in cooperation with transform)
- 6) The Congress could be the starting point of a profound debate about the future of the Left in Europe and the EL. It could decide on a road bound to an extraordinary congress in which respective decisions will be taken.