

Liberals and Greens set to extract concessions from EU Parliament's centrist parties

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News

Green Wave, ALDE renaissance, progressive alliance and populist (non) surges are driving the main pro-EU groups towards a four-party core coalition.



Photo Credit: European Parliament Audiovisual

As Sunday's EU election results came through, Socialist group leader in the European Parliament, Udo Bullmann was quick to set the scene on the discussions that are likely to unfold over the next few weeks.

The German deputy, reacting to the loss of his group's majority coalition in the European Parliament with the centre-right EPP grouping, went on the offensive, arguing that "It is clear from these results that the EPP's reduced numbers mean they can't form a majority in the European Parliament and

therefore cannot claim to decide who should be the next Commission President."

With an estimated 182 seats, the EPP grouping is still Parliament's largest, but the loss of 34 seats was a punishing and potentially game-changing blow to Parliament's traditional power balance and to EPP Spitzenkandidat Manfred Weber's hopes of becoming European Commission President.

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The historic end of the Parliament’s so-called Grand Coalition has opened the door to the EU’s Greens and Liberal parties, who are ready to extract a high price from both the main centrist parties in return for their support in delivering a parliamentary majority that will in turn unlock top EU institutional positions.

This potential four-party core coalition in the Parliament is due primarily to the loss of MEP seats to the Liberals and a so-called Green Wave by Europe’s Greens that saw them gain 17 seats to take fourth place in the elections with 69 MEPs.

The much-hyped surge in populist support failed to materialise, despite expected right-wing victories in France, Italy Germany and Poland, with populist parties winning around 112 seats in the new Parliament, up by 34 MEPs on the 2014 result.

Populists lost ground in the Netherlands and Austria while gaining new MEPs in Spain and Belgium.

Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party clinched top place in the UK’s election results, taking almost 32 percent of the vote. However the 112 MEPs linked to Parliament’s right-wing groupings represent just 15 percent of the total number of deputies elected to the European Parliament, 10 percent down from the 25 percent figure that was frequently touted ahead of the elections.

However, despite Emmanuel Macron’s Renaissance alliance coming second to Marine Le Pen’s RN, the French President’s MEPs and those from the Romanian USR-PLUS coalition will see the Parliament’s reconstituted ALDE group take on a ‘kingmaker’ position with 109 MEPs, up 40 from the previous election.

“There is a new balance of power [in the Parliament]. We will be open to negotiate a new strong robust majority way beyond partisan lines. Our new group will be open to consider all candidates that can gather the support of a robust future governing majority” **Guy Verhofstadt**

With voter turnout passing the 50 percent mark for the first time in more than 25 years, coupled with the loss of the centrist EPP/S&D majority coalition, Liberal leader Guy Verhofstadt felt emboldened

enough to say, “Europe is back... and it’s popular. The ALDE group renaissance is here”.

The Belgian MEP said the loss of dominance between the two main centrist parties would ensure there was no “business as usual” carve-up of the EU’s top posts and he positioned his group in the potential kingmaker role when it comes to forming a majority grouping and delivering the next European Commission candidate.

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Echoing Bullmann, Frans Timmermans, the socialist candidate for Commission President, used his time in front of the cameras on Sunday to court both the Greens and the Liberals into creating a left-leaning “progressive” platform in the Parliament, one that he argued can form a majority and put him forward as Commission President.

Unfortunately for Timmermans, the numbers don’t quite add up as the combined MEPs of his socialist group, the Greens and the new ALDE Renaissance alliance would, according to current estimates, still be short of an overall parliamentary majority.

Recognising Timmermans' predicament, Manfred Weber was quick to lay out his interpretation of the Spitzenkandidaten process, arguing that “as the largest group, we have the right to take leadership... there is no stable majority against the EPP possible.”

"Greens priorities will need to be included in negotiations on any new Commission programme. Any new President will need to deliver on our core principles of climate action, civil liberties and social justice” **Bas Eickhout and Ska Keller**

However, commanding a majority in the European Parliament is seen as a prime Spitzenkandidat requisite and without a majority coalition deal, Weber’s hopes of becoming the next Commission President could slip away.

Flexing their freshly-gained political muscles, senior Greens MEPs Bas Eickhout and Ska Keller predicted an end to the ‘behind closed doors’ approach to selecting the next Commission President, arguing that, “After these results, the Greens must be taken on board in these negotiations”

They added that they would expect to extract significant concessions from the centrist parties in return for their support.

“Greens priorities will need to be included in negotiations on any new Commission programme. Any new President will need to deliver on our core principles of climate action, civil liberties and social justice.”

Margrethe Vestager, who confirmed that she had become the Liberal lead candidate, set out her bid to be next Commission President arguing, “New coalitions can be built. We can show change. We can have the first gender-balanced Commission”.

She also hinted at working with the Greens in a progressive coalition.

Parliament’s group leaders are set to meet on Tuesday to discuss options, ahead of a summit of EU leaders. Negotiations on delivering a working parliamentary majority and lead Commission President

candidate are likely to take several weeks.

About the author

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